The London School of Economics and Political Science

'Performative Refugeeness': Voice, Recognition, and Participation in Creative Mediation

Robert James Leon Sharp

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

I warrant that this authorisation does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party. I declare that my thesis consists of 75,972 words.

Abstract

This thesis is focused on the ways in which refugees express their voices in the context of participatory creative projects in the UK. Its major contribution is an expansion of theories of voice, through the possibilities voice presents in the context of such creative mediation. Through its engagement with refugee creative, mediated self-representations, the thesis reflects on and expands normative theorisations of voice, recognition and participation. While voice has been widely discussed within media and communications scholarship, refugees have remained marginal in many of the debates around the concept. But refugees both raise questions about the politics of self-representation and reveal the complex fluidity between what it means to have, and not have, voice. Refugees are ordinarily excluded from the mainstream; at the same time, they regularly initiate rights claims and bids for asylum, thus seeking democratic inclusion. Given the wholesale exclusion of refugee voices from normative publics, despite the normative democratic arguments against this, I argue that conceptualisations of voice in liberal democratic systems need to go beyond rational-critical definitions that are centred on the individual rights of citizens; further, that voice should be considered more widely as performative, relational, creative as well as a mediated expression of being and becoming a refugee. My argument is that opportunities to understand voices within and beyond the norms of liberal democratic participation—voices which are also messy, collective, or interrupted, for example—are worthy of consideration. This study will examine such voices by tracing different formations of refugee voices in publicness; that is, in and as processes of becoming public locally, regionally, and nationally. I argue that creative refugee mediation, an umbrella term encompassing all participatory creative practices within institutional community spaces, is a possible outlet or promise for refugee voice—through what I refer to as 'performative refugeeness'. Using a multimethod approach of participant observation and participatory creative mediation workshops with refugee communities at two sites in the UK—Cardiff in Wales and Tyneside in North East England—I explore the facilitation and regulation of refugee voice, recognition and participation across different forms of publicness through such creative mediation processes.

Contents

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Context

The representation of refugees and forced migration has once again become prevalent in the public sphere. As I submit this thesis in the days following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022, at the time of writing some 2.6 million Ukrainian refugees are now being forced across Europe, with that number set to rise (Wall, 2022). Refugees are now moving in Europe on a scale not seen since the Second World War (Beaumont, 2022), with the UK's response still being finalised.

Since the end of the US military's withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, thousands more have begun journeys to Europe and beyond in search of safety. The UK has announced that it is to take 20,000 refugees from Afghanistan over the next five years as part of its Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (Morton, 2021). As of August 2021, there are some 2.5 million Afghan refugees worldwide, with this number set to grow substantially (UNHCR, 2021). In the autumn of 2021, the number of globally displaced people was around 82.4 million (UNHCR, 2021).

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted…is outside the country of his [sic] nationality' (UNHCR, 2021). While I will delve into the definitions employed in this thesis in more detail shortly, British legal terminology dictates that UK refugee status is awarded to someone whom the Home Office recognizes as a refugee. (An asylum seeker, by contrast, is someone who has lodged an application to be recognized as such.) A refugee[1] is given leave to remain in the UK for five years, and at the end of that period can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) or permanent residence (gov.co.uk, 2021).

According to the UK charity, the Refugee Council, only 45 per cent of the 35,566 asylum applications received by the UK Home Office annually are successful (Refugee Council, 2021), with most applicants originating from Iran, Albania, or Iraq. In 2016, the year I applied to undertake this study, 13,239 asylum seekers had been locked up in detention centres, with around half of all asylum seekers detained in this way, including dozens of children. Almost all asylum seekers are denied the right to work, and are forced to rely on state support, with almost all living in poverty, experiencing poor health and hunger (Refugee Council, 2021).

The Covid-19 pandemic, which reached the UK in late 2019, had a significant effect on the number of refugees arriving to the UK, with applicants for asylum falling by 41 per cent early in the pandemic, the lowest quarterly count since 2010 (Migration Observatory, 2021). The number of people being granted asylum fell by 55 per cent—the lowest level since 2014. The issuance of refugee family reunion visas also declined by 90 per cent over the same period. Refugee resettlement—which was not possible during lockdown(s)—fell to zero in the second quarter of 2020. Later in 2021, after the US and UK military's withdrawal from Afghanistan, those waiting for a decision on their initial asylum application rose by 73 per cent to 70,000 (Migration Observatory,

[1] When speaking about the theoretical literature relating to 'refugees,' I will use this term; in the methodological and empirical sections of this thesis, refugees will fall under the description 'participants.' I will explain this in greater detail later in this chapter.

2021). Many recent arrivals from Afghanistan have been put up in temporary accommodation in hotels with inadequate medical provision, which has driven some people to ask to be allowed to return to Afghanistan (Townsend, 2021).

The UK is a uniquely hostile place with regard to refugees. Over the last 20 years, successive UK governments have deliberately implemented policies to symbolically marginalise refugees or deter them from arriving at all. In the late 1990s, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair redefined the terms of the asylum debate, which previously had focused on sovereignty, race relations and the idea of the 'bogus' asylum seeker, to link citizenship rights to individuals' social and economic contributions—framing a new conceptual basis of exclusion contrary to human or ethical rights claims (Maughan, 2010). More recently Theresa May's introduction of so-called 'hostile environment' policies, a range of legislative measures aimed at making it as difficult as possible to stay in the UK for those without official leave to remain, acts as a symbolic deterrent by rendering the public apparatus, including state education and healthcare provision, culturally inhospitable (Griffiths & Yeo, 2021, p. 521). Asylum seekers have frequently described being catapulted into interlocking systems of surveillance and control designed to identify, oversee, label, and monitor (Chase, 2010).

Since 2019, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government has continued to use the right-wing press to float hard-line immigration policies as a way of appealing to Conservative voters, as different nationalisms—including vaccine nationalism, debates around whiteness, empire, and history—resurge during the pandemic (James & Valluvan, 2020). This follows the continued, nationalist rhetoric that accompanied Britain's negotiations and subsequent exit from the European Union in 2016. Refugees might be stigmatised for irrational reasons, but given that such extreme forms of exclusion are hardly necessary to protect British borders—not least because of the quantitatively small numbers involved—the most powerful forms of exclusion occur for political purposes. Such politicisation reached a head in 2021 with Home Secretary Priti Patel's demonisation of 'activist lawyers' fighting the deportation of asylum seekers (Townsend, 2020), leaked stories to Conservative-friendly newspapers about the planned use of offshore detention camps (Timothy, 2020), the shaming of asylum seekers by right-leaning nationalist citizen journalists (Taylor, 2021), and attempts to target 'people smugglers' by pledging to turn away asylum seekers who had travelled through other countries on their way to the UK—all part of Patel's 2021 'Plan for Immigration' (Freedom from Torture, 2021). While it is too early to fully assess the UK government's response to the situation caused by the war in Ukraine, Patel's response so far has been widely criticised, partly for the rigid rules and bureaucracy greeting Ukrainians seeking refuge (Stewart, 2022).

Such events are mirrored on a pan-European scale, notably in recent years following the so-called 'refugee crisis' across the continent (Krzyżanowski, 2016; Krzyżanowski et al., 2018). On a discursive level, the events of 2015-16 have been framed in such a way as to stigmatise refugees and migrants through the use of the word 'crisis' itself, while taking place alongside larger-scale ideological and political shifts which have used migration as a condition out of the ordinary, and migrants themselves as scapegoats. Needless to say, the ideological

battle around migration has been highly mediated on both domestic and European levels, with the growth of social media allowing a resurgent far right a growing voice (Blanco-Herrero et al., 2020; Conway et al., 2019; Cammaerts, 2012).

What unites this diverse group of people arriving to the UK in often difficult circumstances—people of different genders, faiths, races, nationalities, speaking different languages, and of different cultural backgrounds—is the circumstantial, regulatory regime in which they find themselves. Ostensibly, asylum seekers may be accommodated in areas in which they can demonstrate a local connection, but in practice they are often forced to locate in places where they have no connections, because of cheaper accommodation costs, while UK Visas and Immigration decides on their case (Brokenshire, 2016).

Despite the huge numbers of refugees affected globally, opportunities to contest or improve their conditions are fraught with difficulty. Asylum applications are subjectively assessed on whether or not the assessor deems the claimant's story to be believable, which assumes a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' (Tutton et al., 2014, p. 3). Many asylum seekers go through this process without legal advice (Asylum Aid, 2022) and suffer the effects of a severe shortage of specialists offering legal aid (Craddock, 2017). If and when an asylum seeker is successful, an individual may continue to face cultural exclusions of voice congruent with that of any minority population through everyday experiences of marginalisation, stigmatisation, or victimisation.

As the world's sixth biggest economy, Britain's government is disproportionately efficient at maintaining its sovereignty and excluding those in need of asylum. This is in spite of the fact that the United Kingdom is a signatory to the International Refugee Convention, which states at multiple points that help offered to refugees should be non-discriminatory, and that their access to work, state-funded welfare support, and education 'should be as favourable as possible, or not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances' (UNHCR, 1951, p. 24). However, refugees face political, legal, and cultural exclusion, the latter often beyond a successful bid for asylum (Baranik et al., 2018). Once a refugee has been granted asylum, significant cross-disciplinary evidence suggests this social exclusion continues, and that the media is a powerful route through which this occurs. More than one study has shown that manifestations of hostility and abuse toward migrant groups can be attributed to how media form public opinion (Lister, 2007; Buchanan et al., 2003, p. 9). Georgiou and Zaborowski (2017) have shown how recent arrivals to Europe have been labelled 'outsiders' and 'were given limited opportunities to speak directly of their experiences' (p. 5). As with other migrants, refugees classically gain voice and are heard in normative publics when they express themselves as silent actors or victims. Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) further analysed empirical evidence suggesting 'the hierarchy of voice in European news causes a triple misrecognition of refugees as political, social and historical actors, thereby keeping them firmly outside the remit of communities of belonging' (p. 1).

Given that for-profit media platforms privilege powerful symbolic exclusions of refugee voice, organisations in the charitable, cultural, and human rights sectors have made claims to fight for refugee representation at

local, regional, and international levels. In larger organisations, the 'refugee voices movement' hosted by the International Rescue Committee offers refugees a chance to 'tell their story,' with similar initiatives across the UK, Italy, Spain, Germany, and Greece—from Refugee Action's work with voice on its digital platform to the UNHCR's huge international campaign #withrefugees to 'empower precisely these voices that welcome refugees and show that the world is on their side' (Refugee Action, 2021; IRC, 2021; UNHCR, 2016). Oxfam's 'I Hear You' project in 2016 saw Hollywood actors speaking and interpreting the words of refugees from Syria, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Oxfam, 2016).

At the local and regional levels, the UK has seen growth in participatory mediation in the cultural sector as a result of governmental policy which has sought to extend the audience reach of cultural institutions, with some arguing that this has replaced social and healthcare providers' responsibilities for social support, thereby justifying funding cutbacks in these sectors (Bishop, 2012). Such initiatives frequently use the language of voice, with Refugee Week, the annual national arts and educational platform and festival, highlighting its core values as including 'taking the voices and experiences of refugees to new spaces' (Refugee Week, 2021). Nationwide research in the field of such work with refugees is rare, though one historic study revealed some 200 organisations engaged with participatory creative practices with refugees in the UK (Gould, 2005). Such organisations include major charities, community arts organisations, and non-governmental organisations. A literature review of relevant participatory practice with refugees suggests that while there is a growing body of research on creative participatory practices pertaining to questions including citizenship and performativity (e.g., Rovisco & Lunt, 2019; Rovisco, 2019; Kaptani et al., 2021; O'Neill et al., 2019; Erel & Reynolds, 2019), academic study of creative work involving refugees and asylum seekers spanning different regions of the UK remains minimal (Gould, 2005; Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2008).

Within the sub-field of self-representation, representations of the refugee self through participatory creativity, using what I call creative mediation, are increasingly prevalent. In this thesis, I define creative mediation as expressions of creativity that include and extend beyond linear rights claims. Such mediation retains formal fluidity outside normative genres of representation—e.g., solely linear written or rights claims, or solely a testimony of victimhood as seen in mainstream mediation—and prioritises the participant's sensorial, emotional, or subjective experience. Creative mediation, I argue, promises a unique opportunity for refugee voice to extend beyond the mainstream media, which is significant given that community media in the UK has faced long-term budget cuts, with funding in the sector scarcely keeping pace with growth. In fact, investment in community media, which could have further supported creative projects of voice and self-representation, has remained minimal in the UK, with over 200 community radio stations accessing a funding pot of just £400,000 annually from the Treasury via Ofcom (Ofcom, 2019; Lewis, 2008). The claim that creative forms of refugee voice can provide critical opportunities to counteract more mainstream exclusions of voice as considered within media and communications is worthy of further scrutiny (Dahlgren, 2009; Couldry, 2010b).

This thesis is concerned with how refugees might be given opportunities for voice and how such opportunities might manifest themselves. Numerous creative projects promise refugees a voice, but to what extent do they actually fulfil this promise? Given the lack of empirical data relating to whether these so-called promises of voice in creative processes—for example, enabling refugees to give an account of their lives—are genuine, voice is the central conceptual interrogation in its expressions and implications, and drives this thesis's central research question: (RQ1) **How does self-representation through creative mediation open up or restrict opportunities for refugee voice?** As we will establish in Chapter 2, voices must be recognised in order to have specific kinds of social value, with the concept of recognition informing my first research sub-question (SQ1): **How does self-representation through creative mediation enable or restrict refugee recognition?** Drawing on the literature around mediation, self-representation and participation, in Chapter 2 I argue for the importance of the question of participation[2] to promises of voice, of how and why refugees might exercise control over their terms of engagement with such promises. This leads to my second research sub-question (SQ2): **How is participation in creative mediation facilitated and regulated?**

Such questions around voice, recognition and participation face renewed pressures in 2022, namely the material inequalities exposed and exacerbated by Covid-19, resurgent nationalisms that threaten migrant rights, and the public demonisation of migrants—particularly migrants of colour—in the mainstream press. In the UK, the Home Office has at points replaced face-to-face evaluations with digital interviews, with asylum decision notices served by email, and appeal hearings paused (Refugee Council, 2021). Mooted proposals for vaccine passports for asylum seekers will undoubtedly cause discrimination against those fleeing persecution, given the difficulties accessing paperwork, which will discriminate against the high percentage of asylum seekers from marginalised racial categories (Rigby et al., 2021). This discrimination occurs against a backdrop of legal and political migration policies that adopt neoliberal ideologies of self-sufficiency and resilience, and thus further impoverish many by restricting their access to bare-minimum funds and public resources. In addition, asylum seekers face social and cultural stigmatisation through being increasingly mislabelled as 'economic migrants,' namely lacking need or right to protection, but instead claiming valuable British resources. This process of misrecognition and denial of right to asylum has intensified in the politically tribal post-Brexit landscape (Brown, 2019).

Contribution to Knowledge

Voice

Without pre-empting the theoretical arguments I go on to explore, I would like to briefly highlight the areas in which this thesis might usefully extend existing knowledge around my key conceptual approach. First, the study will seek to contribute to conceptualisations of voice, specifically in relation to refugee voices, which might be expressed within and beyond linear narrative—ways that Kay (2020) describes as 'messy, collective

[2] Regarding the promise of voice, I will frame the question in this thesis in terms of the normative understanding of participation, which I will seek to extend through the empirical work. By participation I take Pateman's (1970) definition of full participation as 'a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions' (p. 71).

or interrupted,' in her critique of prominent existing conceptions of voice within the field—and thus extend our understanding of what voice might mean (p. 16). This is especially true of groups that are systematically and institutionally marginalised and stereotyped.

This expanded exploration will move beyond existing discussions of voice with respect to refugees. The most prominent recent literature on voice has attempted to look at the terms under which marginalised subjects are afforded voice through a neoliberal value system (Couldry, 2010b). Such accounts have been applied to community journalism (Dickens, Couldry & Fotopoulou, 2015), open content creation (Tacchi, 2012), public relations (Edwards, 2018), along with migrant representation, though refugees specifically are inadequately discussed. Georgiou (2017) has discussed how hypervisibility might accompany images of vulnerability in this context, while others have discussed how seeing exclusions of voice as a 'problem' to be solved might reinscribe expectations about refugee powerlessness (Mthethwa-Sommers & Kisiara, 2015). In this case, we might refer to the words of Rifaie Tammas (2019), who, writing in openDemocracy, talks of refugee stories 'doing more harm than good. For some I will forever be a traumatised Syrian refugee whose primary role is to evoke sympathy and tears,' he writes. While acknowledging the presence of a neoliberally ordered media to categorise subjects as 'winners' and 'losers,' such studies reveal a need for a more nuanced view of the binary categories of helplessness and danger ordinarily used to define refugee voices.

Representations of refugees might feature in headlines decrying poor conditions in refugee camps alongside a distinct lack of refugees themselves communicating their unique, individual voices on their histories, biographies, or how they arrived in Europe. Within mainstream newspapers and broadcasters, and via prominent social media accounts, storylines regularly construct newcomers as either abject victims or threats (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, in press). Accounts of 'success against the odds,' or moral panic around refugee crime, form part of a neoliberal culture of competitiveness—whereby failure is deserving and success is hard won—contributing to simplistic portrayals of either victims or success stories (Davies, 2015). However, refugees might more accurately express themselves as both helpless *and* angry, vulnerable *and* with agency, while still remaining subject to strict hierarchies in which their voice is devalued or finds expression conditionally and along particular axes (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). A more complete empirical exploration of these ambiguities in the light of our understanding of voice will be a core aim of this study.

'Performative Refugeeness'

The exclusion of voice discussed above narrows the discursive space in which refugees might express themselves as subjects. Yet as part of their rights claim, or afterwards, refugees have a legal right to participate in normative publics, even if in practice they are excluded from them. I argue in this thesis that the idea of 'performative refugeeness' might help us understand how refugees might navigate this tension by enacting their voices in such highly regulated circumstances.

'Performative refugeeness,' which I understand as the iterative (re)enactment of the refugee self (Butler, 1990; 1996), has been explored in empirical studies of the construction of the refugee self in relation to a neoliberal (or post-neoliberal) order as well as the Global North's value systems of benevolence and humanism (Rivetti, 2013; Kallio et al, 2019; Georgiou, 2019). Malkki has shown how refugees are encouraged to perform social refugeeness as a waypoint to material aid (Malkki, 1996, p. 380). The extent to which performativity as both a social construct within the regulated spaces of refugee life and one affiliated to its participatory projects' potential for refugee voice is underexplored, and the relationship between these two conceptualisations of performativity, will be the second intended contribution of this thesis.

Recognition

Voice matters because of its implications for recognition—for how people are seen and heard, and not misheard, as valid agents of their own claim-making to participation in the publics in which they now live. As with voice, recognition has a long conceptual history: debates around civil rights, gender equality, and the rights of migrants have all drawn on recognition theory (Smets et al., 2019). The argument for recognition has received renewed attention in recent decades, with Honneth's influence continuing into recent migration studies and the literature around digital divides (Georgiou, 2019; Klinkisch et al., 2017; Solík, 2016). Honnethian recognition, which I will define in full through its various dimensions in Chapter 2, has often been applied to refugees, though less commonly with those going through the asylum process, and barely ever to questions of creative mediation or 'performative refugeeness' (Thomas et al, 2011). Here, I will combine my understanding of Honnethian recognition with the concept of 'difference-respect'—that is, the recognition of members of a particular culture on terms important to them, as opposed to values imposed on them from outside, especially by a neoliberal market and a liberal nation state (van Leeuwen, 2007). There is a lack of empirical evidence around how Honneth's interrelated dimensions of recognition—self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem—might either complement each other or act antagonistically, given the unique situations of refugee voices. Revisiting concepts of recognition and how they relate to refugees' self-representation constitutes the third intended contribution of this thesis.

Participation in Creative Mediation and Publicness

There is a considerable body of literature relating to arts-based participatory practice with migrants and refugees (e.g., Kaptani et al., 2021; Erel et al., 2017; 2019; O'Neill et al., 2019; see Kidd et al., 2008 for a UK overview). However, this is less commonly considered in the light of voice and recognition within the context of media and communications, something this study, arguing as it does for the importance of media and mediation, hopes to rectify. Participatory media projects with refugees and asylum seekers[3] have often been framed as part of an emancipatory practice of political and therapeutic benefit, supporting counter-narratives, self-esteem, and identity construction (Lenette, 2015; Bhimji, 2007). Such practices have been analysed as

[3] Because of my ethics framework, it was difficult to immediately ascertain participants' asylum status; those with asylum status would frequently return to the spaces in question in solidarity with those still applying for asylum. As such, participants in this study hail from both refugee and asylum seeker theoretical categories, as defined.

promising opportunities for creating hybrid identities where 'old habits are superimposed with "new attitudes, values and modes of action"' (Bhabha, 1994; Hall & Du Gay, 1996). In media and communications, participatory creative practices have not yet formed a prominent strand of research. However, significant recent studies in the field, such as the LSE's *European Migration Crisis and the Media,* have focused specifically on migration and refugee representation within institutional media, as opposed to those projects which seek to challenge such representations (Rovisco, 2019; Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017; Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). Where promises of voice are considered, they focus, for example, on the role of social media in increasing refugee community participation (Xu et al., 2017), or how this mostly aligns with governmental priorities around integration (Alencar and Deuze, 2017). Refugee media has also been analysed in particular geopolitical contexts, including the Syrian civil war, with problems around material precarity and self-censorship explored (Assaf, 2018).

In Chapter 2 I make the case for the importance of self-representation in the light of creative mediation, given the prevalence of many such projects in the UK. Recent studies of refugee self-representation—production of autobiographical texts by refugees (Viloria at al., 2018; Risam, 2018; Chouliaraki, 2017; Thumim, 2008, p. 84)—mirror the criticisms around refugee voice hitherto highlighted, specifically the re-inscription of power hierarchies between gatekeepers and participants, whose voices are recontextualised in moral registers which include empathy, suspicion, and celebration (Chouliaraki, 2017, p. 91). Moving beyond accounts of empowerment through self-representation, Chouliaraki has suggested that digital refugee self-representations provide the ethical possibility of voice that sits within the broader mediated system which also devalues it (2017, p. 23). Cento Bull and Hansen (2020) have discussed creative approaches to refugee voice as one route by which spaces for resistance against such discourses might form (p. 550), partly through narrative complexity. Others have suggested that the ambivalent practices observed in the field may be more commensurate with accounts which serve to unsettle entrenched hegemonic perspectives on migration (Mouffe, 2013). Building on this work, by focusing not only on the outcomes of refugee voice, but also on the social nature of highly regulated participation in creative refugee media, this thesis will help construct a detailed ontology of the social and participatory dimensions through which refugee voice is possible through such creative processes, and use this to help us expand existing accounts of voice and recognition.

In considering these social processes of participation in creative media, I hope to extend the idea of publicness—that is, the process of becoming public—to help us understand how refugee voice might find public expression in fluid ways that disrupt a binary distinction between exclusion and inclusion from the normative public sphere (Kavada & Poell, 2021; Georgiou and Titley, 2022). This approach seeks to add to historical critiques of normative public sphere theory, including affective (Papacharissi, 2015) and agonistic publics (Mouffe, 2002). Papacharissi (2015) defines affective publics as networking publics connected and disconnected through 'expression of sentiment' (p. 311), with affect defined as a form of pre-emotive intensity, connected to processes of premediation. I argue that this conception is underdeveloped beyond mediation in its consideration of affect, and leaves the orientation of affective publics towards normative

publics underexplored. Mouffe's (2007) account of agonistic publics, meanwhile, sees the public sphere as a battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, 'without any possibility of final reconciliation' (p. 3). While conceived to describe forms of public contestation on social media, Kavada and Poell argue that publicness is a process that takes place offline and online in hybrid media environments (Chadwick, 2013; Kavada & Poell, 2021, p. 193). My argument here is that publicness can encompass both the possibility of solidarities and contestation formed at different sites and scales offline as well as online. This can be affective or otherwise, in ways that do not completely exclude the possibility of rational-critical consensus. Publicness will be considered using a typology with three levels: micropublicness, mesopublicness, and macropublicnss, which correspond to processes of becoming public at local, regional and national levels.

Thesis Structure

In this study, I aim to explore and shed light on the deeply unequal processes through which refugee voice is shaped creatively, beyond institutional media. The thesis is divided into seven chapters. In Chapter 2, I develop my theoretical framework, drawing on existing literatures around voice and recognition. I begin by expanding on why voice is a pivotal part of the construction of the self. Among other studies, I refer to Couldry's (2010b) influential book on voice, *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism*, and explore its limitations by drawing on critiques influenced by postcolonial, disability, and gender theory, including the work of Jilly Kay (2020) and Sara Ahmed (2004). As stated previously, 'performative refugeeness' is introduced to conceptualise how refugees might negotiate the expression of their voices in highly exclusionary social systems. I follow my consideration of voice with a theorisation of recognition, employing Axel Honneth's (1995; 2003; 2007) tripartite framing of recognition in terms of love, rights, and solidarity as my principal mechanism for understanding recognition, which I then subject to critiques, including those by Fraser (2000) and Taylor (1994). I then extend Honneth's definition of recognition using the concept of 'difference-respect' (van Leeuwen, 2007), arguing that Honneth's universalising approach is insufficient to account for different groups' preferred forms of self-identification (van Leeuwen, 2007). Following this, I argue that creative mediation is one of the foremost institutional opportunities for 'new' or alternative kinds of voice in the UK, and that conceptions of participation in this context might usefully be applied to understand the factors determining inclusion and exclusion from such promises of voice. I introduce the ideas of participation, self-representation, and mediation as the means by which participation in these mediation processes might be understood. I also introduce the concept that creative mediation as promises of voice has been under-researched with respect to refugees.

In Chapter 3, I outline my methodological choices around how to study refugee experiences and outputs of creative self-representation. I develop my research questions and sub-questions around voice, recognition, and participation outlined above. I explain my decision to conduct two case studies—in community centres in Cardiff and Tyneside—and the nature of my participant observation and creative mediation workshops at both locations. I expand on how my resulting field notes and workshop data were analysed. I primarily use a thematic analysis and supplement this approach with multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) and

participatory analysis. I also detail with some granularity the complex ethical questions involved in undertaking fieldwork with participants of this kind. Given that I was both an observer and a workshop facilitator, the complexity of the situations I was in needed constant negotiation between approaches, and I reflect on the implications of this.

In Chapter 4, 5, and 6 I present and analyse my empirical findings. I introduce the context of my fieldwork and the nature of the spaces in which I operated, as well as the structure of the empirical chapters. All the empirical chapters are organised using a typology based on different scales of publicness: I discuss conceptions of publicness and creative mediation as these are manifested, as micropublicness, mesopublicness, and macropublicness, corresponding here, respectively, to local, regional, and national scales of publicness, wherever these are present and relevant in the collected data. This multiscalar approach unfolds around three key analytical themes: voice (Chapter 4), recognition (Chapter 5), participation in creative mediation (Chapter 6).

The focus in Chapter 4 is on voice as self-representation and the kinds of voice which find expression in the institutions studied, as well as the range of creative mediation practices seen. We will see how different forms of voice articulate different kinds of self-representation in various contexts, and how these might relate to different forms of self-representation, according to how they are privileged or marginalised within a neoliberal order. We will see how different kinds of voice find expression as broader publicness, as some benefit from opportunities for self-representation while others struggle to find expression and thus visibility in any kind of publics—local, regional, or national.

Chapter 5 then looks at questions around recognition, and how self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem as defined by Honneth, and 'difference-respect', as understood by van Leeuwen (2007), find expression among different participants and through a range of processes of self-representation. We will see how creative mediation facilitates particular forms of recognition as micropublicness, but that as we move into broader forms of publicness—i.e., publicness on a regional or national scale—the dimensions around which recognition might take place are limited to those privileged by a neoliberal order; namely, subjects who demonstrate entrepreneurial resilience, for instance. That is not to say, however, that particular hierarchies of recognition do not emerge in different scales of publicness with different actors, as will be shown. What I will demonstrate is that, while misrecognition might happen on a local level, when moving to regional and national levels of publicness, the chances of misrecognition increase. We will also see how different kinds of recognition might manifest antagonistically.

Chapter 6 explores the context for participation in creative mediation, specifically workshops I facilitated, and those run by the centres. This chapter employs the same multiscalar typology of publicness as before (local, regional, national), though we should note again the lack of data relating to macropublicness, precisely because refugee self-representation on a national level is rare. Here, I will grapple with questions of regulation

of participation within the community centres themselves, as well as on broader scales of publicness. We will see how the precarity of participants' circumstances is often masked by their 'performative refugeeness,' though as before, this is not without ambivalence. An understanding of different refugee selves is pivotal to understanding how and why participation may occur or be regulated along dimensions of gender, race, class, and language, among many other facets of identity. The circumstances of access and control in the different centres affected participation, as did the local funding regimes, the regional arts funding bodies' decision-making and the national frameworks through which funding is directed towards creative mediation against other forms of participation, within which refugee lives are highly regulated.

The concluding Chapter 7 will summarise how my findings offer answers to my research questions, discuss the implications for the theoretical framework described above, and discuss the study's limitations. I will also suggest possible avenues for future research.

Questions of Terminology

Before moving onto Chapter 2, I should offer some clarification on my use of terminology, as this will be important to my discussion of theorisations and engagement with participants. The terms 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' have been employed in this thesis in contexts where the legal categories of people are necessary to distinguish as defined above, or as a theoretical terminological construct to be cited, and then critiqued. Methodologically and empirically, participants in this study officially comprise those who have arrived in the UK as refugees, those in the process of applying for asylum, or who have finished doing so. Participants also include centre staff, volunteers (who are British citizens or otherwise) or audiences for creative mediation activities—essentially anyone who participated in the research. In the ensuing chapters I have used the shorthand of 'participants' to refer to 'mediation participants', specifically those who have self-identified as asylum seekers or refugees who are participating in my creative media workshops. In these cases, people's names have been removed or replaced by participants' own preferred names, as described in my ethics and consent processes. The term 'centre staff' refers to those who are formally employed by the participating institutions, regardless of whether or not they were previously refugees, though where relevant this difference is clarified.

In the UK, an asylum seeker is a person who has 'left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded' (Refugee Council, 2021). A refugee is defined by the 1951 United Nations Convention Related to the Status of Refugees as someone who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted…is outside the country of [his/her/their] nationality and is unable to avail themselves of the protection of that country' (United Nations, 1951). In the UK, a person is legally recognised as a refugee when they gain refugee status documentation—not when they pass through the country's borders. Generally, refugees are given five years' leave to remain if granted asylum; they then apply for further leave, although their refugee status might continue. Refugees might arrive in the UK through 'legitimate' (the UK government's term) means, such as tourist visas or via a number of resettlement schemes

run by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), including the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. Others might arrive through other means, such as documents supplied by agents. Some come to the UK directly from their country of origin; others have complex journeys through multiple countries (Crawley, 2010). Often, refugees have little understanding of the asylum system in the UK before they arrive; many have little choice over their final destination. Asylum seekers apply for the right to remain and have an interview with a Home Office caseworker. While the UK government claims this takes place within six months, the process can often take much longer, especially if the asylum seeker appeals the decision. When asylum seekers are awaiting a decision, they are 'dispersed' to different locations across the UK—it is these locations that were chosen as empirical sites.

Before we turn to empirical questions, and given that we have introduced the urgency of this study, I will establish a picture of the theoretical terrain which informs it.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

> If you're visiting Paris over the coming months the walls along the Seine may look a little different. A photo exhibition along the banks now includes a 370-meter long panorama featuring portraits of refugees and photographs taken by Syrian refugee children living in Iraq. So what exactly is the objective of the photographs? Reza explains that at the core of this project is the hope that the photos will provide a way for refugee children to tell their own stories.
>
> UNHCR, September 2015

In order to unpack the question of how creative projects in the UK might facilitate or limit the possibilities for refugee voice, we must break that inquiry into its constituent parts. The question of voice, and how it might manifest itself with regard to refugees, covers a complex and varied scholarly terrain. This theoretical chapter is divided into three parts, each of which corresponds to one of this study's research questions or sub-questions. The first part will consider voice, examining the concept's relevance to forced migration and the experience of refugees as discussed within the existing literature. I will expand theorisations of voice to accommodate refugee voices, first by describing and then critiquing prominent theorisations. I argue here that the idea of 'performative refugeeness' has the capacity to help us better understand how refugees might express themselves in highly regulated settings. In the chapter's second part, I will explore the limitations of existing theories of recognition and critically define this concept—which essentially refers to the value attributed, or not, to the voices of refugees. Third, I will consider the social context for voices expressed in this way, specifically through participation in creative mediation projects with refugees, described here as alternatives to existing possibilities of refugee voice, or powerful promises of voice. Given the cross-disciplinary nature of this concept, here my conceptualisation draws on theories of mediation, self-representation, and publicness. It is my contention that creative forms of mediation with refugees are worthy of consideration, given their prevalence as promises of voice in the UK, and should be critiqued as such. Here, I will outline how refugee voices might be expressed as publicness, i.e., the process of becoming public, through such promises.

To expand on how this hierarchy of concepts will play out, the first section will engage with, and critique, dominant theories of voice primarily as conceived by Couldry (2010b). I will explore the literature around how refugees' voices are excluded materially and symbolically from mainstream publics—either by being denied voice entirely, or because they are able to express voice only by adhering to the normative rational-critical terms of the traditional Habermasian public sphere. I will examine how Couldry frames this around the conditions of voice regulated by neoliberalism, and the priorities of neoliberal systems. While Couldry (2010b) argues that such systems need to find new ways to value voice, we might also argue that the definition of voice should be broadened to take account of critiques of its normative conception and application. For instance, there is an epistemic conflict around reconciling normative conceptions of voice with the

reinscription of exclusionary relationships with refugees. By conceiving of voice only in relation to the Habermasian public sphere, we threaten to exclude different kinds of refugee voices which lie beyond its purview of communicative rationality. By decentralising normativity, we can create room for broader conceptions of voice to include hesitation, vulnerability, or interdependency (Kay, 2020). We should also be mindful of the *regulation* of refugee voice. This occurs along material and symbolic lines, with exclusions of mediated voice around refugees reaching fever pitch during recent European-constructed crises around migration (Ford & Goodwin, 2014; Emmott & Guarascio, 2015; Moore & Ramsay, 2017; Greenslade, 2005; Berry et al., 2016). I argue that the emerging literature on 'performative refugeeness' (Georgiou, 2019; Georgiou, Hall & Dajani, 2020; Bruinenberg et al., 2021; Malkki, 1996, p. 380) is helpful in understanding how refugees might attempt to conceal the exclusions facing them in their day-to-day lives at the same time as refugee voice is enacted.

In the second section of this discussion, we will see that voice is inextricable from recognition, both in the psychoanalytic sense, in that the construction and expression of the self is by its nature constituted in relationship to another, and in the relational understanding of social and political interaction. Such an approach coheres with approaches to the construction of subjects formed in relationship to each other, acknowledging their equal status and distinctness (Levinas, 1986; Fraser, 2000). Thus, conceptions of the exclusion of refugee voice must be accompanied by a deeper understanding of recognition and misrecognition. Honneth's normative three-pronged framework of recognition encompasses its individual and social dimensions (Honneth, 1995; 2004), and can be combined with an understanding of 'difference-respect' (Van Leeuwen, 2007) as a useful start in conceiving of refugee recognition beyond the notion of the rational subject and nation state. As with voice, we must be aware that this view of recognition might inadvertently reinforce nationalistic notions of acceptance which only superficially acknowledge difference, while not fully accounting for the complexities of refugees' circumstances in relation to participation within a society or polity, or even through the limited range opportunities for voice available to them.

Finally, in the chapter's third section I will move on to my consideration of participation through creative mediation. Here I will illustrate how charitable, media and arts institutions publicly align their mission statements around how they help address the exclusion of refugee voice from normative publics. The potential limitations of such projects have been well researched, and I do not plan to focus theoretically on how or whether they work in practice, given substantial previous scholarship to this end (Carpentier, 2016; Bishop, 2014; Dreher, 2012). Instead, I take the opposite approach: that normative considerations of voice must be rethought, given the need for an understanding of refugee voice beyond normative, Habermasian conceptions of mainstream publics (Bohman, 2007; Habermas, 2017). I argue that we need to more fully understand how voice relates to the values and meanings of creative refugee media practices and self-representations.

I contend that creative mediation is worthy of consideration as an opportunity for alternative routes to promise refugee voice in the UK beyond the mainstream media, particularly if we are to interrogate and further explore Couldry's (2010b) call for new forms of voice, which he defines as 'new voices, or voices that have long grown silent' (p. 145). My argument here is not so much concerned with what is and what is not 'new,' but instead to see 'newness' around creative mediation as an articulated promise of voice sitting in discursive context that is worthy of elucidation. It is my argument that creative mediation's promise of innovative forms of participation and mediation might allow us to move beyond our current understanding of voice, with complex expressions and consequences that are worthy of consideration. To move beyond a naïve understanding of the promise of refugee voice, my contention here is that refugee practices and self-representations in creative mediation may well see participants' voices always subject to regulation, and thus prevent both the consensus-building of normative publics, and the agonism and dissent of more radical counter- or subaltern publics (Warner, 2002; Fraser, 2016). In light of this critique, there is a case to be made for reimagining the scope of voice to encompass the mediated possibilities for refugee self-representation and recognition.

Given the importance of voice and recognition in social systems, the concept of publicness is also introduced here to complexify the existing binaries between inclusion in and exclusion from mainstream publics (Kavada, 2020; Kavada & Poell, 2021; Georgiou and Titley, 2022). It is my assertion here that because of their uncertain relationship to the state, many refugees find themselves neither inside nor in opposition to mainstream publics, but instead are engaged in the process of publicness—specifically, the process of becoming public, considered to be a continuous activity—to varying degrees and with various complexities. Refugees thus occupy an ambivalent position in relation to mainstream publics, enjoying very few of their benefits around so-called rational consensus-building versus more radical oppositional politics. Within this ambivalent position, refugees are still able to express voice in ways oppositional to what mainstream publics can offer. It is on these oppositions, I argue, that we should also focus if we are to fully understand refugee voice.

Part One: Expanding Theorisations of Voice and Recognition

Theorising and Critiquing Voice

In this section, I will outline and critically engage with recent scholarship around voice. The focus of this literature is on normative liberal democratic terms through which voice emerges and becomes regulated along parameters outlined by those with power in a Western liberal society. Scholarship around voice has particularly focused on the importance of narrative to the construction of the self, from Paul Ricoeur's (1984b) assertions around the power of narrative within human experience (p. 28), to work by Judith Butler (2004), Amartya Sen (2009), Hannah Arendt (1958), Adriana Cavarero (2000), Alisdair MacIntyre (1981) and Charles Taylor (1989), who all theorise various facets of the importance of narrative self-expression to identity and society. I focus here on Couldry's (2010b) conceptualisation of voice—which draws on these intellectual precedents—as the most thorough recent conceptualisation in media and communications scholarship, despite its cursory treatment of voice *beyond* narrative, as well as within it. Since publication, Couldry's work

has been challenged through feminist critiques, among others, for its inadequate consideration of the exclusionary realities of the social interdependency of voice in practice. I argue that the concept of 'performative refugeeness' might be usefully employed to help us understand how refugees might navigate their complex, contradictory opportunities for voice, given the reality exposed by such critiques.

As a starting point, the concept of voice, when relating to refugees, can help theorise the stereotypical refugee voice we observe within mainstream media. Such theories need to move beyond binary classifications around refugee victimhood and agency as defined within a neoliberal order, if we are to complexify voice's theorisation. They also need to move beyond the narrativised voices centralised by Couldry (2010b), given the problematic need for refugees to narrativise their rights claims as part of their asylum applications (Woolley, 2017).

This thesis argues that there is a need to expand theorisations of voice in the aftermath of the so-called 'refugee crisis' in Europe of 2015 (Berry et al., 2016; Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017; Chouliaraki, 2017; Corbu et al., 2017; Xu, 2020) beyond discussions of representation in mainstream and social media. While such studies importantly focus on the stigmatisation, Othering, or one-dimensional celebration of migrants and refugees by powerful institutional gatekeepers, a deeper social analysis of refugees' attempts to produce work themselves, on their own terms, that challenges such representational norms is largely missing within mainstream institutions. As such, this study builds on a body of literature that focuses on the portrayal of refugees in the media from a critical perspective, highlighting the mediation of refugees as ambiguous figures suspended between victimhood and malevolence, their lives described in terms of 'dreams' and 'nightmares' (Appadurai, 1996, p.5, p.9; Wyszynski, 2018; Orgad, 2014), or framed as a voiceless 'other' (Malkki, 1996; Sanyal, 2017; Smets et al., 2019). The mainstream media, which Dahlgren (2010) describes as mediating democracy's most important symbols (p. 34), manifests symbolic omissions of refugee voices, the incorporation of refugees into collective referents, and the decontextualisation of refugees' personal stories (Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017, p. 630). There is significant cross-disciplinary evidence highlighting the social exclusion of refugee voice, and the powerful role the media play in perpetuating this. Lister has shown that migrant groups' experience of prejudice and abuse can be attributed to how institutional media help shape public opinion (Lister, 2007; Buchanan et al., 2004, p. 9). Buchanan and Grillo's analysis of the portrayal of asylum seekers in British media showed the extent of exaggeration of the scale and nature of asylum seekers arriving to the UK, and the resulting disregard for their welfare and human rights (2003: 19).

Couldry's (2010b) account is predicated on the idea that voice as a process is defined as 'giving an account of one's life and its conditions' (p. 7). In terms of voice as a value, this is the act of 'valuing voice', that which 'values all human beings' ability to give an account of themselves, their status as "narratable selves"' (Couldry, 2010b, p. 13). The capacity for a subject to give an account of themselves, is acknowledged widely across Anglo-American philosophy, continental philosophy and poststructuralism (Couldry, 2010b, p. 7). 'In acting and speaking,' says Arendt (1958), 'men [sic] show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities

and thus make their appearance in the human world' (p. 179). As we will see throughout this thesis Couldry's emphasis on the links between voice and narration of the self—giving an account of one's life through story—can be complexified by the broad array of interrupted, collective, affective, messy and ephemeral voices displayed by marginalised groups.

In Western democracies, voice is experienced inequitably within the normative public sphere, and this inequality can have damaging political and democratic consequences (Rouse, 1991; Skeggs, 2004). If we adopt the normative assumption that the ideal public sphere is an arena that might generate critical consensus necessary for public participation in democratic political processes (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994; Habermas, 1987b), then refugees are clearly marginalised and stigmatised within this arena. The bourgeois public's claim to equal accessibility is often unrealised, with exclusions from political participation inscribed along race, class and gender lines (Fraser, 1990). The precarities and diversities of refugee life—temporary accommodation, legal exclusion, diverse cultural norms, racialised prejudices—do not align with equality of participation through rational-critical norms. Fraser builds an ethical case against this exclusion by maintaining that in a globalised world the frame setting of debate should be extended to those affected by law, rather than just those with formal political rights (Fraser, 1990). Building on this and drawing on the work of legal scholars Robert Cover and Frank Michelman (1988), Benhabib (2006) has argued that the processes of opinion and will formation in the public sphere inform law-making decisions.

Couldry's (2010b) argument is that neoliberalism ignores the democratic value of voice and privileges an economic view of public life. Any opposition to neoliberalism might be expressed in terms of devaluing voice (p. 5), and this can be embedded within a broader social and cultural order, whereby economic imperatives trump all others. It is this same neoliberal order that is responsible for exclusions of voice as aided by powerful progenitors of symbolic power, such as the mainstream media (Couldry, 2010b; Dahlgren, 2010). The neoliberal order's influence on migrant precarity has been described extensively by Georgiou (2019), who has noted how active citizenship research has actively privileged middle-class subjects at the expense of the marginalised. The neoliberal framing of voice has also been shown to undermine the potential for normative political engagement and civic participation more broadly (Dahlgren, 2010, p. 35). Within this context, I seek to centralise the question of power in the debate around value as applied to refugee voice—that is, how we assign value to who speaks and how they speak (Couldry, 2010b). This is combined with an interest in voice in the Foucauldian sense—refugee subjects produced in and by systems of knowledge production, embodying and experiencing the unequal social relations of which refugees, like all subjects, are products (Foucault, 1976; 1997).

It is worth noting that those with a greater power to use their words to transform politics are often white, middle class, cisgendered, neurotypical, and heterosexual men (Kay, 2020, p. 15), (as I am, and I will reflect in more detail on this in Chapter 3). Kay argues for voice to be rethought as collective, interdependent, vulnerable, faltering, misfiring, awkward and messy (2020, p. 16). Other prominent critiques of Couldry have

taken his approach to task for its vagueness—for failing to account for what a post-neoliberal politics of voice might look like beyond critiquing the idea that a greater number of voices is necessarily better (Broad, 2011). There is a clear need for deeper empirical analysis of post-neoliberal spaces where voices are valued in different ways.

It is important to stress that we might consider Couldry's conception as being rooted primarily in the normative Habermasian rational-critical public sphere, and, by extension, depoliticising voices that exist outside this sphere. Couldry's (2010b) argument is that we must create new spaces and counterrationalities to challenge the existing ways voice is valued, in essence neoliberally. He undertheorises voices that do not conform to rational, linear narrative expressions of the self within normative publics. To counteract this flaw, this thesis will seek to politicise voices that exist *outside* this normative conception, arguing that there might equally be a politics of voice that is not necessarily grounded in rationality or coherence, and therefore might emerge in ways that are less easily and immediately understood. That is not to say that narrative-based voices are not extremely important—clearly, narrative—an account of linked events—is one of the preeminent forms of human expression. Rather, it is to state plainly that voices are important *within and beyond narrative*—that an omission or a refusal might not be immediately obvious, or provide shiny forms of data, but is an equally important expression of voice. These voices still might mark a political contribution, even if their placement in the normative public sphere is less stable, even absent. Refugees have long been known to rearticulate discourses of vulnerability and collectivity, but also accounts of trauma, dissent and disability. As such, their voices might offer an antidote to the fetishisation of 'powerful speakers' (Kay, 2020, p. 17).

Drawing on the work of Ricoeur, among others, Couldry (2010b) repeatedly centralises the idea of narrative when conceptualising voice. 'We define voice at one level as the capacity to make, and be recognized as making, narratives about one's life' (p. 7). He links this narrativisation to ethics via Butler (2005), who notes that 'no one can live in a radically non-narratable world or survive a non-narratable life' (p. 59), and Ricoeur (1992), who asks 'how can a subject of action give his life an ethical qualification if this life cannot be brought together in the form of a narrative' (p. 162). While 'giving an account of oneself' is at the heart of this idea (Butler, 2005) of narratives as representing the 'temporal aspect of human life' (Ricoeur, 1980, p. 165) it does not fully unpack the possibilities for non-narrativised voices—specifically, the gaps, break, interruptions and non-narratable experiences and precarities of refugee existence. There are multiple factors that might hinder the victims of traumatic events from recounting their past experiences in a linear, rule-oriented way (Shuman & Bohmer, 2004). Our understanding of voice must accommodate the ability of refugees to break away from linear narratives around their rights claims, should they choose to do so.

Couldry's critical centralisation of neoliberal rationality also does little to explore the possibilities for emotional or affective voice. Thus, a critique of this normative understanding of voice could equally be extended to including refugee affect or emotion—a focus on 'how people are moved, what attracts them…pains and pleasures, feelings and memories' (Wetherell, 2013, p. 2). Refugees might express voice irrationally—through

excitement, pleasure, thankfulness, fearfulness, hatred, or envy—and any understanding of voice should include how such emotions or affect relate to broader constructions of the refugee self. While they are not central to this thesis, Couldry does not consider the potential sonic or polyvocal possibilities of voice in any depth (James, 2021; Bakhtin, 1984). Analysis of written narrative as text might ignore meanings that are 'masked, camouflaged, indirect, embedded or hidden' (Conquergood, 2002, p. 146). The critical theorist Lauren Berlant (2011) writes of intimate publics and affect in their influential book *Cruel Optimism*, and much of this writing could be extended to critique voice in the case of refugees. If we define affect as a form of pre-emotive intensity, Berlant talks of the *feeling* of 'an affective soundscape producing the effects of social mutuality', with the process of *listening together* as an object of desire (p. 224). This affect locates the desire for the political in an alternative commons in which the senses circulate. Such intimate publics are the preserve of the marginalised, providing opportunities for feelings of immediacy and solidarity; publics that contain an affective register of belonging in the absence of hospitable normative institutions. Equally, in such contexts, silence is a form of political protest—rejecting the terms on which voice is offered normatively, *or refusing to speak on particular subjects*. This is both empowering *and* a loss. Unpacking how such silences—refusing the promises of voice levied by myself or others in this thesis—might ambivalently extend what voice means to include absences of voice (affectscapes beyond the linearly and obviously political) is relevant to the highly regulated spaces of refugees. This regulation is enacted symbolically, through institutional media, and materially, through the stringent laws that govern refugee lives and movements.

So, we have made an argument for more fluid forms of voice that should be considered in greater detail empirically in the case of refugees. I turn now to the concept of 'performative refugeeness,' which helps further conceptualise how refugee voices might be more ambivalently and dynamically negotiated than with existing theories of voice—specifically, the issue of narrativising a life when this narrative is so crucial to a rights claim within an exclusionary system.

'Performative Refugeeness'

Given the ambivalent nature of refugees' opportunities for voice, I argue here that 'performative refugeeness'—a concept that recognises the specific limits of possibility for constituting refugee selves—might yield a more complete theorisation of the processes around refugee voice within highly regulated settings that retain ambivalence and complexity. I draw on Butler's (1990) conception of performativity as the citational re-enactment through which discourse produces its effects. Namely, a subject is (re)constructed through the (re)citation of discourses which it reinforces, repeats or breaks from in various ways.

On the one hand, it is clearly true that the liberal democratic promise of equality of voice for refugees is unfulfilled. On the other, such a normative framing of refugee voice reifies a power hierarchy that distinguishes between citizens and non-citizens. It is my argument that we could combine a more complete theorisation of 'performative refugeeness' with a broader conceptualisation of voice that is disruptive, collective, or hesitant, as discussed above. This use of performativity draws on Isin and Nielsen's (2008) idea of

'acts of citizenship' (Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Isin, 2002; 2009; 2012)—the enactment of rights claims by those without formal citizenship rights. Such acts might be instances of 'performative refugeeness' enacted within a discursive context that relates to refugees. To state this in less abstract terms, the extent to which refugees might performatively rearticulate discourses such as entrepreneurialism or victimhood—or the way that particular discourses are rearticulated, contested, or ignored as part of the process of the construction of the refugee self, is worthy of further understanding.

Butler (1996) defines performativity as 'not a singular or deliberate "act" but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect it names' (p. 2). In her influential exploration, Butler (1990) argues that gender is a set of acts which produce the effect of coherent substance and conceal gender's lack of stable foundation (p. 145; Sedgwick, 1990). Gender is considered here as 'the stylized repetition of acts through time' (Butler, 1990, p. 141). Repetition is crucial because it has 'no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitutes its reality' (Butler, 1990, p. 173). So, via repetitive practices, differences are inscribed between the self and other actors. Crucially, Butler (1988) says these repetitions contain the possibility for a *break* (i.e., the possibility for a different kind of repeating), 'the breaking or subversive repetition of that style' (p. 520). By using this theory, we might maintain an evaluation of refugee voice that combines an understanding of the decentred subject, avoids naïve conceptions of voice, and maintains the potential around promised new ways to value voice. By decentred subject, I mean understanding the self as constructed within a context of discursive practices; and that the institutionalisation and embedded power of discursive practices interrelate, shape and are contested by social relations (Dunn, 2016, p. 689; Foucault, 1979; 1980).

We might conceive of circumstances in which participants enact voice in ways that contest their construction primarily as refugees. These acts follow Isin and Nielsen's assertion of new civic acts in the form of acts of citizenship that may 'transform modes of being political by bringing into being new actors [and] creating new sites and scales of struggle' and could shift focus from the institution(s) of citizenship to collective or individual deeds that interrupt socio-historical patterns (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 39). At one pole, these acts might demand rights for social provision based on the logic of humanitarian compassion (Isin, 2009) or might be overtly political or justice-based claims based in human rights law aiming to transform the boundaries of citizenship (Isin, 2009). Isin and Nielsen (2008) argue that such acts challenge habitus, create new possibilities, are creatively expressive, and shift 'established practices, status and order' (p. 10). They should be accountable to justice, participatory, and politically effective in helping 'organize public presentations from actors who claim rights or impose social responsibilities' (Isin & Nielsen, 2008, p. 10). Here, citizenship becomes a practice that disrupts social-historical patterns if subjects constitute themselves as political subjects (Müller, 2016). Thus, acts of citizenship contest the meaning of citizenship itself[4] and have the potential to create new forms

[4] Citizenship studies has historically defined citizenship along its civil dimension, i.e., the legal rights of its members; its political, i.e., those rights associated with democratic participation, and its social dimensions, i.e., the cultural life circumstances of individuals (Marshall, 1950; Dalhgren, 2010, p. 60). In the absence of expensive legal advice or political lobbying, symbolic or cultural routes—or the production of 'common sense' knowledge—might provide immediate opportunities for refugees to seek recognition through the cultural dimension

of solidarity that can usefully be considered in relation to groups of non-status refugees (Nyers, 2010). I would argue that speech or textual acts, performative utterances, whereby to 'utter [a] sentence is not to describe my doing…it is to do it' (Austin, 1962, p. 8), may also constitute acts of citizenship. Such enactment of voice may be one mechanism for communicatively challenging cultural inequalities of voice.

Such performativity has specific considerations when discussing refugee voices, given the highly regulated and exclusionary orders in which they find themselves (Butler, 2004; Arendt, 1951). 'Performative refugeeness' might encourage particular forms of enactment of voice and self-representation by disguising structural precarity (Butler, 2004). In other words, 'performative refugeeness' is a way by which refugees might navigate through processes that promise voice, thereby retaining a degree of possibility to break with dominant conceptions of what voice means.

My intention here is to explore the extent to which the refugee self is similarly constructed through such citational practice, given that the mechanisms for its occurrence are worthy of further study. These refugee selves might well be constructed through everyday acts in situations where individuals come into contact with other actors, e.g., as part of their asylum claim, and are recognised only on the basis of refugeeness, and not any other facet of their identity. Refugee identities as women, wives, mothers, friends, employees, to name some examples, should also be important sources of voice. Within this conception of 'performative refugeeness' there is the possibility for a break, for a difference from what has gone before, and it is here that I believe lies the genuine promise for new ways of valuing voice that we might search for in this thesis. The extent to which this is possible will be evaluated in this study—as performances under strict regulation might be limited to particular re-enactments of the refugee self along particular dimensions. By conceptualising this in terms of citational practice, 'performative refugeeness' might deliver different kinds of voice via cultural routes while acknowledging participants' differences, or not—this will be subject to empirical evaluation.

Crucially, performativity is not just a possibility for citation, but also a means to inhabit and perform other identities creatively through these 'breaks'—to negotiate, cite, or express another facet of the refugee self which might not ordinarily gain expression. While my conception of performativity is Butlerian, given the highly regulated nature of refugee voice, these 'breaks' speak to an emerging body of scholarship which sees performativity as a means of building knowledge of citizenship in modes of expression (e.g. ludic or affective) that challenge the discursive mode of normative inclusive/exclusive logics of citizenship (Tyler & Marciniak, 2013, p. 146; Balme, 2015, p. 11). For instance, such breaks might move away from logics which seek to challenge political and legal frameworks, but reinforce them in the process—the inclusive/exclusive logic of citizenship is after all, designed to 'fail specific groups and populations' (Tyler, 2010). A more complete

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of citizenship. This is inspired by the idea of 'common sense' within critical theory, which sees commonsensical discourses as a product of historical struggles in which the 'natural order' has been legitimised, obscured by essentialist discourses about 'human nature' (Lawrence, 1981). 'Common sense' in terms of racism is articulated through the popular media, and provides a fertile ground for the legitimisation of repressive measures directed towards minority communities, and the growth of racist ideologies, including against asylum seekers. Recalibrating such ideas of 'common sense' might therefore also provide a cultural route to recognition for those beyond legal boundaries.

theorisation and study of 'performative refugeeness,' given this theoretical approach around the enactment of participants' selves in for example, ludic, contestatory, or agreeable ways relating to performativity, is another contribution of this study.

Given this study's interest not just in voice but in its social context, we must also include here Couldry's (2010b) centrality of the concept of recognition in his argument, where he draws on Honneth's belief that recognition of others' agency is central to social justice (p. 19). Citing Honneth (1995) and studies of UK citizen engagement in politics (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2007), Couldry (2008b) reports that 'the real issue about the...long-term decline in engagement in formal electoral politics in the UK and elsewhere ... was not so much a "motivation crisis" on the part of citizens ... the real issue was a "recognition crisis"' (p. 16). We must realise at this point that Honneth's (1995) conception of love, rights and solidarity—a multipartite theorisation of what it actually means to recognise another subject, to acknowledge another's voice—departs from the Habermasian norm of democratic communicative negotiation—where a refugee might not only be loved, but might legitimately express the forms of hesitation or collectivity described by Kay or Berlant (Kay 2020; Berlant, 2011).

Part Two: Recognition beyond the State

Given its importance to voice, I will now consider recognition of refugee voice. Scholarship around the value of voice emphasises the need for voice to be recognised—that is to say, for one's essential self to be socially valued by others (Back, 2007; Couldry, 2010b). In this section, I proffer an expansion of Honneth's (1996) normative three-pronged social theory of recognition. Honneth conceived of his approach as a normative standard against which the struggle for recognition might be appraised (Mark, 2016). Beginning with an exploration of Honneth's approach to recognition—predicated as it is on self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem—I argue that the flexibility of Honneth's fundamental philosophical, ethical, and psychological conception, and its openness to forms of recognition beyond the rational-critical subject, make it appropriate in this context. However, it can also be critiqued for its failure to acknowledge the contingency of refugee recognition as constructed within particular social circumstances—where recognition might aid the construction of hierarchies between those who 'do' the recognising and those who are, or are not, recognised along particular dimensions; for instance, through creative mediation processes which I will describe below. As such, I argue that Honneth's theory must be combined with the idea of 'difference-respect' (Van Leeuwen, 2007). While this study's participants might engage with a normative process of asylum, and thus are seeking legal recognition from the British state, we must be open-minded about evaluating recognition both *within* and *beyond* the apparatus of the state. In thinking about the fact that normative legal recognition is of importance to refugees, but that other forms of recognition might emerge, I am influenced by the idea of immanent critique—deriving the standards employed from the object critiqued (Honneth, 2001)—but I am conscious of expanding recognition beyond its prominent definitions.

I argue here that other theories of recognition go into greater depth about the risks and dangers of the (mis)recognition of identity. However, Honneth's theory, in its multidimensional psychological, political and *personal* application across dimensions of the self and society—though not complete, and with some caveats around acknowledging differences among refugee groups, as I will describe—is ambitious in scope and well aligned with the critique of the rational-critical Habermasian voice outlined above.

Fraser has identified the importance of both autonomy and morality for self-realisation (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Honneth's (2007) emphasis on recognition as an intersubjective process where all subjects recognise each other for their value aligns with Couldry's conception of voice. Honneth embeds his conception in a social system of realisation linked to subjects' capacities as citizens (Georgiou, 2019). He draws epistemologically on the Kantian categorical imperative to explain that what we owe every person is the recognition and respect for 'his or her status as…the autonomous author of the political and moral laws to which he or she is subject' (Honneth, 1995, p. xv). 'The Kantian categorical imperative states that to recognize every other human being as a person must be to act, with regard to all of them, in the manner to which we are morally obligated by the features of a person' (Honneth, 1995, p. 112). Honneth (1995) develops his definition of recognition along three axes, the three preconditions one needs to be an ethical agent: self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem (p. 94). Each of these is dependent on a different kind of recognition: love, legal recognition, and social esteem, through the mutual valuation of share goals within a particular society. These are realised through three kinds of social relationship: loving primary relationships, legal relations, or the social state of solidarity. If a subject is misrecognised by the denial of love, legal recognition, or social esteem, then this is experienced as injustice or harm (Van der Brink & Owen, 2007).

Love, the primary and individual form of recognition, involves subjects forming basic confidence in themselves. Such recognition, acting as it does at the level of subjectivity through the construction of the self, is fundamental to the efficacy of voice, and precedes a subject's ability to find political agency. It allows for self-confidence, to express one's needs and desires, due to being surrounded by unconditional love and emotional support. Honneth's (1995) second axis of recognition, 'self-respect,' suggests that legal recognition, or the 'autonomous capacity to raise and defend claims discursively,' thereby viewing oneself as worthy of the same status and treatment as everyone else, gives an individual 'a symbolic means of expression [to] demonstrate that he or she is universally recognized as a morally responsible person' (Honneth, p. 120). Finally, in his third axis, Honneth (1995) believes that self-esteem can be acquired through a 'cultural struggle for the recognition of previously denigrated contributors to the common good' (p. xvii), ultimately by changing a society to create conditions where minority populations are not denigrated outside their sub-culture and thus may contribute civically. As Georgiou (2019) notes, all three dimensions are necessary for subjects to be recognised as equal participants in a society, what Honneth (1992) calls 'fully fledged partner[s]', as opposed to being assimilated into a singular way of being in order to acquire rights (p. 91)[5]. Some scholars have argued that trust is a

[5] Recognition can be extended beyond these dimensions to an ethico-political project such as Back's (2007) concept of 'listening,' a deeply reflexive approach committed to paying 'attention to the fragments, the voices and stories that are otherwise passed over or ignored'

necessary precondition for recognition, given that Honneth refers to recognition's 'assumption of being given positive consideration by others' (Petherbridge, 2021, p. 16).

Honneth's (1995) views here on recognition follow those of Taylor (1994), whose politics of dignity and difference lays out one of the central conflicts in the field of recognition studies (p. 27). Unlike Honneth, who adopts a more universal approach, Taylor applies his theory to North American multiculturalism and identity politics. Both theorists urge for a respect for individual rights—Honneth (1995) through legal recognition, and Taylor (1994) in his argument for fundamental universalising laws beneath bespoke applications of certain principles; for instance, the widespread application of *habeas corpus*, legal recourse in the case of unlawful detention, combined with treating different cultures in different ways in order to ensure their survival (p. 61). Taylor (1994) has written extensively about how 'misrecognition' on a personal level can cause psychological damage if the people surrounding a subject mirror back to them a demeaning picture (p. 25). While Taylor (1994) describes minority populations as suffering from dominant societies [that have] 'for generations projected a demeaning image of them, which some of them have been unable to resist adopting' (p. 26), this is encompassed by Honneth's (1996) own theories of misrecognition, which are more expansive (pp. 42-45). On top of the numerous cultural and psychological challenges faced by refugees, including communication difficulties, acculturation, and aspects of acceptance by the host society, the links between discrimination and mental health problems among refugee populations are well evidenced (Montgomery et al., 2007; Fozdar & Torezani, 2008).

Honneth's (1995) conception has been strongly criticised by theorists such as Fraser (2003) for failing to account fully for economic and redistributive arguments around inequality, which Fraser (2003) argues should be given equal footing alongside the idea of recognition itself. Various justifications have emerged for this omission. Writing about refugees in educational contexts, Sprung (2013) channels Honneth by saying that love can help refugees dissent against broader legal exclusions, and that agency through love can help them struggle for broader forms of redistributive justice. Fraser's (2003) response to this would be that material and legal institutional frameworks should be prioritised, and that these can lead to cultural subordination through the internalisation of social norms.

My own response to this, in turn, is first that Honneth (1995) accommodates Fraser's (2003) critique in his third dimension of recognition—solidarity. And secondly, that love and self-respect are as important to psychological well-being—the refugee self is de facto constructed by the refugee's exclusion from the state—as sociocultural equality. It is worth acknowledging that there is an alignment between a human rights claim and full Honnethian recognition, which is envisioned as a process in search of the Arendtian universal need for

(Back, 2007, p. 1). In such a thesis, what remains unsaid is as important as what is said—the aporia in social life that scarcely get noticed. Such an ethical listening project, where refugee stories are not objectified, where listening goes beyond the stereotypes already extant and places agency over the terms of such listening with the refugees themselves, helps address some of the epistemic dissonance around voice highlighted above. Such listening might be reframed as an 'exchange'—where 'voice' and 'listening' should in an ideal world be experienced equitably.

rights (Arendt, 1951). By this, I mean that Honneth's (1995) conception of self-respect can be aligned with refugees' bid for asylum, given that it acknowledges a need for subjects to have the right to shape their own life, without being obstructed. While we must keep in mind Fraser's (2003) argument for broader structural change, the immediate and often definitive nature of refugee exclusion must be acknowledged, while being mindful of Honneth's failure to prioritise these material redistributive questions. Either way, any study around refugee voice and self-representation must tease apart the conditions under which recognition of refugees can take place, and be mindful of the fact that we must extend the conception of recognition *beyond* the claim to rights—that refugees might experience recognition independently of market-based or legal forces.

We should also be mindful of the dangers of equating these arguments concerning recognition with a nationalist strain of multiculturalism, whereby 'the nation becomes an ideal through being posited as "being" plural, open and diverse; as being loving and welcoming to others' (Ahmed, 2014, p. 133). In this context, a so-called nation of tolerance could be undermined by any refugee who refuses the conditions of solidarity—those who reject the available offer of recognition. Such silences, or refusals, also proffer a critique of the Honnethian approach to recognition. In the case of refugees, the offer of recognition in mainstream publics might be perceived as one of integration, of conforming to liberal views of 'Britishness' through language and symbolic forms of citizenship, and therefore we might usefully extend our theorisation of recognition to instances where refugees refuse to abide by this—where they reject the offer of recognition as abiding by the values of a majority community. Honneth's (1995) conception of symmetrical esteem—his third form of recognition—depends too heavily on a national community of values, neglecting the modern complexity of local subcultural variation (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 184). Honneth (1995) argues that individuals should 'view one another in light of values that allow the abilities and traits of the other to appear significant for shared praxis,' (p. 129). However, this can be criticised for lacking a formal recognition of difference—national, linguistic, cultural, or ethnic attachments—that are non-evaluative; namely, that do not impose an external conception of value, as opposed to recognising a social or cultural group for its value on that group's own terms. We should be wary of reinforcing a communitarian ideal—where a 'sense of belonging cannot be ethnic and based on shared cultural, ethnic, and other characteristics…but must be based on a shared commitment to a political community' (Parekh, 1994, p. 4).

The process of valuing alternative forms of recognition cannot simply be a recourse to simplistic understandings of communitarian and multicultural thinking. Ahmed (2014) posits that the national ideal is 'presented as all the more ideal through the failure of other others to approximate that ideal' (p. 137). If we are not careful, Honneth's theory might be considered as lacking 'difference-respect,' without an evaluative understanding of a culture's specificities of race, culture, gender, or language—therefore, such recognition might not be complete and on the participants' terms, with respect to the unique traditions which are of importance to them (Kymlicka, 1989; van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 186). It is naïve to think that particular states are not biased towards particular groups, and ignoring such bias does not allow for the differential respect of particular minorities or for the grievances levied against them through state-sponsored racism (van Leeuwen,

2007, p. 196). It is for this reason that we must account for the specificities of recognition of refugee individuals[6].

To add to this, I argue that forms of voice and recognition for refugees who do not conform to the narrow rules of neoliberal systems—to be entrepreneurial, self-sufficient, and assimilated in the market (Choularaki & Georgiou, in press)—must be recognised universally, in combination with the politics of difference, which includes the willingness to recognise the right of refugee groups to express their voice through self-identification. Van Leeuwen (2007) refers to this second dimension of respect as 'difference-respect', 'concerned not just with the recognition of the value of a culture or language for the social community, but with the value of a culture for the *members* of the social group' (p. 181). So, Honneth's (1995) three-pronged approach has in fact four prongs—with his second prong, respect, needing to comprise *both* the Honnethian necessity for an 'agent's autonomous capacity to raise and defend claims discursively,' (Honneth, 1995, p.120) through legal recognition from the state, and *also* their social attachments, which pay heed to participants' complex membership of multiple overlapping identities of race, class, gender, nationality, transnationally or otherwise.

Self-respect must also emerge through a sense of social belonging and 'difference-respect'. This might come through one's sexuality, culture, gender, or country of origin being acknowledged, and can function *independently* of asylum. Indeed, this independence, if fully described, might help address critiques of Honneth's theoretical reinforcement of the power relations between state and subject when he assumes the state's power to determine participants' self-respect (Staples, 2012, p. 101). State actors can be entirely discriminatory in their actions towards legal rights, as the UK Home Office's disproportionate detention of Black migrants has evidenced (Townsend, 2020). 'Difference-respect' can go *beyond* discrete identity categories to acknowledge participants' experiences, personalities, preferences, interests, ambitions, or desires, on their own terms, and might be usefully extended beyond normative concerns. Here, I take normative concerns to be those concerns which align with the concerns of the state—for example, legal recognition. As well as extending critiques of voice, by using refugee groups as a case study, theories of recognition might usefully be extended within neoliberal nationalist frameworks. As such, this thesis privileges self-identification, and people's subjective attachment to particular communities (Zimmerman et al., 2007). I am also inspired here by theories of listening, particularly what Dreher (2009), terms 'difficult listening'" (p. 450; Ward & Wasserman, 2015, p. 838), whereby listening occurs to facilitate understanding as opposed to necessitating agreement.

[6] The literature around listening has attempted to shift away from a tokenistic consideration of the bestowal of voice to a structural critique of institutions that fail to facilitate recognition (Macnamara, 2013, p. 164). Drawing on political theory and postcolonial feminism, the Listening Project's Tanja Dreher (2009) says that societies need to learn 'listening across difference.' This concept draws attention to the social, cultural, political and ideological barriers to attention, recognition, understanding and response, and shifts focus and responsibility from the marginalized and voiceless 'on to institutions and conventions which enable and constrain receptivity and response' (p. 456). With its focus on 'difference-respect', this study partly concerns itself with this lacuna.

A critique of the narrow conception of voice that is assimilated into market and national norms can be aligned with the case of refugees to proffer a broadening of our understanding of what voice means. A conception of recognition as conceived by Honneth (1995) is key to a subject's psychological and social wellbeing, and this can be extended to those subjects seeking asylum. The exclusionary nature of this construction of the refugee self means that questions of identity construction should be urgently considered, using a multidimensional Honnethian approach that acknowledges the individual and social particularities of individual refugees' need for voice and recognition. Given the ethical need to expand the possibilities for refugee voice, we must understand more fully where and how such expansion might take place—the value of recognition privileged by such individuals—in order to extend what it means to be recognised.

Given the media's central role in excluding refugees, forms of mediation which might proffer 'new' opportunities for voice, using Couldry's words (2010b), represent my third conceptual focus. To explore this, I will now turn to the question of the promise of voice through participation in creative mediation, and how such promises might be better understood in light of the discussions hitherto outlined.

Part Three: Participation in Creative Mediation

Mediation and Participation

In this final section, I move to participatory mediated social practices which promise to contest refugee exclusions, to open up new ways and forms of valuing voice in what I term promises of voice. This is in order to take up Couldry's assertion for 'new' ways of valuing voice (2010b), beyond neoliberalism. A commonsensical approach would suggest that those places advertising themselves as heralding 'new' forms of voices might be worthy of scrutiny.

Such promises seem to offer possibilities that lie beyond normative governmental opportunities for voice—those that meet the criteria defined above regarding the nation-state or market. I define the most prevalent promises here as creative mediation, creative activities involving self-representation offered through official charitable institutional commitments to 'give refugees a voice,' with little granular detail as to how this might occur, and for what purpose. Such promises of voice are highly ambivalent—in previous studies on such institutional promises, the reality has seen such voices highly disconnected from possibilities of mainstream political recognition (Dreher, 2012). Superficial engagement with 'celebrating' voices can gloss over engaging with more complex and difficult questions.

In this section, I will explain why creative mediation heralds a compelling promise of voice, due to its prevalence and the many institutional efforts to make it work as a system of inclusive representation of those on the social margins. I define creative mediation as creative expressions that are mediated, facilitated by institutions, and centred on projects of self-representation; these projects are shared with others, and thus constitute creative and communicative elements of publicness (even if the scale of publicness they contribute to varies). As such, creative mediation provides opportunities for, but also regulates voice and recognition.

My definition of creative mediation draws primarily on Silverstone's (2005) conception of mediation as a dialectical communication process which is institutionally and technologically driven and embedded (p. 189), with this meaning construction occurring in and around media production and reception (Hall, 1973). While 'participation in creative mediation' is my core concept here, in order to establish this definition of creative mediation I will unpack its constituent parts. I will first argue for the importance of mediation in understanding promises of voice, if we believe that the media supplies the most important symbols in our society (Silverstone, 1999; Dahlgren, 2010). I will then argue that a critical understanding of self-representation is central to this literature, if we are interested in mediation through self-representation—which is necessary for a refugee to 'speak' rather than be 'spoken for.' The concept of participation will be introduced here as a parallel and helpful body of literature that could aid empirical understanding of self-representation. Finally, I will introduce and then critique the argument that precisely when it is creative, mediation offers by definition different and new forms of voice. The core value of publicness—sharing and communicating self-representations—helps us understand creative mediation as an ambivalent space of voice, and the contingency of participation in different publics, these being local, regional, and national.

Let us begin our exploration of creative mediation with the concept of mediation itself. Following Silverstone's (1999) centralisation of the media in the 'general texture of experience' (p. 2) and Dahlgren's (2010) claim that mainstream media mediates democracy's most important symbols (p. 34), the concept of mediation as a social phenomenon can help us develop an understanding of refugee voice as entangled with social, cultural, and institutional environments; how these influence and shape voices, and vice versa. '[Mediation] requires a consideration of the social as a mediator: institutions and technologies alongside the meanings delivered by them are mediated in the social processes of reception and consumption' (Silverstone, 2005, p. 189). Following Silverstone, my intention is to both explore voices within media*,* i.e., within texts, and also around them *in broader mediation processes,* to encompass the social possibilities for refugees to contest the opportunities for inclusion presented to them, given the risks that conventional forms of media have the capacity to reinscribe logics which ignore refugees' opportunities to refuse media, or to express voice in messier ways, as discussed (Couldry, 2006; Fornas, 2000; Martin-Barbero, 1993; Silverstone, 1999; Thompson, 1995; Thumim, 2009, p. 619). Following Thumim, my intention is to begin with the assumption that media is at the centre of meaning-making—in this case as a promise of voice—while remaining open to critiques of this idea that will emerge through empirical work (Thumim, 2012, p. 53).

In order to further unpack the idea of refugees voicing or expressing themselves through mediation, I take inspiration from the literature around self-representation, a range of common institutional practices which in their most straightforward sense can be defined as participants producing their own representation, as opposed to being represented by a third party (Thumim, 2012). Thumim's (2017) work addresses the ubiquity of participants 'speaking for themselves' through self-representation, performing, presenting, representing and circulating information, and I argue that this might equally extend to creative mediation. As Thumim

(2012) argues, there has been a proliferation of self-representation across a range of sites in the UK, from publicly funded bodies to private companies and digital platforms, with self-representation increasingly ubiquitous in public life, and this study will attempt to consider these practices empirically, focusing on refugees. Thumim (2012) centralises media in her understanding of self-representation, but acknowledges that meaning circulates both between and around sites of production, text and reception as defined above (Hall, 1973; 1997)[7]. The influence of technology, cultural context, and constituent actors alongside the text itself are all part of her consideration of what mediation means (Thumim, 2012, p. 51).

Given that my central research question concerns voice itself, and its associated promises and exclusions, it is important to note that there is a significant, parallel literature on alternative, participatory and community media that offers useful context to what might enable refugees to self-represent in creative mediation, or, alternatively, what might prevent this from happening (Downing, 1990; Rodriguez, 2011; Thomas, 2010; Atton, 2001; Couldry & Curran, 2003). Participatory media has long heralded the prospect of extending the possibility of voice to marginalised groups, with the concept of participation crucial to understanding the social processes through which such voices might be heard, or otherwise. Tacchi and Kiran (2008) argue that content creation has given voice to marginalised communities, and describe voice as a situation in which inclusion and participation are facilitated in social, political, and economic processes; meaning-making, autonomy, and expression (Tacchi & Kiran, 2008). Lister (2004) defines voice as the right to participate in decision-making in social, economic, cultural, and political life, and thus as a crucial human and citizenship right. If we are interested in understanding practices in which restricted voice is couched as a problem that must be remedied, then the practice of participatory media can be defined as a means by which 'ordinary citizens' are given greater control over the decision-making, production, and distribution of content to greater or lesser degrees (Waller et al., 2014).

I focus on a political understanding of participation in mediation here, what Carpentier (2006) describes as 'the equalisation of power inequalities in particular decision-making processes' (p. 72; Carpentier, Dahlgren & Pasquali, 2014). This follows Pateman's (1970) definition of full participation as 'a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions' (p. 71). This definition can be mapped on to the processes around promises of voice through creative mediation that I describe here. The concept of participation is a useful tool for understanding how these social processes work in light of voice empirically, and is particularly useful for understanding exclusions and inclusions of voice, which we have established as being instrumental to the expression of the refugee self.

[7] Though Thumim makes a distinction between the digital and non-digital institutional, textual, and cultural dimensions of self-representation, these practices likely interrelate as more hybrid practices, with digital self-representation informing non-digital equivalents and vice versa (Marino, 2015). An emerging body of scholarship has considered the importance of digital transnational mediation to refugee groups traversing Europe, for navigation, communication, and networking, as well as communicating with their family through digital self-representation (Gillespie et al., 2018; Chouliaraki, 2017).

Bailey et al (2008) distinguish between participation in production (content-related participation) and participation in decision-making (structural participation), seeking out media in which 'each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions' (Pateman, 1970). It is through such participation that voices might be regulated and controlled in particular ways to reinforce the exclusions of voice and recognition discussed earlier. In democratic systems, participation in political arenas outside the dominant political space allows the individual to better appreciate the connection between the public and private spheres, the link between everyday politicized engagement, and full-on democratic decision-making (Pateman, 1970, p. 110). This can also be described as a form of micro-participation, i.e., adopting a democratic and civic attitude, thus strengthening the possibility of macro-participation, i.e., broader participation in direct democratic processes involving the creation and certification of legislation and decision-making (Bailey et al., 2007, p. 11). Needless to say, micro-participation as a concept is analogous to the Habermasian conceptualisation of the normative public sphere, which presumes a degree of rational participatory equality, or an equality of participating voices engaging in the processes of dialogue, debate, and deliberation (Bailey et al., 2007, p. 11). The extent to which these ideas of participation might extend to refugees, given their exclusion from these self-same political systems, is worthy of empirical evaluation.

Moving beyond Arnstein's (1969) linear ladder, we can think about participation in the promise of voice that might change over time in different ways through different components of that participation. It might comprise participation in creative mediation, but also participation in other ways beyond normative participation, such as socialising, family life, work, and activism. As Rovisco and Lunt (2019, p. 616) have noted, participation might be rethought in terms of everyday life with and beyond the state-centred arena of politics (Jessop, 2000). While my argument in the case of refugees is that we cannot ignore the regulating power of the state, we should also be mindful of more horizontal forms of participation analogous to debates around cultural citizenship (Stevenson, 2003; Hartley, 2010). Marshall's three dimensions of citizenship (1950) —the civil, political, and social—have coincided in formulations privileged by Western academia of the 'ideal typical' nation-state. However, recent decades have seen an increased reappraisal of this unitary model due to the transnational economic, political, and social changes that have taken place through globalised migratory flows of labour. Alongside this, transnational cultural communities have emerged through digital communication networks that often transcend formal political and economic boundaries (Sandercock, 1998; Teune, 2008, p. 249). Migrant communities have traditionally been excluded from Western definitions of citizenship, in part because of historic Eurocentric ideals of citizenship that originate in ancient Athenian democracy: ostensibly unities of residence, administrative subjection, democratic participation, and cultural membership (Isin, 2002, p. 277; Vidal-Naquet, 1995).

We must note the importance of regulation to these processes of mediation, if we take regulation to mean both formal governmental laws which might limit such mediation and particular symbolic orders which normalise particular representational forms (Thompson, 1995). The idea of double articulation, to use Silverstone's (1994) term (Livingstone, 2007,p. 18), when applied to these processes of refugee voice, in both

material and symbolic ways, might help us understand both normative symbolic concerns around voice and its restriction alongside more material regulatory factors which have been shown to be of equal or greater concern to refugees themselves. Regulation of voice exists in terms that are both symbolic—the representation of those seeking asylum—and material—such as the physical exclusion of refugees confined at Napier Barracks in Kent, UK, for instance, which made headlines in 2021 for their appalling living conditions (Taylor, 2021). Regulation and mediation of refugee voices might be seen through such symbolic and physical parameters. By extension, we might argue that voice can exist 'materially' in particular spatio-temporal settings—through the execution of asylum law, for instance, which physically excludes participants from particular spaces—as well as symbolically, within the 'flows of particular socio-cultural discourses' (Livingstone, 2007, p. 2), the discursive order of refugee representation. This double articulation aside, given the power of legal exclusions of refugees, and the expensive and time-consuming routes to legal contestation of asylum systems, cultural forms of contestation might conceivably constitute effective ways of recalibrating 'common-sensical' meaning around refugee voice.

Creative Mediation and Publicness

So far, I have argued for the importance of participation in mediation and self-representation to promises of voice, but that still leaves a sprawling potential for empirical interrogation. Turning now to creative mediation specifically, it is my argument that such forms of mediation are both an undertheorised component of mediation and an important potential 'new' source of refugee voice in the absence of widely funded forms of alternative mediation in the UK (such as community or ethnic media). The most recent nationwide research into the field of creative mediation with refugees revealed an area of growing importance, with some 200 organisations engaged in creative practices with refugees in the UK. It was established that while there is a growing body of research of such practices, nationwide academic study of creative work involving refugees and asylum seekers in the UK remains minimal, with just one national study to date (Gould, 2005). As of 2021, the UK charity Counterpoints Arts—which runs one of the leading networks of creative practitioners engaging with refugees—works with over 300 organisations nationwide engaged in digital practice, craft, film, literature, the spoken word, performance, and visual art, among other media, with partner organisations that include universities, funding authorities, artistic institutions, and individual practitioners (Counterpoints Arts, 2021).

Because such promises of voice aim for more complete forms of participation around production *and* meaning, creative mediation does not proscribe professionalised conventions around participatory art (e.g., sculpture and figuration) or digital storytelling (e.g., linear narrative), craft (e.g., pottery), or film (e.g., a video of a live performance). Instead, the term creative mediation is used here to encompass all of these practices, which are likely to take place institutionally in order to create opportunities for voice among refugees, containing them under one umbrella so that I might scrutinise their collective promise for voice.

On the question of where this sits within media and communications scholarship, relevant research has looked at migration (self-)representation in social media, national newspapers, national television, and imagery

(Choularaki, 2017; Risam, 2018; Rettberg & Gajjala, 2016; Alhayek, 2014; Khosravinik, 2010; Lenette & Miskovic, 2018). Recurring negative representational tropes around migrants and ethnic minorities in the media have been documented consistently; these include, but are not limited to, Othering and associating immigrants with crime, drugs, and violence (Van Dijk, 2000, p. 38). My contribution will be to consider mediation or media production that offers or promises 'new' forms of voice beyond the mainstream or social media in light of creative media and 'performative refugeeness.' There is a significant body of literature on participatory creative writing practices, including digital storytelling, with refugees and migrants, including those going through the asylum system (e.g., Lenette, 2015; Schweitzer et al., 2018; Rousseau et al., 2004). However, such practices are often constituted as a form of therapeutic participation—as opposed to the mediation conceptualised here—and as such, they focus on therapeutic outcomes such as attaching meaning to experience (Rousseau et al., 2011), instead of feeding into debates around voice and the politics of recognition and performativity.

In my methodology chapter I will explain how I attempted to provide the participants choices between forms of creative mediation in order to heighten the possibility of participatory fluidity. Such practices are dependent on various technologies—film or audio equipment, art-making tools, or materials—and are defined in relation to specific audiences, as part of broader processes of meaning-making. They might also secondarily be mediated via institutions for marketing purposes in order to broaden audiences' understanding of refugee voice as framed by the centres, as well as intermediated and transmediated within refugee publics, alongside the face-to-face encounters of the practices themselves. Though refugee creative mediation takes place in a number of settings, offline and online, it is my contention that funded projects within institutions will necessarily have pre-existing networks of funding and audiences that make them an important site for the study of the promise of voice. As Thumim (2009) points out, one of the priorities of many institutions is to 'involve members of the public to address the urgent need to broaden the audience profile…to find ways of representing and involving people through their stories and voices' (p. 621). Thumim focuses on how such practices might empower participants to affect shifts in the role of institutions in the public sphere, and the relationship between those institutions and their audiences (Livingstone, 2005; Thumim, 2009), and here I extend this to refugee groups through creative practice, in order to complexify existing accounts of participation in mediation, along with voice and recognition.

Such creative mediation work has gained particular momentum in the last 20 years, a by-product of the UK government's nationwide dispersal policy, funding programmes initiated by agencies from the 1990s onwards, and a desire to provide a positive response to negative media coverage around resettlement (Kidd et al., 2008, p. 4). Meanwhile, community media in the UK has faced long-term financial cuts, with funding in the sector scarcely keeping pace with growth. Investment in community media has remained minimal in the UK, with over 200 community radio stations accessing a funding pot of just £400,000 annually from the Treasury via Ofcom (Ofcom, 2019; Lewis, 2008). This has accompanied a well-publicised long-term structural decline in privately funded community media and journalism, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Ofcom, 2021;

Harte et al., 2019). While Arts Council England (ACE) does not keep data that specifically relate to refugees, the size of Counterpoints Arts' network suggests their combined funding portfolio, while not significant in institutional terms, is comparable to or even outweighs that of community media organisations. These institutions offering such creative mediation activities with refugees in the UK will be the empirical focus of this study, given their prominence as a major source of so-called promises of voice. By accessing and working locally with such institutions, this study places such promises for voice in their social and cultural context, allowing an in-depth examination of how such processes take place—the kinds of voice and recognition they produce, and how they are manifested socially through participation in creative mediation.

Given its prevalence and undertheorisation as mediation, I consider creative mediation to be of particular importance due to its potential to harbour fluid forms of meaning, and as part of structures of feeling that exist in the precarious, diverse, multifaceted, and ephemeral spaces which refugee groups occupy while seeking asylum. Such structures of feeling are 'a sense of life' or 'community of experience' of a culture enacted in a particular time and space (Williams, 1961, p. 64). Csikszentmihalyi (1996) defines creativity as a social process dependent on the relationship between a culture containing symbolic rules, a person bringing novelty into that culture, and an audience who recognize and validate that novelty (p. 6). Classic conceptions of creativity suggest that it encompasses the expression of subjectivity in ways other forms of communication cannot by prioritising the creator's subjective, sensorial, and emotional experience (Dewey, 1934). The promise of voice encompasses creative forms that are less interesting to a neoliberally ordered institutional media beholden to news values of scale, controversy, and conflict (Harcup & O'Neil, 2010).

Humanities and Cultural Studies scholarship has a significant tradition of interest in new forms of meaning, with Fuchs's (2010) description of art's emancipatory potential cohering with Williams's (1961) view that artists can either recreate common meanings, build artwork by using ideas already commonly understood, or potentially create *new* meanings, *new* ways of communicating that here I extend to refugees for the reasons outlined above (Fuchs, 2010; Dewey, 1934; Williams, 1961, p. 49; Rancière, 2010; Bishop, 2014). Williams (1961) hoped that symbolic potential could be pursued where the 'relationship between common and personal meanings is distant,' in order to privilege new systems of communication beyond existing capitalistic, specifically neoliberal systems of meaning (p. 50). More recently, creative mediation is that which is fashioned to hold audience attention (Cochran, 2010, p. 254). This also resonates with Rancière's (2011) concept of 'dissensus,' such moments where possibilities of social change appear as conflicts 'between two regimes of sense, two sensory worlds' (p. 58). The dissensual artistic experience, says Rancière (2011), 'is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable, and the feasible' (p. 72).

Thus, we might understand creative mediation as containing no binary separation between new and commonly understood meaning, but rather a *fabric* of interlocking common and new experience enacted by and with the mediator. These mediations are promised as 'new' forms of voice, especially through their

representational and productional fluidity—a drawing of a mosque, a collage of domestic architecture, a fragment of a letter, a piece of pottery, a diary entry, a spoken audio or video eulogy or advocacy, a piece of satire, a soundscape, or any informal blend of such genres—in that superficially they might be thought of as flexible enough to allow participants to reflect on their own and others' work in multiple ways that defy vocal simplification.

These practices include the production of drawing, storytelling, collage, music, audio, digital storytelling, or photography, which retain formal fluidity beyond linear rights claims, and which prioritise the participant's sensorial, emotional, or subjective experience, and openly acknowledge their potential to move into fictive or metaphorical representations beyond literal testimony. I am not suggesting prescriptively that these creative self-representations do not draw on an overlapping array of discourses already commonly observed around refugee voice in the public sphere—e.g., neoliberally ordered entrepreneurialism or victimhood; or indeed, that they offer a solution to the ethical problems around refugee voice in normative publics. Instead, I argue that they reflect commonly observed practices seen in institutions which offer promises of voice and are worthy of critical evaluation.

Imogen Tyler (2013) has applied Rancière's work on dissensus to migrant protest, discussing how dissensus can operate in a 'third space' within the public sphere beyond protest events and mass media. Rancière (1999) emphasises such spaces as 'interruptions' to 'produce new inscriptions of equality and a fresh sphere of visibility for further demonstrations' (p. 40). Tyler (2015) describes how the possibilities of 'resistance to migrant abjection lie not in singular acts of resistance but in the building of wider communities of struggle that question the inclusive/exclusive logic of citizenship, the economics of illegality and the global marketization of migration' (p. 12). Yet, as before, a specific conceptualisation and granular account of what this might look like with regard to refugee voice and recognition is largely absent—as indeed is the social and cultural context to such creative mediation practices. The extent to which such self-representation might foster new forms of voice that allow for transnational reflexivity or indeed 'affectscapes'—the communication of feelings that intersect and change across borders—is worthy of evaluation (Ponzanesi, 2020)[8].

This question becomes more complex when dealing with creative mediation around trauma-centred discourse (Pupavac, 2008, p. 280), which have the potential to reinscribe a relationship of dependency or a situation where someone's capacity for political subjectivity may be called into question (Fiddian-Qasmieyh et al., 2014). Indeed, the exclusions from creative practice along class and geographic grounds seen in domestic populations may persist across refugee communities. Public funding, on which such work is heavily reliant, favours work that is easily measurable or instrumentalised, or that develops community networks and self-administration as a prelude to dismantling the welfare state and as a means of social control (Bishop, 2014, p. 15). For instance,

[8] This chimes with Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) 'artistic critique,' with its championing of 'the values of expressive creativity, fluid identity, autonomy and self-development…against the constraints of bureaucratic discipline, bourgeois hypocrisy and consumer conformity' (Budgen, 2000, p,1).

Whittaker (2017) found that the intransigence of the funding terms of participatory art projects limited opportunities for engagement by artists within communities in East London (p. 203). Such constraints around meeting the evaluation needs of funders also speak to the literature around accountability, whereby institutional actors may feel individually responsible for an organisation's work—personally contributing to the positive accounts of institutional effectiveness through internal or external measures (Ball, 2003; Sheely, 2018; de St Croix, 2020). De St Croix *et al.* noted that accountability measures in the youth sector, which aim to observe young people's outcomes and convert them into 'value for money claims' (de St Croix, McGimpsey, and Owens, 2020) can 'create a climate of performativity in which daily lives are shaped by the pressure to succeed according to an ever-expanding array of indicators by which they are ranked and compared' (Ball, 2003; de St Croix, 2020, p. 4). While a forensic analysis of these funding evaluation commitments is beyond the scope of this study, it is worth acknowledging the limits of 'top down' evaluation measurements as opposed to forms of accountability which might favour those most affected by decision-making. These alternatives include what de St Croix describes as participatory storytelling workshops employing 'a collective reflection on practice' (de Croix, 2020, p. 3) responding to participants on their own terms, 'rather than according to "labels" or "outcomes" defined by others' (de Croix, 2020, p. 2).

Within this context, we might ask whether refugees are still largely unable to express their voice in terms of their choosing. Such practices sit within and beyond media, and while frequently framed by institutions as practices engaged in embodied, material kinds of making, inevitably form part of transnational refugee mediated communication flows. Within any study of such practices there is clearly a need to move away from 'trauma-centred' academic discourse to research a politics of agentive (self-)representation where subjects' capacity for self-determination and political subjectivity is no longer called into question (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014). Refugee voice in such settings draws on the cultural repertoire at refugees' disposal, residing in a diversity of experiences that relate to gender, age, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and social class, yet 'academic discourses privilege a one-dimensional representation' which reinforces a relationship of dependency (Sigona, 2014, p. 370).

The sombre reality, of course, is that creative mediation is beholden to its own socially constituted and framed potentialities in relation to embedded power structures and discourses. As opposed to non-participatory creative practice—for instance, the depiction of a refugee by an artist from a different cultural community or host population—self-representation intuitively suggests more opportunity for refugee voice because of the refugee's involvement in the process. While such practices might engage participants and break down the 'conventional hierarchy between the artist and viewer' (Kester, 2008, p. xvii), there is a risk that this engagement may obscure the complicity of such expressions of voice in perpetuating systems designed to marginalise refugee voice as participants engage in a process of trying to attain citizenship rights. They may be centred on an exchange between a facilitator, viewed as intellectually and creatively empowered, and a given subject who is defined a priori as being in need of empowerment.

The idea of publicness might help our understanding of the complexities of creative mediation beyond assumed binaries of inclusion in/exclusion from mainstream publics (Kavada, 2020; Kavada & Poell 2021; Georgiou and Titley, 2022). The facets of someone's identity classified as 'refugee' are formed by their de facto exclusion from a polity and the mainstream publics existing within that polity. We cannot simply map conceptions of voice, recognition, and participation as they are generally studied on to refugees without acknowledging the precarity and uniqueness of refugees' participation. Refugees do not find themselves either inside or in opposition to mainstream publics, but instead are engaged in the process of publicness—the process of gaining membership in the public sphere—to varying degrees. Thus, I argue, refugees occupy an ambivalent position in relation to mainstream publics, enjoying very few of their benefits around so-called rational consensus-building or more radical oppositional politics, yet still able to express voice in ways oppositional to what mainstream publics can offer. Thus, opposition to this exclusion might define the possibilities or inhibition of such a person's voice, and this is worthy of exploration.

Publicness is defined here as the process of gaining membership of a public—with the public being the outcome of a process of publicness (Kavada & Poell, 2021), and public defined as 'what is visible or observable…what is open for all to hear about' (Thompson, 1995, p. 123). Kavada and Poell (2021) delineate between publics as stable through time, and publicness as a continuous activity of making things public. As such, publicness is the 'dynamic process of emergence, crystallization and dissolution of contentious publics' (p. 193). My argument here is that while conceptually creative mediation might be considered organisationally within publics*, these publics are constantly being dissolved, crystallised and shifted through different processes of publicness*. Publicness is not defined here in terms of a unitary stable public, but the process of crossing from the private to the public domain, reconstituting the identity of key actors in the process (Kavada & Poell, 2021, p. 193).

One might think of the movement towards membership of a mainstream public as the gradual assumption of one particular kind of publicness associated with normative political membership, but it is by no means the only form of publicness available to refugees (Kavada, 2020). Publicness builds on the conception of counterpublics—what Fraser (1992) defines as formulating 'oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs' (p.123)—but with an awareness of the regulation incurred by such publics' 'alternative' status (Warner, 2002), where participants might reasonably expect the efficacy of voice therein to struggle to cross over into mainstream publics. Therefore, instead of the discrete difference between counterpublics as defined in relation to mainstream publics, publicness suggests the complexity of a process that is constantly being constituted and reconstituted (Chadwick, 2013). Refugee publics might assume one form of publicness gradually as they move towards normative citizenship, but their communicative interactions within different publics might blur, thread, and weave in non-linear ways around this as refugees express their voices and are recognised—either reinscribing the normative axis or subtly changing it (Gal, 2002). This non-linearity might encompass transnational refugee publics which traverse legal boundaries as with migrants (Marino, 2015, p.

2). My conception envisions publicness not just in relation to sites of contestation but also sites of solidarity, as well as messier, or affective sites of voice and recognition—all with different levels of publicness.

In my critiques of voice and recognition theory I also learn from cultural theorists who argue that emotion as well as rationality should become defining parts of the public sphere; this dual emphasis is also relevant to refugee voices and creative mediation (Ruiz, 2014, p. 24; McGuigan, 1998, p. 92). Considering emotion and rationality together might help us also move beyond the mindset of the dominance of institutional media in forming mainstream publics (Ong, 1982), and into understanding the role of creative forms of mediation as expressions of refugee voice and alternative forms of self-representation. Such an understanding of voice takes inspiration from radical media practices—outside mainstream media—which themselves offer a critique of the Habermasian public sphere model. These might include approaches that contravene the logics of discourse ethics and communicative rationality, which even under the best of circumstances occlude the inequalities of voice seen in mainstream publics (Fraser, 1990).

To conclude, in this section I have made the argument that mediation is core to understandings and applications of promises of voice in the context of British institutional politics of regulating and enabling refugee self-representations. I have argued for creative mediation's unique position in providing 'new' forms of voice through mediation, and that this must be understood in a context pertaining to the symbolic and material possibilities for facilitation and regulation; e.g., laws, rules, economic systems. Given the social nature of creative mediation, I have shown that publicness, the process of being public, frames the possibilities and restrictions of self-representation and, consequently, the ways in which refugee voices can be expressed, shared, heard, or denied access to different publics.

Typology of Publicness

Before concluding, I wish to note that for analytical purposes, in my empirical chapters I distinguish between different kinds of refugee publicness using a multilevel typology, depending on the institutional context of the publicness in question. The typology is oriented towards different kinds of institutions observed in the study. I have used institutions in this typology to align with my definition of participation in creative mediation on p.34, which includes institutions and draws on mediation theory as described. Following Thumim, I define institutions as organisations seeking to serve a public purpose including cultural institutions, media institutions, or charitable institutions (Thumim, 2012). Given my focus on institutions, and the difficulty of ascertaining the different legal status of their participants, this approach will allow me to analyse participation in processes overseen by institutions with audiences of different sizes. I will define these different scales of publicness here. I will draw on this typology where different forms of publicness are present in my data.

Micropublicness describes processes of voice where participants might, for instance, communicate and form mutual solidarities with intimate audiences, such as with staff and volunteers at a community centre serving those living in a local district, but little beyond this (Valentine, 2008; Amin, 2002). Micropublicness thus aligns

with localised publics where refugees might communicate with each other but not with the broader British polity.

Mesopublicness, meanwhile, is taken to mean publicness formed around regional institutions which reach broader audiences beyond immediate refugee communities e.g. town, county or region (Keane, 1998; McCallum, 2011). This is an intermediate level of publicness.

Macropublicness refers to a level of national publicness associated with institutions whose audience reach is nation-wide; e.g., government, or national media (McCallum, 2011; Amin, 2012).

Needless to say, other kinds of publicness—for instance, those beholden to digital networks of communication and transnational media conglomerates within Fortress Europe—also occur and overlap with the aforementioned levels of publicness (Kavada & Poell, 2021).

So, a participant will see their voice emerging as micropublicness in smaller institutions along particular dimensions (e.g., discourses related to intimacy, for instance), while their voice might be expressed in different ways as mesopublicness in regional institutions (e.g., discourses of performative success), and finally have an entirely different kind of expression as macropublicness at the largest institutions featured (e.g., discourses of victimhood). Refugees might find expression in different ways through micropublicness, mesopublicness, and macropublicness processes, with these different expressions of publicness oriented in relationship to an axis aligned around scale. Macropublicness, for instance, constitutes a higher scale of publicness in terms of 'what is visible or observable, what is performed in front of spectators, what is open for all or many to see or hear or hear about' (Thompson, 1995, p. 123).

Kavada and Poell argue that their conception of publicness challenges normative public sphere theory which 'remains based on the idea of the national democratic state whose legitimation depends on the extent to which it takes public opinion into account' (2021, p. 194). Couldry (2014. p. 57) argues in turn that we must 'move away from the idea that each public sphere has an exclusive citizen constituency towards a notion of overlapping constituencies whose mutual interactions require regulation in ways that have not yet been clarified'. This overlapping, dynamic and interdependent nature is at the heart of publicness, where communication in one context can easily spill over into another in complex, shifting ways.

As such, though for the purposes of operationalisation I have organised data into these three categories, refugee publicness overlaps and interrelates in different contexts in ways that challenge normative public sphere theory. While macropublicness has some similarities with the normative Habermasian public sphere model ([1962] 1991)—a space located between the market and state, where private individuals 'can debate public affairs unencumbered by state or commercial interests and arrive at a public opinion' (Kavada and Poell,

2021, p. 192) here its institutions are simply defined by their scale—encompassing, but not directly aligning with the state—and form part of a broader, non-unitary publicness process as defined.

The location of voice in one particular kind of publicness over another can help extend our understanding of what voice is and might mean—voice that might be visible in microcommunities in specific ways, and in broader communities in different forms at the same time, or shift from moment to moment through multiple processes. It is worth noting that not all voices or forms of publicness are included in my empirical chapters to the same degree—visibility in national contexts was highly challenging, but this reinforces the idea that refugee voices might not achieve broader publicness even within alternative or so-called 'new' processes promising voice.

As such, these different forms of publicness may be formed around institutions at different scales, but the reality of refugee publicness as described above is much more complex: a local community centre is one small element in local, regional, national, and international communication that flows both offline and digitally, with publicness corresponding to participation of varying scale and homogeneity within this hierarchy. Refugee micropublicness might differ in particular ways from normative conceptions of voice, but assumes more of the qualities of normative voice as publicness manifests within the context of larger institutions. Such different kinds of publicness in reality have overlapping effects and constituencies, with individuals communicating simultaneously as micro, meso, and macropublicness. The data in my empirical chapters tries to refer to what is *unique* to each level's mode of publicness in terms of voice, recognition, or participation, but the reality is one closer to the fluidity of publicness as defined above. Poell, Rajagopalan and Kavada (2018, p. 14) have discussed processes and temporal trajectories of publicness. How these processes work at different scales in and around their relationship to normative publics will be another contribution of this study.

Conclusion

This thesis seeks to scrutinise voice and its associated concept of recognition through the prism of creative mediated participatory projects in the UK. Such promises of voice supply different possibilities for participating in processes of voice in 'new' or alternative processes beyond the mainstream media. A raft of mediated projects across Europe and the UK have attempted to rectify the absence and reductiveness of refugee voice on mainstream platforms, equivalent to what is framed by Couldry (2010b) as a need for 'new civic acts' and new ways of enacting voice through communication (p. 39). A significant number of organisations, including charities and NGOs, aim to give a platform to marginalised voices in the public sphere, often failing to fully explore the deep compromises that the representation of such voices entails. My aim is to place such promises of voice under greater scrutiny, given the relative paucity of detailed scholarship around how pro-asylum organisations facilitate refugee voices (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014). It is my argument that this critique of voice and its allied conceptions of recognition—how our societies and people acknowledge and value voice—can help broaden the understanding of these two concepts in the field of media and communications, and

consequently, the politics of voice in the context of forced migration and resettlement in the UK and across the West.

This work is situated in a tradition of critical social constructivist scholarship, which itself has roots in post-structuralist and psychoanalytic theory, and which conceives cultural and mediated symbols as the main constructive architecture around meaning and knowledge in our societies (Ager & Strang, 2008). This position does not ignore the role of material factors and structures of power—including legal and economic, or the effects of political rules and laws—in regulating how these symbols find expression and limitation in refugees' lived experiences. Such rules and laws may ultimately be symbolically and culturally defined (Cover & Michelman, 1988; Benhabib, 2006), but the way they find expression is in embodied and material life. The tension between the material and symbolic factors shaping refugee voices will emerge as a central tension throughout. Because my approach presupposes that meaning is socially constructed, I do not engage uncritically with universalising normative ethical debates but see ethical truths as local and contingent.

Throughout this thesis I am interested in exploring both the media itself and those voices which move beyond that media as part of a social process of meaning-making in which both speaking and listening feature. Refugee voices must be understood both in relation to the rational-critical public sphere and in opposition to it. Refugees do not speak as equals but are given moments to enact their selves as refugee subjects, and these moments, and the moments around them, can shed light on their possibilities for voice. 'Performative refugeeness' within this context is a form of performative Otherness that may well surrender or overcompensate regarding the rational normative sphere of rational-critical publicness, rendering institutional sources of voice an exceptional opportunity for inferior humanity. The extent to which this occurs, and how it occurs, are my subject of interest. Within this context, recognition may well be seen as conditional along normative axes tied to liberal democracy and neoliberal economics, with discursive requirements regulating participation to specific mediations, either of hopeless victimhood through inferiority, or resilient entrepreneurship as assimilation. Thus, voice within institutional contexts contains such possibilities for expression, and we must therefore extend our inquiry to what lies beyond them.

Though they are highly interrelated, my empirical chapters will discretely consider how each of voice, recognition, and participation in creative mediation are manifested empirically through 'performative refugeeness' as conceived here.

In **Chapter 4** I focus on voice by examining refugee self-representation. I am first interested in determining who speaks—i.e., which participants can produce media—and who remains silent. Mediation in this context is understood as not only the forms the voices take, the technologies used, the textual content, but also the audiences of self-representations at different scales of publicness. Are they intimate audiences, or are voices heard through mediation at larger scales in different ways? The operation of creative mediation to allow for breaks in the re-enactment of refugee performativity along different dimensions will also be considered.

Chapter 5 focuses on recognition, considering who, where, and how subjects feel recognised or misrecognised, and how this (mis)recognition occurs at different levels of publicness—locally, regionally, and nationally. Given the participants' precarity, we will consider the extent to which Honnethian recognition as self-confidence, self-respect, or self-esteem might be observed or not alongside 'difference-respect', and how the different dimensions of recognition are observed in interrelationships between different actors—participants, volunteers, staff, and audiences.

Chapter 6 discusses participation within institutions, focusing on the material and symbolic factors regulating and facilitating refugee expression through creative mediation. Creative mediation is institutionally framed or performed, and consequently 'performative refugeeness' by its nature is regulated within the specific and wider institutional power structures. Given our interest in participation, the extent to which decision-making is shared or otherwise, and between which people, will be elucidated in terms of the actors, behaviours, rules, and rituals governing participation. We will consider how far the outcome of these decisions fulfils the promises of voice these centres advertise.

Though I argue above that refugee publics are constructed around multiscalar performances of publicness, for the sake of clarity, and subject to the data that I was able to collect, and its limitations, each empirical chapter draws from the different kinds of publicness through its three-level typology: micropublicness, mesopublicness, and macropublicness. I will now turn to my methodological approach, framed around this thesis's two main concerns: i) expanding theorisations of voice and recognition empirically and interrogating the nature of the promise of refugee voice through participation, and ii) how that participation is facilitated and regulated.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I mapped out the theoretical terrain surrounding voice, recognition, and participation in relation to creative mediation. In this chapter, I turn to how we might empirically investigate such ideas. I do so by giving a brief overview of my research design, a discussion of the practical and methodological appropriateness of my two sites (Cardiff and Tyneside), and a description of the context of my data collection.

The research undertaken for the purposes of this study employed two main methods of data collection—creative mediation workshops and participant observation. My primary method of data analysis was thematic analysis; this was employed in conjunction with multimodal discourse analysis (MCDA) and participatory analysis (Bryman, 2004; Carpentier, 2016). A full description of the participatory analysis employed is presented later on in this chapter. This was used to situate actors' power relative to each other and reveal how this power impacted on individuals' decision-making moments during participatory processes.

There are, however, various ethical-political and practical challenges which relate to the conduct of this kind of research—including the mental and physical vulnerability of some participants, the underfunding of the centres, the overwork of their staff, not to mention my own status as a white, male academic based in London—that engender complicity in asymmetrical participatory processes. This arrives regardless of my own intention to remain reflexive, open, caring, and silent when necessary. I will reflect on the import of these ethical questions at the end of this chapter.

Research Questions

In Chapter 2, I argued for the potential of creative mediation to provide different ways of valuing voice. In particular, I suggested that the promises of voice, which are articulated by creative mediation institutions to justify their creative work with refugees, are worthy of further consideration (Godin et al., 2016; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Colombo, 2018). It is this line of inquiry that forms the basis of the primary and two secondary research questions that will be pursued by this study over the course of the following chapters:

> **RQ1: How does self-representation through creative mediation open up or restrict opportunities for refugee voice?**

Within this inquiry, I will explore common refugee self-representations that emerge through creative mediation processes; in particular, how these voices manifest at different scales of publicness, and how they relate to the kinds of voice commonly observed. This will include an investigation of which voices are silenced, and the points at which this occurs, as a means to extend the currently dominant conceptions of voice. This research question will principally be considered in Chapter 4.

SQ1: In what ways does self-representation through creative mediation enable or restrict refugee recognition?

As has already been established, prominent accounts of voice combine voice with the conceptual importance of recognition. Different kinds of voice, however, may sit in tension with different forms of recognition at different levels of publicness, as they occur in practice. Participants may feel recognised in smaller spaces, yet that they lack voice on a broader scale. Or they may shape their articulations within narrow regulatory frames that allow them voice solely as victims or entrepreneurs, for instance. This research sub-question will therefore unpick how participants experienced different facets of recognition—self-confidence, self-respect, self-esteem, and 'difference-respect' (Honneth, 1995; Van Leeuwen, 2007)—as described by my theoretical framework. This sub-question will be considered primarily in Chapter 5.

SQ2: How is participation facilitated in creative mediation and how is it regulated?

This sub-question will consider how participation in the processes of creative mediation is facilitated or regulated, particularly in relation to the decisions made around the creative processes experienced, and the possible resistance (or otherwise) to these decisions from the participants (Carpentier, 2006). This will include legal and cultural factors which might influence participation, such as laws relating to migration, the asylum process, a lack of trust in the mainstream media, and/or creative mediation. Aiming to elucidate some of the key material and discursive factors that empower refugees and asylum seekers to claim voice in the institutional settings researched, this sub-question will also explore how this manifests itself at different scales of publicness. This will be the primary topic of Chapter 6.

As discussed in Chapter 2, meaning is considered an open-ended and ongoing process comprising specific instances of production, text, and reception, with media a central part of this process (Corner, 1994; Couldry, 2006; Fornas, 2000; Martin-Barbero, 1993; Silverstone, 1999; Thompson, 1995; Thumim, 2009, p. 619). My hierarchy of methodology follows the assumption that media is at the centre of meaning-making—in this case as a promise of voice through self-representation, as considered through my central research question. However, I also remain open to critiques of the idea that media should be centralised in mediation that will emerge through empirical work (Thumim, 2012, p. 53). Each of the following empirical chapters considers different facets of meaning-making discretely in different chapters, though elements of all the empirical investigations undertaken by this study will also be woven into the text throughout.

Research Design

I will firstly provide an overview of what my research entailed; after this section I will unpack each data collection and method of analysis. The bulk of my data stems from the multiple visits, meetings, and interviews conducted with workshop participants, audiences, local creative mediation professionals, and centre staff between January 2019 and January 2020, including two months of full-time work in community centres in

Cardiff, and subsequently in Tyneside (between July 22nd and September 18th 2019). For practical reasons, I was forced to fit this fieldwork around my employment at universities in Sussex and London.

For clarity's sake, 'participants' will refer to the users of the centres who engaged in my creative mediation workshops—primarily those who were about to engage with, were currently engaged in, or had previously been involved in the asylum process. 'Participant' is useful as it describes people in terms of their relation to the research, rather than the British asylum system, though I will occasionally reference these individuals' asylum status where relevant to my analysis. 'Citizen volunteers' will refer to those with citizenship status attending the centres voluntarily, and whose cultural background I will refer to where necessary. Centre staff and audiences at the exhibitions will be referred to as such, regardless of current or previous asylum status.

Given my time restrictions, I was mindful of the need for intensive data collection via multimethod means during the period allotted for research (Knoblauch, 2005, p. 16). As such, I organised 12 'drop-in' workshops which ran thrice weekly at each site throughout this principal period, over the course of which I worked with approximately 60 participants in total. Some of these participants came to only one workshop, whilst others partook in a series of sessions, with 17 participants[9] regularly engaging over multiple workshops, sometimes in multiple cities.[10] These participants were mostly those who were in the process of seeking asylum, but the group also included refugees with leave to remain—an individual's status did not, therefore, determine inclusion/exclusion.

When it comes to data collection, creative mediation workshops were employed as an entry point to access and build on a pilot study previously completed in July 2018 in Middlesbrough and London, during which interviews and participant observation were conducted with creative facilitators at two creative mediation institutions (Middlesbrough's Institute of Modern Art and Counterpoints Arts' work at Tate Exchange in London). In the run up to the fieldwork conducted for this thesis, access to different centres was negotiated by approaching a shortlist of suitable sites in dispersal areas in the UK. Once I had secured access, the format of the workshops subject to negotiation with institution staff. As such, the sessions included a variety of both activities with an element of narrative (creative writing, documentary, digital storytelling) and non-storytelling activities (drawing, collage), the negotiation of which I reflect upon in Chapter 6.

In relation to the analysis, and as described fully below, following an initial thematic analysis across all data, MCDA was employed in relation to textual data. This data included participants' self-representation texts in Chapter 4, as well as a sample of media texts describing creative mediation e.g., reviews of exhibitions organised by the centres or news stories about their participants and interviews with arts practitioners in

[9] A list of participants' pseudonyms, countries of origin, gender and media is included in the appendix. I will explain questions of anonymity and consent later in this chapter.

[10] Most participants were interviewed and worked with in the fieldwork sites, but others were relocated to London and Birmingham by the Home Office during their asylum claims. In these instances, there were impromptu workshops in these cities; for instance, I met Amin in Redbridge twice in September 2019 to continue working on his creative mediation work.

Chapter 5 (see summary table below), along with interview material or publicity about centre activity in Chapter 6. Participant observation was appropriate for recording and understanding the complex social contexts in which recognition and participation occurred, and is therefore something which feeds across Chapters 4, 5, and 6 (Evans, 2012; Geertz, 1973). Participatory analysis is employed in Chapter 6, where my focus is on the facilitation and regulation of refugee participation, and was also used on fieldnotes pertaining to the thematics of participation, regulation, and recognition (Carpentier 2006; 2016). This included identification of the relevant actors in the self-representation process (i.e., the participants, myself, institutional staff), the mapping of their relations, and the mapping of their relative privilege within the field of consideration. Again, this will all be described in full below.

RQ	Related Chapter	Data Collection	Analysis
RQ1 (voice)	Chapter 4	Creative workshops, participant observation	Thematic analysis, MCDA of workshop texts
SQ1 (recognition)	Chapter 5	Creative workshops, participant observation	Thematic analysis, MCDA of reviews/news stories about creative media at sites
SQ2 (participation)	Chapter 6	Creative workshops, participant observation	Thematic analysis, participatory analysis, MCDA of marketing text

Summary of main concepts/methodologies/analyses in research design.

In sum, **Chapter 4's interest in voice as self-representation** is explored through creative workshops and participant observation as means of data collection. Analysis of this data employs thematic analysis and MCDA of workshop texts, the results of which, along with excerpts from my participant observation notes, are included. **Chapter 5's interest in recognition** is explored through creative workshops, participant observation, thematic analysis, and MCDA of texts pertaining to recognition, e.g., media texts about the centres' work, as described above. **Chapter 6's interest in participation and its regulation** is explored through creative workshops, participant observation, thematic analysis, as well as MCDA and a participatory analysis.

Case Studies

Critical case studies, i.e., specific centres in specific locations, were chosen as a small number of important cases where the social and political circumstances of selected projects were likely to have 'the greatest impact on the development of knowledge' (Patton, 2001, p. 236). Following Weber, the use of these case studies may point to different patterns of individual and social practices around voice, even if not possessed of the generalisability of natural scientific theory (Ragin & Zaret, 1983), as 'ideal types' that 'thus occupy a middle ground between the uniqueness of historical events and the generality of laws' (Ragin & Zaret, 1983, p. 732).

Traditionally, the use of multiple case studies allows for more reliable findings which accommodate any peculiarities encountered in one particular location (Yin, 2003, p. 46). However, we should be mindful of the difficulty of setting neo-positivist boundaries around variables in such complex settings—where numbers of participants, sizes of centre, numbers of staff, and the funding of local authorities are so different. While there may be some qualitative comparison, this study will therefore not necessarily be able to generalise beyond the contingencies of the cases in question (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). Some non-predetermined elements of comparison from one site may shed light on the other e.g., through how the refugee self and its context finds expression across comparable levels of voice, recognition, and participation at the two sites, evident from, for instance, the kind of material produced, its relative quantities, and what stopped people from working in either place (Goodrick, 2014; Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 10). A limit of two case studies was necessary to gather data of sufficient depth, given the time and opportunities for access available.

I took a hybrid inductive/deductive approach to analysis, mindful of themes that might emerge in relation to voice, recognition, and participation in creative mediation when conducting my analyses—for example, state regulation of participation or entrepreneurial voice (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This was complemented by additional codes which emerged from my data—for instance, classification according to publicness or 'performative refugeeness', along with critiques of voice that exist beyond narrative—which were then factored into my conceptual framework.

Centre A/Cardiff as a Case Study

Cardiff was selected as a case study site for economic, ethical, demographic, and cultural reasons. As the capital of Wales, one of the constituent nations in the United Kingdom, and with 477,627 inhabitants as of March 2020, it is the most racially diverse city of the nation, with over 100 languages spoken in the city, and around 15 per cent of its people identifying as people of colour. It also has a longstanding historical status as a major British port city and significant destination for post-War migration (Markaki, 2016), housing (alongside the North East, North West, Yorkshire, and West Midlands) the highest number of asylum seekers as a share of the population anywhere in the UK (Migration Observatory, 2018). Around a fifth of its workforce earn less than the National Living Wage (Heery and Nash, 2015).

Despite its rapid population growth, Cardiff has borne the brunt of budget cuts within Wales in the wake of the 2008 global recession, with cuts to public services, already amounting to £35m in 2018, continuing in the wake of Covid-19 (Mosalki, 2019; Deacon, 2021). Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, however, GDP per head in Wales was £23,866—significantly below the UK average of £31,976, and far lower than London's £54,686 (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

Wales has four designated asylum dispersal areas: Cardiff, Swansea, Wrexham, and Newport, which collectively support 3,219 asylum seekers (as of March 2020). These areas are those to which the Home Office disperses participants—who have little say on where they are located—whilst their claims are being

processed, one of the many means by which participants' lives are controlled, policed, and dehumanised by the asylum process. This policy segregates them from British citizens, entrenches exclusion, and undermines the potential for social cohesion (Hynes & Sales, 2010). Of particular interest to media scholars is the negative press around the rise of hate crime towards migrants and people of colour in post-Brexit Wales. The fact that these crimes have doubled between 2013 and 2019 has been linked to the 2016 referendum in which 52.5% of Welsh voters opted to leave the European Union (BBC News, 2019).

When asylum seekers receive accommodation in Wales, this is usually in Cardiff. In keeping with the relatively small number of refugees which the city welcomes compared to the rest of the UK, there are also relatively few asylum charities based in the city, with Wales housing the second lowest number of creative mediation organisations which specialise in working with refugees (behind Northern Ireland). Indeed, publicly funded art in Wales has been in long-term decline, even before the rampant financial consequences of Covid-19 on the cultural and charity sector hit home, with Arts Council Wales's public subsidy having reduced by 18% in real terms between 2011-12 and 2017-2018—their total annual revenue amounts to just over £30 million, in comparison to £622 million per year in England, (Senedd Cymru, 2020; Arts Council England, 2016).

Within this context, Cardiff serves as a critical case study in regard to the regulatory effects of the paucity of accommodation, given, for instance, its underbudgeted resources and the notoriety of the local accommodation for asylum seekers, which has been widely reported as under resourced and cramped (Taylor, 2016). Nevertheless, there exists an available, if underfunded, community of creatives engaged in participatory work in the city; a tightly knit, albeit underserved, arts community that therefore made Cardiff an attractive case for understanding how the creative mediation and charitable sector might facilitate promises of voice. Indeed, though various other sites, including Newport and Swansea, were considered during my scoping phase, which involved trips to these other cities in the UK, no other local city had as many institutions engaged in creative mediation work as Cardiff. Centre A was one of the larger refugee charities in Cardiff, with a regular arts programme already in place (managed by a participatory creative with whom I had mutual connections). It is located in a ward with one of the lowest median annual household incomes in the city at £21,596, well below the city's average of £27,265 (Cardiff City Council, 2015). By embedding myself at this centre, I was able to observe the existing creative mediation programme while being afforded the trust and flexibility to facilitate my own workshops in a private room which abutted the centre's central social space.

By situating my fieldwork in Wales, I hoped to take into account the numerous economic, cultural, and national biases at play in the UK that favour research and reporting around the South East of England and London (van Heur, 2010). The strong bias towards London in terms of cultural provision has been widely noted, with some reports of institutional bias labelling the UK 'as one of the most regionally unbalanced countries in the industrialised world' (UK2070, 2019).

Centre B/Tyneside as a Case Study

Tyneside, with 774,891 inhabitants, straddles the River Tyne in the North East of England, and includes the city of Newcastle and the town of Gateshead. It houses Centre B, situated in one of Tyneside's constituent three boroughs of North Tyneside, South Tyneside, and Gateshead (its exact location, as with Cardiff, will not be specified to preserve its anonymity). Tyneside has a mixed economy, with significant post-industrial regeneration and job creation in central Newcastle coexisting with pockets of significant poverty—Gateshead, for instance, is one of the economically most deprived towns in the UK, with around a third of children living in poverty (Murray, 2020). According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), Newcastle has become relatively more deprived between 2015 and 2019, moving from an overall rank of 42 to a rank of 32, where the local authority ranked '1' is the most deprived in England (Newcastle City Council, 2021).

Within England, the North East has the highest number of dispersed asylum seekers relative to population (six to every 10,000 inhabitants), compared to the lowest number in the South East (fewer than one in every 10,000 inhabitants) (Vickers et al., 2016; Politowski & McGuinness, 2016). Indeed, the North East infamously appeared in the media through representations of asylum seekers taking up housing in accommodations easily identified by the red doors of housing contractor Jomast, making them a target for vandalism and abuse (BBC, 2016).

Tyneside shares Cardiff's status as a deprived, underfunded urban centre, with a high number of asylum seekers that far exceeds the cultural and economic privileges of South East England and London. Unlike Centre A in Cardiff, however, Tyneside lies in close proximity to a relatively high number of international creative institutions, including Sage Gateshead and BALTIC, both of which host their own community outreach programmes which supply funding and expertise to local charities working with refugee and asylum seeker groups.

Indeed, Centre B is one of the longest-established refugee organisations in the region, with a strong creative programme to which I was able to secure access. This programme served, in particular, local Iranian, Kurdish, Syrian, and Turkish refugees, with a centre endowed with sufficient space for me to conduct a workshop at the tables in its central communal area.

While participants in both sites reflected the demographic makeup of asylum applicants to the UK in general, the Tyneside site was a smaller centre, incorporated into a more reliable, well-resourced local arts economy and a body of institutions which employed officers to oversee community participatory activities (which may have stemmed from a decades-long cultural regeneration programme funded by central government (Jones, 2000)), with a higher ratio of staff to participants than seen in Cardiff. As such, both Cardiff and Tyneside were able to serve as useful case studies of relatively deprived areas of the UK which were acting as nuclei for dispersed accommodation and creative mediation funding structures, but were each sufficiently different to allow comparison where necessary.

Creative Mediation Workshops

There was a clear need to collect data on the symbolic dimensions of self-representation and its participatory context intensively and reflexively, in order to investigate my central research question – which considered the kinds of voice observed within self-representation. As such, my first form of data collection was through participatory creative mediation drop-in workshops held at the two sites sequentially, three times a week between July and September 2019 of between one to three hours' duration. A list of workshops which I initiated and facilitated, or which I attended but were initiated by the centres, is included in the appendix. I was occasionally assisted by volunteers at the centre, including a local artist, David; where this is applicable this is also indicated in my appendix.

While there is a significant methodological literature relating to participatory approaches, including Participatory Action Research (PAR) or participatory art practices working with refugees (for an overview see Lockowandt, 2013), these workshops were an original form of data collection developed for this study. This was necessitated by the breadth of creative practices covered by my conceptualisation of creative mediation in Chapter 2, a need to collect participatory creative media data intensively, and my need to reflect deeply and reflexively on the rituals, decisions and social relationships around this, given the power inequality between myself and the participants. My creative mediation sessions followed the format of many of the tools and exercises laid out in Insightshare's *Rights-based approach to participatory video toolkit* which is available via Open Access (Lunch C. & Lunch N., 2006; Benest, 2010)[11]. Insightshare's approach revolves around four core principles—participation, reflection, empowerment, and positive action—where stakeholders are invited to engage equally at all stages of the process; reflection is built into the sessions; the process values the knowledge, potential, and passions of participants, and is intended to foster awareness with multiple audiences (Lunch C. & Lunch N., 2006; Benest, 2010: 17). Here, process was valued as much as product—unfinished products were viewed as just as successful as finished creative mediation products—and the Insightshare toolkit and exercises were easily adapted beyond video—if participants were more interested in adapting their work towards audio, writing, or drawing, this was facilitated.

Participants were recruited to the sessions in two main ways. Firstly, they were already known to me through my volunteering in the centres, or were recommended by centre staff. Secondly, they were recruited by my circulating the centres at the time of my 'drop in' sessions and asking those present if they would like to attend.

[11] The workshops were first planned as a series of participatory journalism workshops, but it soon became clear that a 12-session course at each site was impractical owing to limitations on participants' time—the preconceived rigid design of the workshops underestimated the flexibility and trust needed for such a programme to be realised in full. During the early stages of fieldwork, I therefore adapted this fixed programme into the much more flexible and creative 'drop-in' format described, in which sessions were initially structured around the same series of preordained options, with the format departing from the original depending on the preferences of the participants.

Upon recruitment to the sessions, participants were given information about the study, asked for their consent, and a number of different warm-up exercises were used. Warm-up exercises and techniques were employed from Insightshare's toolkit(s) included participants recording or writing 'statements' to a third party; role-playing where participants assumed identities of different people (e.g., a favourite footballer to 'break the ice'); interviewing each other; vox pops and interviews; and drawing maps of places 'important' to participants. After warm-up, participants were able to choose from materials which included storyboard worksheets, papers and pens, video editing software (Adobe Premiere), mobile phone photography and/or video including lighting, or mobile phone audio recording, and disposable cameras. I collaboratively worked with participants on practices including drawing, group storytelling, audio and video (using mobile phones), storyboarding (using pre-printed worksheets with boxes in which participants could draw), and creative writing, all of which informed my broad conceptualisation of creative mediation as described. In Tyneside, collage materials (scissors, magazines, glue) were added at the centre's behest, and this is reflected upon in Chapter 6.

Participants were made clear of the project's interest in voice(s) at the outset, this was explored in conversation, and themes for expression were decided upon discussion with participants; some participants, such as Amin, had clearly already had a creative practice, whilst others, such as Basir, had an interest in wrestling, which he wanted to take forward as a storyboard. Victor was keen to use audio to talk about his reflections on life, whilst Sarya wanted to discuss her memories of Kurdistan.

The centres stipulated the sessions were held in English. The use of English was frequently framed by centres as precondition of access as part of the participants' language-skill acquisition, which, given that the creative mediation activities *conducted by the centres* were delivered in English, may serve as a limitation on the basis of a loss of potential 'difference-respect' engendered by a lack of deep intercultural interpretation in institutional settings (Wright, 2018).This was not always possible for new arrivals to the UK; in these instances, translators from a professional translation service in Tyneside were used for in-person and textual translation. Google Translate was used for interpersonal oral translation only. I was able to communicate with some participants in French, mindful of the fact that for many such participants, French was being used as a second language[12]. Granular textual analysis was only undertaken where workshops were conducted in English or texts had been professionally translated.

Work at each site was exhibited at local arts institutions' 'open call' group shows at Gallery A in Tyneside in November 2019, and Gallery B in Cardiff November 2019. I worked with participants on their work for both shows, in collaboration with curators at each gallery, to meet the galleries' guidelines for presentation, and I returned to the exhibition launch in Tyneside to conduct participant observation. I also conducted a further

[12] Together, these instances demonstrate that we should reflect on the notion that asking people to produce mediation activities in terms meaningful to them necessitates 'their drawing upon collective symbols, normative values and social more…these may not have a ready equivalence in the target language or culture' (Wright, 2018; Baker, 2006).

creative mediation workshop at Gallery B with a small number of audience members, where, using the same prompts as with the original workshops, I engaged in participant observation and gathered interview material.

After the completion of fieldwork, I approached participants in Tyneside about the possibility of the further development their work with the LSE Film and Video division, and Basir, Victor, and Sariya each agreed; others were unavailable. Using their original storyboards, participants collaborated with LSE filmmaker James Rattee and animator Ignatz Higham, who supplied participants with moodboards containing a range of options relating to the aesthetics of their mediation work (e.g., samples of different forms of professional animation sourced online from prominent creatives in Iran, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Kurdistan, respectively) on the digital platform Pinterest. Participants chose from these options, and the animators produced content to reflect these preferences, in consultation with participants on WhatsApp. These animations were then incorporated in an edited video, alongside interview material with the original participants, and posted on LSE's YouTube channel, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn accounts. The limitations of this process, given the asymmetricity of the power of the actors involved, are discussed in the following chapters.

Participant Observation

Moving to my second form of data collection, participant observation was employed as a means of providing a deep understanding of participant experience, with its frustrations, nuances, boredoms, pleasures, and stresses. Participant observation is defined here as learning about participants' activities through observing and participating in participants' daily activities, rituals and interactions (Musante and DeWalt, 2010, p.1; Geertz, 1973). While I wished to pay attention to the symbolic meanings within creative mediation, I also wanted to place this within the context of the 'routines, mobilities and socialities' (Postill & Pink, 2012) of production, to allow for an understanding of self-representation, recognition, and participation within and beyond media that stemmed from a deep understanding of the participants' daily lives (Williams, 2006; Fisher et al., 2014; Evans, 2013).

This observation comprised three main elements: first, observation of participant life at the centres; second, observation in and around creative mediation workshops, including any exhibition; and finally, the conducting of interviews.

Observation of Centres

Turning first to my observations of life at the centres, this approach allowed me to move away from the homogenising tendency of positivist or quantitative approaches, and instead to work with and get to know participants as individuals (Balsiger, 2014). This consisted of working alongside each other in spaces of sociality and conviviality outside of workshop settings (Comi & Stamper, 2021)[13]—for instance, as a volunteer in the

[13] Each centre's workshops were held either within or adjacent to a central social space where participants met, ate, and communicated, and I was able to observe these spaces intimately. In Cardiff, the social space contained dinner tables that were removed or set up for

kitchen helping to prepare meals, working as an ESOL teaching assistant in classes, helping prepare laundry, working in the garden, including weeding and helping compile stock inventories, as well as interacting with participants informally in communal spaces in both centres. Participants would also invite me to play football or table tennis, or sit and speak with me socially over lunch, which facilitated a mutual process of getting to know each other through informal means. When groups of participants would meet together—whether at a Turkish social in Tyneside or an Iranian New Year festivity—I would nevertheless be required to negotiate my status as an outsider, a visibly white British citizen, with whom participants would laugh, get angry, reject, become friends with, exploit, confide in, and so on.

I would take notes at the end of the day, at lunchtime, or in natural breaks in conversation (Lederman, 2019). My intention was not to initiate the research and then disappear, but to develop sustained relationships of ethical engagement. Therefore, when participants moved to London or elsewhere in the country, I continued to meet and communicate with them, for instance via social media such as WhatsApp. For this reason, I also undertook to hold workshops at the Tyneside site during the various Covid-19 lockdowns, edit films for the centre's social media channels, and collaborate with another participant on a film for his postgraduate degree in southwest London. I have helped another participant settle in London, and met him regularly in the northern part of the city; I have also met with other participants housed in London suburbs. The complexity and hybridity of these relationships are integral to my methodological approach to investigating voices—how, why, and where they happen.

As part of this participant observation process, I also gathered information on external marketing material, self-representations displayed internally in the centres, and public funding applications, e.g., to the websites of the Charity Commission, Arts Council Wales, and Arts Council England, available contemporaneously to the fieldwork period, as well as institutional media concerning the two sites' creative mediation work. A theoretical sample of this material, which is available online, was subjected to thematic and discourse analysis along the lines of the methodological analyses enumerated below, and this analysis has been woven into the empirical investigations of the following chapters (Bryman, 2012, p. 194; Cohen & Arieli, 2012; Saunders et al., 2018).

Observation of Workshops

The second capacity in which I used participant observation, which pertained to the creative mediation workshops, comprised of both the observation of workshops already being held at the centres, as well as the workshops that I organised myself. I also attended creative projects run by the centres, including a participatory performance by a major arts institution in Cardiff, an open day at a local authority building in Tyneside, where participants engaged in craft activities, and internal workshops relating to music, sculpture,

mealtimes, along with a pool table and one for table tennis, a corner for games including chess, and a kitchenette, which I was able to move between. In Tyneside, the workshops took place in a smaller space with several permanent tables, and a crèche. Exterior to the centre there was a significantly sized garden, including a greenhouse polytunnel and football pitch.

drawing, gardening and storytelling. My access to these workshops (via institutional gatekeepers, the implications of which have been factored into my participatory analysis) enabled me to gain a contextual understanding of the decisions made around participation in creative mediation.

The combination of running workshops in tandem with observation was intense, and akin 'to prolonged engagement' between the participants and myself as a means of building trust through labour (Pandey & Patnaik, 2003; Shenton, 2003). The limitation of this approach was that, during my own workshops, I was preoccupied with delivering material rather than observing, something which exemplified the primary challenge to this creative approach to participant observation: the constant switching between roles. My solution was therefore to use materials and photographs co-produced with participants as an aide-memoire, so that I could rapidly make notes directly after workshops had finished. This visual photographic component was incorporated into the participant observation, in what Banks and Morphy (1997) call 'studying society by producing images' (p. 14). As Pink (2001) states, 'researchers should not have fixed, preconceived expectations of what it will be possible to achieve by using visual research methods in a given situation' (p. 32). As such, I instituted a flexible approach in which (because it was not possible to be everything all at once) I have attempted to triangulate my notes with interview and photographic data as much as possible.

Interviews

Finally, as part of the participant observation process, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with participants, facilitators, audiences, and key institutional staff (Bryman, 2012, p. 194). Interviews took inspiration from the semi-structured approach (Bryman, 2012, p. 194) which was also employed during my pilot study, useful because of its flexibility and applicability to a wide range of kinds of conversation between participants and myself. Here, my interview conduct was centred on the principle of focused and active listening as a means of building trust in environments where mistrust was highly visible (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 118), operating with a high degree of flexibility and attentiveness to our conversation, with the proviso that certain conceptual themes regarding voice, recognition, and participation were discussed, if possible. Following Geertz, I conducted interviews on the assumption that interviews both contain data regarding experiences of voice, as well as construct (self-)representations around voice at particular moments and times (Geertz, 1973).

Here, participant observation informed my interviews, as I was able to ask participants questions about their creative decisions (Jensen & Jankowski, 1991, p. 87). Interviews were conducted at the recruitment stage, during the workshops themselves, and once the project had been exhibited—three temporal points in total—with the 17 participants regularly engaging in the workshops as listed in the appendix participating in all three stages. Participant observation necessarily includes a longitudinal dimension to ascertain the degree to which participants' self-representation and reflections change through the creative mediation processes, and as such, interviews before the workshop process saw participants taking the opportunity to take ownership of the direction of conversation, address any concerns, and attempt to build a rapport for the duration of the study. The second set of interviews provided the opportunity to reflect upon the participatory process's

opportunities and limitations for voice and recognition, as well as to correct any initial errors or misgivings. The final interviews enabled reflection on interaction with audience members and the opportunities for recognition therein, including how audiences might *recognise* refugee voice as a social group.

Audience interviews took place where possible on the exhibition site in Tyneside,[14] until theoretical saturation was reached (Saunders et al., 2018)—in other words, up until the point at which I felt satisfied that non-repetitive answers to the analytic categories pertaining to self-representation, participation, and recognition had been reached. These conversations—i.e., those which took place beyond the workshop space—were anonymised and covered by the circumstances of the institutions' own consent processes around client confidentiality and data protection.

This participant observation approach allows the generation of data through informal, interpersonal, everyday interactions between participants (Rodgers, 2004), and does not assume that the researcher already knows what the relevant questions are—instead, it provides space for the participants' views, and allows multiple and contradictory perspectives to be presented (Rodgers, 2004, p. 49). We should, however, be wary of objectifying participants as mere objects of study, 'instrumentalising the suffering of another person' (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994, p. 13), and must extend our interest in who speaks and how, to the research itself; my interest is not just in the identity of who speaks, but also who is excluded, and these moments of exclusion are factored into my analysis.

Data Analysis

As shown in the table depicted earlier in this chapter, my data analysis comprised a primary thematic analysis of the gathered fieldwork material (Guest et al., 2012), with a secondary in-depth MCDA conducted on workshop material, interviews, a sample of media, and institutional texts pertaining to recognition relating to the centres' activities (Lacey, 2000; Machin & Mayr, 2014) along with a secondary participatory analysis (Carpentier, 2016). The participatory analysis was used to unpack the dimensions of participation observed within my participant observation. MCDA was favoured as a flexible option which was able to encompass both visuality and written text.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is defined as the identification of patterns in trends in qualitative data through familiarisation, coding and identification of themes, and was suitable here because of the large quantity of varied data collected (Macnair and Frank, 2017, p. 240). It was conducted on the material and records of the creative mediation material, and interviews and fieldnotes taken using NVivo. Following Jones (2010), thematic analysis was undertaken through an initial coding, with a constant comparison between cases,

[14] This was possible in Tyneside thanks to the financial support available to host audience workshops in the exhibition space; this wasn't available in Cardiff.

wherein the fieldnotes were coded under iteratively developed categories, as they related to voice, recognition, and participation (Aronson, 1995; Bryman, 2004, p. 584).

The resultant categories of voice, recognition, and participation were then divided and sub-divided until data pertaining to sub-themes—for instance mutuality and entrepreneurialism, which appeared as prominent themes throughout my data—emerged from my fieldnotes. These themes were then used to organise the empirical findings. Once this initial analysis was completed, the creative mediation was subjected to supplementary analyses as described below. The themes which emerged pertained to my research question and its two sub-inquiries, the results of which are described in my 'empirical chapters'—i.e., Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA)

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) is a hybrid form of analysis which draws on the analytical disciplines of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and visual analysis. Viewing text as socially situated within particular orders of discourse with which it is dialectically connected, 'CDA does not advocate a particular understanding of a text…an explanation…[but] redescribes the range of understandings it gives rise to by using a particular theoretical framework to locate the text in social practice' (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 67). Order of discourse is defined here as a conflictual configuration of discourses within a social field, in this case the social practices and rearticulated discourses of creative mediation in the community centres in question (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, p. 73). This approach is critical, as CDA sees texts as contributing to unequal relationships of power (Fairclough, 2000) which occur through different kinds of articulation that draw on different forms of discourse. Textual meaning is therefore seen as one site of struggle in societal change. MCDA, in particular, is concerned specifically with different modes of text, including visual communication (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Hodge & Kress, 1988).

MCDA was used to analyse three kinds of text: first, the participants' creative mediation practices, where necessary, employing the photographic stills of the creative media taken either by myself or in collaboration with the participants (Monaco, 2000; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996); second, supplementary texts which might cast light on recognition and participation, which included, in the former case, a sample of newspaper texts, e.g., reviews about creative mediation at the sites in question, as well as examples of marketing and financial report material for the centres and their creative activities. Finally, interviews were subjected to MCDA where there was sufficient material.

This approach sees texts as rearticulating particular orders of discourses (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999) available to the participants, but also with the possibility—congruent with a Butlerian conception of performativity—that this order might be reconfigured or challenged. I therefore employed this approach because I was interested in the discourses rearticulated through the participants' work insofar as this might reflect e.g. neoliberal orders of voice—congruent with my social constructivist approach, in which the media's

symbolic force is centralised, as outlined in Chapter 2—while allowing for new forms of valuing voice, thus drawing out some of the ambiguities and tensions around this. In such contexts, I adopted the position of seeing respondents' accounts as being structured by discourse, but also able to be presented in new iterations (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999b). Indeed, Machin and Mayr's (2012) approach to MCDA, which I centralised, argues specifically that the granular grammatical study of language through CDA might be extended to visual communication in a more rigorous systematised way than visual analysis, which can allow the researcher to consider precisely how images might contribute to the construction of meaning, in reflection of particular choices by the author (p. 9).

My analysis considered dimensions of lexical choice and transitivity (Van Leeweun, 1996). With regard to lexical choice (which in MCDA refers to both written text and images), I did not simply look to the connotations of the symbols used, but, crucially, to what was *absent*—the many things the participants did not feel empowered to say. This was crucial to understanding how, in the case of refugees, voices might operate in particular ways. In seeking to understand which discourses are rearticulated (or not) I have also looked at the genre of language used—reflection, testimony, rights claims, and so on—but also have paid attention to what is *left out.* In terms of transitivity, I was also particularly interested in constructions of activeness or passivity: *who* is seen to act upon *whom* in the photographs, written texts, and video, where this was possible (Van Leeweun, 1996).

The output of my MCDA will not make grand claims as to the texts and traditions upon which participants draw—indeed, there is a risk of projecting my own cultural references on to the participants, which should be avoided—unless this is triangulated with observational data. As such, I was only able to make conclusions about the particular discourses rearticulated by participants at particular moments within these texts and mediation processes. I was, however, also able to reflect on their absences at certain times, which was, as I argue, as revealing as what was included.

Questions of Language and CDA

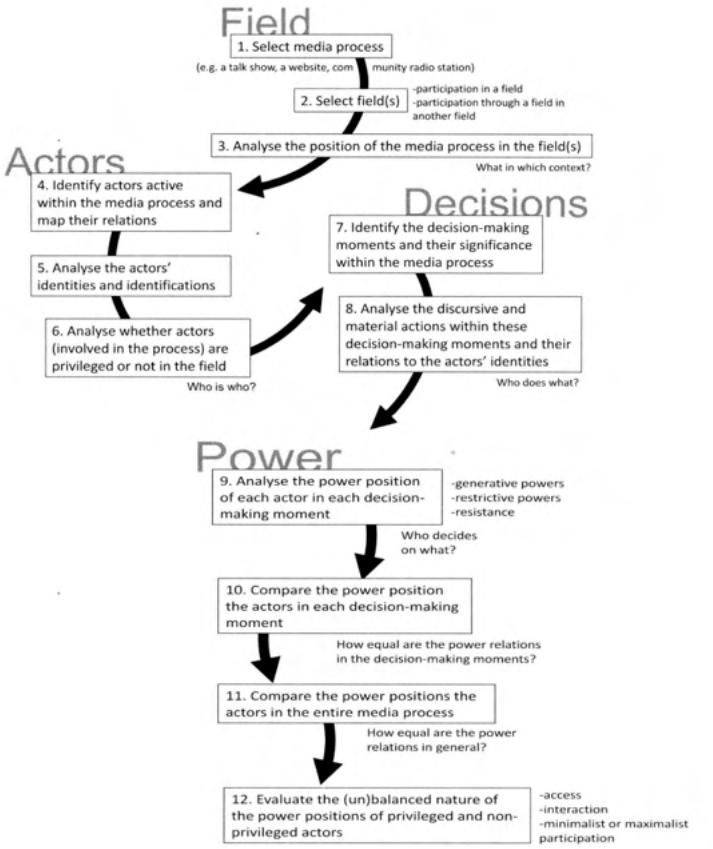
Texts are assumed to be rearticulated in relationship to these regulated orders of discourse, and the products of translation are considered a part of this process. It was important to be mindful of applying strict forms of discourse analysis where participants might be speaking English as a foreign language, or in translation. Because of this my empirical chapters triangulate MCDA with participant observation—to highlight participants' reflections on the experience of self-representation—in conjunction with my analysis of that self-representation. It is worth emphasising again that this analysis is limited to the perspective of a British citizen and their observation of how 'performative refugeeness' manifests itself in highly regulated spaces. Conclusions cannot be made beyond what is rearticulated within these processes, as is relevant to the research question's interest in voice through such practices.

While this methodology will be applied in a rigorous, systematised way, such analyses may generate different interpretations in the hands of different researchers, for which reasons there must be caveats in respect to the generalisability of such findings. My focus here is not on generalisability, so much as a detailed, granular analysis of the representational properties, social context and power dynamics behind particular creative mediation projects. However by using CDA, critical reflexivity of the researcher's position should underline how these findings may highlight that 'different discourses are associated with different perspectives on the domain concerned' (Fairclough, 2010, p. 549), and discursive meaning will thus be framed as a range of possible interpretations. It is also important to note that this power imbalance prevails beyond any such methodological consideration, given my status as researcher, and thus the broader material inequality between myself and the participants. On account of this imbalance between myself as researcher and participants as individuals subjected to precarity and uncertainty for their future, care had to be taken that my analytical frame did not privilege analytical categories that foregrounded my own voice over those—such as embedded participant observation passages or interviews—which might be more suitable for deeper contextualisation of refugee experience.

It is for this reason that this study sees MCDA and participant observation as complementary rather than epistemically antagonistic, with observation methods supplying context around which particular discourses are constructed and challenged—i.e., so-called 'situated' linguistic practice (Krzyżanowski, 2011, p. 232). This is consistent with recent trends in participant observation which allow for triangulation between different stages of analytical research and different genres of data gathered in an interrelated social setting. In this study, the observational context applies to the decisions around a particular production process, allowing for a granular understanding of the regulatory factors at play. This is considered congruent with a participant observation approach on the grounds that both methodologies essentially seek 'to uncover the shared norms or cultural conventions governing who can say what, and when in particular communicative situations' (Bhatia, 2008, p. 63). The participant observation provides the context in which knowledge construction takes place, with my approach to MCDA providing a granular understanding of how this context is interrelated with self-representation. The role of the participant observation in such contexts is a merging of the researcher's disciplinary theories with the informant's own locally produced theories, as a description of meaning-making through symbolic action (Geertz, 1973, p. 27).

Participatory Analysis

In order to answer my second research sub-question (SQ2), as to how and whether participation took place through these creative mediation processes, a supplementary participatory analysis was undertaken. This analysis, which was applied to the results of the primary thematic analysis of my fieldnotes, used Carpentier's analytical toolkit (2016), chosen for its interest in power in decision-making around participatory media processes.



Participatory toolkit (Carpentier, 2016, p. 78).

Carpentier advocates for a detailed understanding of power through its expression in decision-making moments, especially within dimensions of restriction, generation, or resistance—in other words, how the participatory process's decisions might be restricted, how decisions might be generated, and how decisions might be resisted. Carpentier's analysis, therefore, essentially looks at who decides on what, and how this is decided (2011; 2016). Carpentier states that participation's key defining element is power; that participation is situated always in particular processes and localities and involves specific actors; that the concept is contingent and part of power struggles in society; that it is invitational; and that it is not the same as the two allied concepts of access and interaction (2011, p. 170). He also states that participation is not to be seen as part of the democratic-populist fantasy; in other words, not eliminating the gatekeeper altogether, but extending, diversifying, and opening up the societal identity of the media professional (2011, p. 171). Carpentier's work (2016) extends our understanding of participation through specific dimensions of participation that could be described or studied within alternative creative mediation space. His analytical toolkit, *Beyond the Ladder of Participation*, highlights 'the vagueness over how participation should be researched' (2016, p. 70), and criticises the absence of any debate over how participation should be evaluated.

This particular analytical toolkit was pertinent because it allowed for a granular account of the social dimension and regulation of participation around the workshops—for instance, who decided on the materials, the style of the media, the particular biases at play in regard to the texts which were privileged, who wasn't

able to attend the sessions, and for what reason. This offered an antidote to the simplistic binary division between full and partial participation, as well as Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, which traces a continuum from citizen control to manipulation, arguing that these two approaches are too simplistic to account for the complexities of participation, which might exist in varying degrees across different parts of the processes. As such, I attempt to construct a more nuanced analysis around how participation took place in practice in Chapter 6, based on evaluation of my fieldnotes according to the degree of participation, the extent to which power is shared between actors, the extent to which decisions are made by one or both parties, the access participants have within an organisation or to technology, and the qualities and types of social-communicative relationships that are formed. A broad assessment as to whether this was full or partial participation, and thus a completely sufficient or less effective means of mediating voice and recognition, was then possible across the different levels of publicness.

This framework involves identifying the media process under investigation, the fields in question, the relationship between actors, including which of them hold the power at key decision-making moments—perhaps the British citizen volunteers, the state, myself, the British government, the participants, or some combination thereof—and evaluating the participatory efficacy of the process in question. When considering the field, I therefore 'analyse[d] the basic characteristics of the field, how it is constructed and structured, with which knowledges, positions, interests, stakes, commodities and histories, together with how the exact relationships between the participatory process and the field are organised' (Carpentier, 2016, p. 78). Decision-making moments are micro-processes that are complicated by their sheer number. Within the three categories of 'generation,' 'resistance,' and 'restriction' necessitated by Carpentier's analysis, categories of decision-making emerged from the results of my primary thematic analysis—for instance, where participants refused to join in the mediation sessions, or negotiated with me over their contents. Generation and restriction thus emerged from participants generating ideas, or pushing back on things they didn't like.

Ethics and Positionality

All participants in this study had experienced some form of displacement, with some individuals remaining in positions of ongoing vulnerability, having arrived in the UK after months and years in situations of danger, high risk, and precarity caused by a range of circumstances, including war and organised violence, which engendered physical and mental trauma. This, in addition to the obstacles to their lives in the UK—the conditions of their accommodation, difficulties with their asylum claims, the absence of work etc.—meant it was particularly important to do no harm, to respect autonomy, and to respect and ensure the equitable sharing of benefits in line with best practice within migration research.

The advice from the LSE Ethics Committee that I obtain verbal and/or written consent from workshop participants was followed throughout the study. Centres and participants were sent advance information sheets informing them of their right to anonymity and condition of withdrawal. Any participants from whom I could not obtain consent were not included.

Respondents who had trouble agreeing to verbal and/or written consent owing to their language preferences, or to whom the interview would be a subject of stress or disruption, were not included in this research. My ethics framework made it clear that during interviews I would not ask participants about the circumstances of their arrival to the UK, unless they themselves raised the subject; that I would explain that this process would be anonymous, and that I would remove participants' identifying characteristics, replacing their names with pseudonyms unless they insisted otherwise. Interviews were recorded ethnographically using contemporaneous notetaking as best I could, with any sensitive material disposed of securely. Participants were clear there would be no adverse consequences of withdrawal from the study, and were provided with my contact details upon engagement.

When participants were first approached, I welcomed them by explaining the nature of the workshops and the possibility of participation; once the sessions had begun, I would verbally explain my position and the work I was doing in order to obtain written and/or verbal consent as recommended by the LSE Research Ethics Committee, using information sheets if necessary. For those participants who worked on a more extended form of self-representation, consent was obtained verbally. As such, there were three points at which participants might choose not to participate, and indeed, many participants changed their minds after the initial point of recruitment, sometimes within the sessions themselves (e.g., by leaving partway through or by requesting the deletion of their contributions to training materials recorded on devices within exercises). Participants were also given the opportunity to participate in the workshops and not in the research; in such cases data relating to relevant participants was deleted.

It is important not to be naïve about perceived benefits—the participants were in incredibly precarious circumstances, and speaking to an unknown researcher involved time, commitment, and trust. Given this ethical complexity, I continually asked myself how, if I was unable to provide any direct benefit to the participants, I could at least minimise harm (O'Reilly, 2004, p. 68; Crang & Cook, 2008, p. 27), and if at any point my research could potentially *worsen* these conditions of inhospitality, I withdrew accordingly. Ultimately, my commitment to this principle resulted in creative mediation sessions that were co-constructed; I helped participants who asked for assistance with Adobe Creative Suite, including Premiere for businesses they hoped to set up; supplied informal verbal translation, helped people apply for government benefits, supported language classes as a teaching assistant, and provided labour at the centres (e.g., washing up, helping with meals etc). In the run-up to my fieldwork, information sheets informed potential participating institutions of the possibility of my producing creative mediation toolkits for organisations in a format of their choice.[15] While I sought to trade skills, benefits nevertheless always came with caveats relating to our relative power, about which I have attempted to be open.

[15] See appendices for information sheets.

Reflexivity

It is important to be aware of reflexivity in participant observation—these observations and analyses were inevitably from a singular perspective, which was closely bound to my power and agency in such settings, and therefore do not purport to demonstrate 'objective truth'; rather, they are conversations and behaviours constructed relationally. Reflexivity creates possibilities to analyse 'the complexity of the data, avoiding the suggestion that there is a simple fit between the social world under scrutiny and the ethnographic representation of it' (Brewer, 2000, pp. 132-133): my presence around participants necessarily altered both their and my behaviour, particularly as I performatively enacted the motions of a researcher with the necessary academicized forms of consent. Indeed, even my choices of with whom to strike up conversations in these settings, while consciously open, would inevitably be subject to unconscious biases. I have therefore been open about these choices and the potential biases at work in the following chapters.

Needless to say, there is a difference between obtaining ethics approval from a university and the actual practice of ethics through the practical upholding of moral behaviours in face-to-face encounters. Indeed, many ethnographic researchers have warned of the difficulties of presenting a 'friendly face' and an illusion of mutuality, as well as of the emotional load on researchers if one is not a trained psychotherapist (Wolf, 1996; Brannen, 1988). Researchers are, however, increasingly expected to occupy multiple roles, even if these roles may be in conflict: in this case, my own personal moral and ethical desire to research people's voices conflicted with my academic knowledge that I may in some way be reinforcing a power hierarchy of voice between us—indeed, the same hierarchy I was attempting to investigate. My presence in each centre was one of constantly renegotiated identity, and I took inspiration from compassionate creative participatory methodologies: insofar as I was present as a researcher, I was also able to be present to openly share my own vulnerabilities, to construct voices thoughtfully and respectfully, and to operate within a relational ethics of care (Ellis, 2007; Gilligan, 1982)[16].

Positionality

Following Kamlongera's (2021) writing on navigating positionality while co-creating knowledge, it is important to reflect on how lines around positionality may shift in different contexts. Qualitative researchers acknowledge the complex nature of a researcher's ontological and epistemological position on outcome

[16] Central to this approach was thinking with participants 'what can we do now' rather than 'you should do this now' (Bergum, 1998); as such, I continually asked myself ethical questions related to the spaces I was in and the decisions I was making—whether to pursue a particular creative media project, whether to approach someone to inquire about their participation, how to respectfully follow their wishes to exclude them from the research, as well as the correct tools, processes, and conversations with which to engage. These relationships of intimacy and care thus necessitated the constant reassessment of boundaries and power. My research therefore followed Leaning's ethical guide for refugee research (Leaning, 2001, p. 1432): ensuring the research design minimised additional risk; selecting participants on the basis of research principles without bias introduced by issues of accessibility, cost or malleability; establishing high standards of informed consent; instituting procedures to assess, minimise, and monitor risks to safety and confidentiality; and promoting the well-being, dignity and autonomy of all study participants (Smith, 2009, p. 59). I also consulted the Refugee and Immigrants Services' and Empowerment (RISE, 2015) recommendations on participatory artwork insofar as this related to creative mediation, which included critically interrogating the study's intention, seeking feedback on when participation and analysis is obstructive, avoiding condescension, and collaborating to avoid reductive treatment of asylum seekers' answers throughout the process. Prior to entry to the two sites, I signed both centres' Code of Conduct documents around treating participants with dignity and respect, safeguarding, participants' rights to privacy, and reporting examples of abuse, alongside the other ethical processes outlined here.

knowledge (Kamlongera, 2021, p. 3; Johansson et al., 2021). My positionality as a white, male, middle class researcher framed my position throughout the research, though the exact context to this changed between my roles as a creative facilitator co-creating knowledge within the mediation workshops, and a researcher outside the workshops observing, taking notes, and recruiting participants. I will reflect on each of these different contexts to positionality in turn—as a facilitator, as an observer, and in terms of recruitment, below, mindful of avoiding binaries in favour of 'in-between' positionalities that overlap and change (Humphrey, 2007) and the need to 'preserve attachments to different worlds in order to respect their inner truth, whilst cultivating a non-attachment which allows for creative and critical growth' (Humphrey, 2007, p. 23).

Within the workshops, I was mindful of my position as a former journalist, media lecturer, creative practitioner and former volunteer with refugee charities, alongside questions of my gender, class and race. Building on my pedagogical and practical experience of participatory methodologies, I undertook one-on-one coaching with InsightShare consultant Soledad Muniz in June 2019 to forensically plan and receive detailed feedback on my lesson plans, materials and approach as described earlier in this chapter. Within the workshops, I was mindful of emphasising to participants these were process-led sessions, predicated on interdiscussion and co-creation, approaches embedded in the workshop design (Bailey et al, 2008; Wenger, 1998). While I was open about my professional identity if asked, I was mindful of presenting myself as a facilitator and not a researcher in these contexts, carefully framing the parameters of the self-representation through clear consent processes. During the sessions I was immersed in facilitation and co-creation—organising materials, discussing ideas, facilitating the use of technical equipment or otherwise—with caveats as described.

Once the sessions were complete, I had more time to reflect on and consider how decisions had emerged, mindful these different positions likely blur and with caution about the power imbalances inherent in such academic observation (Berger, 2015; Milligan, 2016). Inevitably, my status as facilitator influenced the 'performative refugeeness' on display, and these highly regulated forms of voice—and the decisions accompanying them—emerged as important themes within the study. A record of decisions made, and their likely biases, once the sessions were over, fed into my fieldnotes and analysis of the limits and possibilities of creative mediation. In turn, these notes informed my approach within the workshops. This reflection partly led to, for example, my decision to co-organise female-only sessions in Tyneside, my second research site.

Regarding how positionality interrelated with my role as an observer beyond the sessions, I was especially mindful of discussing participants' experiences of racism in and around the centres, both among the volunteers and participants, especially given that participants were not always comfortable discussing racism with me, possibly perceiving me to be affiliated with the institution—clearly a further limitation of this study. My status as a visibly white citizen was something that informed conversations participants could have with me about the media, institutional or otherwise—indeed, I spoke at length with one participant about how he felt patronised and demonised by the community centre's treatment of participants, which he felt diminished him, a conversation which was itself based on an asymmetrical relationship, given my complicity in the

centres' whiteness (volunteers and staff were almost exclusively white in Cardiff and Tyneside). For this reason, I took care to discuss my positionality with participants. One individual who helped me with informal translation work told me that, as a white man, I would never be able to fully understand the nuances of life as an Iranian refugee; this opened a debate about the possibilities of valuing voice in which I acknowledged the limitations of my understanding to him, something I subsequently factored into my methodological approach. Indeed, I was clearly viewed as a gatekeeper thanks to my race: at one point, during a Turkish barbecue in Tyneside, though intended good-naturedly, I was pushed into a circle of dancing participants and filmed, much to my embarrassment; in Cardiff, a participant borrowed one of the mobile phone holders I had naively taken with me to help with filming, and ignored my messages about bringing it back. Such moments, while well-meaning, were negotiations around our terms of engagement, and my complicity in reinscribing hierarchies. This is one reason why participants' rejection or renegotiation around the possibilities for voice became an integral part of my theoretical framework.

In terms of recruitment, my positionality as a white, male, middle class researcher affected the degree of trust participants had towards me and their likelihood of participating in the workshops. "How long will you be here?" asked one participant, who was used to researchers arriving and moving on; "Why are you interested in refugees' stories?" asked another, who was tired of being asked to explain themself. There was a clear fatigue with those showing an extractive interest in participants' lives, which ultimately manifested in many participants pushing back and refusing to participate; when participants did agree to participate, they were often clear about the terms of engagement—asking whether they could use the creative mediation in their asylum claim, for instance. I was open about how helpful this would be, and engaged in dialogue around the purpose of the research, and those dialogues integral to my final analyses.

The relative ease of winning participants' trust was markedly different according to the participants' gender, given my own gender and the sociological terrain of the community centres: the men I approached during my fieldwork were consistently more likely to participate than the women, who, instead, most often spoke to me through their husband or father—boundaries were constantly being broken and reinstated, with the terms of consent reissued. This reflected the gender breakdown of those arriving to Europe (UNICEF, 2019) and the UK to seek asylum, where men are both dramatically overrepresented, and more likely to report their refugee status (Phillimore, 2016). Men were more likely to engage in individualistic forms of expression (as opposed to engaging in group activities). As such, I was hyperaware of my gender in these settings, particularly in negotiating the complexities of the dynamics between myself and women, either on their own or with their families. While many of the approaches to participants occurred through the centres, or through other participants, some occurred through day-to-day life at the centres with my approaching and introducing myself, and while my role as a volunteer may have minimised, it did not erase some elements of my claimed privilege. Nevertheless, though I was recognised as different, participants remained willing to share intimacies with me, or ask for favours. As Mukherjee (2017) argues, relationships between participant and researcher are constructed simultaneously, and this pivoted between individuals, and as individuals' asylum situations

changed through time. While very little research has been done into how male researchers position themselves in such studies (Thomas, 2017), I had to be mindful of this privilege insofar as it was present (Ortiz, 2005).

While I built up relationships with gatekeepers in the two cities over many months, it is also worth acknowledging the risks of recruitment via the centres. I have taken steps to acknowledge these biases, particularly in contexts where participants with high degrees of amenability behaved differently inside and outside the creative mediation sessions, and where participants with high familiarity with Western modes of creative mediation may sometimes have been privileged.

Owing to the unequal division of labour within particular refugee communities—Afghan women, for instance, have often been classified as 'hard to reach' owing to language barriers and cultural differences (Goodkin & Deacon, 2004, p. 729)—I supported in the organisation of two women-only sessions with interpreters and local facilitators in Tyneside, at the centre's behest, and led by the centre and an external partner. Overall, however, the relatively small number of women using the centres, especially in Cardiff, resulted in a smaller quantity of material involving female participants, which is a clear limitation of this study—indeed, the fact that such female-only sessions could be organised at all in Tyneside, I have attributed to the relative abundance of funding for participatory work in the city, the relatively higher number of women using Centre B, as well as the greater ease of forming relationships in a smaller centre—something upon which I have reflected in the following chapters.

Methodological limitations

While this study is partly concerned with participation, there are limits to the methodological tools employed: final decisions on how to interpret data ultimately lie with the researcher—something which applies not only to the analyses, but to the selection of creative mediation to pursue and develop. While I tried to make my presence maximally unobtrusive, so as to facilitate agency among participants around the creative mediation they created and the form in which they chose to do so, the presence of an unknown researcher, albeit one working in the centres over a number of months, was evidently a factor in participants' choice of creative mediation, given the precarity of their political and legal situations. Indeed, the presence of such researchers among refugee groups has long been criticised for its lack of so-called 'objectivity' (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003), and though participants are seen as 'co-researchers and co-authors' (Krulfeld & Macdonald, 1998, p. 7), given the obvious material limits to how this power imbalance can be equalised, the findings and analyses supplied must come with caveats about the specificities of knowledge construction created through the processes described. My analysis and findings were shared with participants as I progressed through the writing up process (translated where necessary), and their comments informed the text. Notes from our private communication and from the participants' social media were not used unless the participants were made explicitly aware, and gave their consent.

While most occasions of creative mediation did not comprise obvious or complete narratives, it is worth noting there is harm and good in participants relating accounts of their lives: they might, for instance, help to reconstruct meaning around fragmented memory (Harvey, Mischler, Koenen, & Harney, 2000; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999; Romanoff, 2001; Rosenthal, 2003). These accounts are nevertheless often complicated by the participants' life histories in political regimes where silence is used as a tool of oppression; trauma's effects on memory, particularly where participants may be torn between processing and avoiding painful memories; and the discriminatory and scrutinising environment that narration asylum seekers face in the UK (Bedard-Gilligan et al., 2017). Given the very real possibility that language may be insufficient to make sense of atrocity, care and careful listening was important throughout all the elements of my fieldwork.

With regard to my use of discourse analysis, critical awareness is necessary in regard to the power relations inherent in the understanding of discourses—i.e., the potential for the researcher's understanding of specific discourses to be rearticulated by the asylum seekers—as is care not to bias or privilege certain discourses over others in the selection of both the interview guide and the subsequent analysis (Warburton, 2016). Reflexivity over interviews was particularly important in regard to my positionality and the range of descriptive, discursive, and semiotic meanings of this study's key concepts.

Responses sometimes involved discussions of sensitive topics relating to the current domestic or legal situation of the participant or their representation, but the interview guide avoided tackling questions of trauma relating to the interviewees' place of origin by retaining flexibility to structure the interview around the participants' own interests. Questions that might cause undue stress or upset, insofar as this could be anticipated in advance, were avoided, and all questions were phrased in an open-ended way. The interviews were subject to informed consent, and the participants were informed of their power to withdraw from the interview or participation in the workshops, at any time. The community centres in question were anonymised to allow me the possibility of speaking freely about what may be seen by some as transgressions, reducing the risk to both the centres and participants (the Tyneside centre is located in one specific part of this region, but I have referred to the broader urban area instead). All other matters relating to LSE's Ethics Code, including ratification by the Research Ethics Committee, if necessary, were followed.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced how I designed and implemented a study of participatory creative practices with refugees, by working from the inside out to observe and conduct these practices myself. Central to this inquiry is the question of voice, which my research question seeks to broaden beyond dominant conceptions. I have also introduced two secondary sub-questions relating to recognition and participation which relate to my theoretical framework's interest in recognition as a pivotal part of voice, the social context of participation in processes of voice and recognition, and how these processes occur. Within this chapter, I have explored my principal means of data gathering (through creative mediation workshops and participant observation), my primary means of analysing data, (thematic analysis), and my two secondary means of data analysis

(multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) and participatory analysis), a broad suite of analytical tools which was necessitated by the varied material produced during my fieldwork period.

As we have seen, this project aims to use a triangulated multi-method approach to investigate how participatory creative mediation among refugees might facilitate voice and recognition at an individual or social level through 'performative refugeeness'. Thematic analysis was a way of organising both the participants' texts and my fieldnotes so as to discover the themes according to which a nuanced account of how the work was structured might be formulated (Bryman, 2004). This acted as a precursor to a more detailed MCDA of the participants' creative output as a means to work through the various discursive rearticulations that these outputs produced, as a variety of different kinds of publicness. I also explored my approach to participatory analysis and how this allowed me to take a granular view of decision-making moments so as to place them in a social context which acknowledged the different power positions of the various actors involved.

Finally, I discussed my approach to ethics during fieldwork, which accounts for my decision to anonymise the identities of participants where requested, my positionality, and also the delicacy around working with highly vulnerable participants who have gone through recent displacement. Respect for participants through the ethics frameworks employed was always my most important and primary consideration, and this drew on ethical best practices from other participatory media refugee studies (Hugman et al., 2011). It was important for me to have an applied component to this research, and this necessitated being flexible, given the restrictions on the time of those seeking asylum (Block et al., 2013).

It is important to acknowledge that this was a complex project, featuring a diverse array of people, and conducted within the complicated regulatory systems that surveil and control refugee lives. This study faced unique challenges relating to recruitment, positionality, and precarity, about which I have attempted to remain mindful and open throughout my depiction of the refugee voice over the following chapters. This principle of honesty around such limitations and my own complicity in the processes around promises of voice—as well as how refugee performativity either feeds into or rejects these processes—has been the driving force behind my conducting this research. In doing so, I hope that it may enhance our understanding of what voice might mean in as thoughtful and reflective a way as possible, and thereby acknowledge what realistic creative opportunities for voice might look like, in all their nuanced complexity.

Chapter Four: Refugee Voice through Self-Representation

Introduction

Basir's co-produced storyboard, Tyneside, Jan 2020

My thesis is primarily concerned with how refugee voices might find expression through participatory creative processes, and in this chapter, I will analyse the kinds of voices produced in such processes. In doing so, I will examine not just what participants chose to include in the sessions, but also *what they left out*. As will be seen in the case studies below, there are some identifiable patterns to these omissions.

The first case study features Basir, a 25-year-old participant from Iran. During an interview in the summer of 2019, Basir told me he wanted to be inspirational to others; specifically, he wanted to use his voice to communicate the positive effects of sport to the people around him. 'It's my story,' he said, by way of explanation. 'Some people give you bad energy. I like to give people positive energy. I say to people: "you can do anything."'

Out of all the possible choices of voice apparently available to him, in expressing his voice in this specific way, Basir both espoused and attempted to personify the benefits of an entrepreneurial spirit of self-making. His positive message clearly endeared him to the staff at the Tyneside community centre that he had frequently attended since arriving to the UK the previous year, and they regularly invited him to creative mediation workshops[17] run by external partners. These workshops were led by visiting artists undertaking practice-based research, or by local arts institutions conducting outreach work—projects that represented a wave of research interest in the views of participants like Basir. For his part, Basir appeared accommodating, even enthusiastic, about participating.

Given that he seemed happy to do so, it was not best practice to ask Basir a leading question about how or why he felt compelled to participate in these projects. Open questions to him from myself or other researchers asking if he would be interested in participating in our research, would inevitably result in him expressing his desire to help. This supportive impulse was enacted in a subtle variety of ways. For example, when he saw me

[17] In this chapter I use 'creative media' to refer to the textual products of our creative mediation workshops. I refer to mediation itself as the social processes around the production of these texts, in line with definitions outlined in previous chapters. Participants engaged in creative mediation processes might reject the terms of voice on offer and refuse inclusion in particular texts, and this was captured by my participant observation.

sitting alone, reading, between sessions, Basir would strike up a conversation. I was grateful for his sensitivity to my own feelings of isolation as a stranger in an unfamiliar city (albeit one whose work and citizenship status, unlike his, were stable and secure), and the warmth of these conversations inflected our relationship.

It was clear when comparing the behaviour of centre staff toward other participants that Basir was favoured and trusted, more so than many who attended less frequently, where social relationships were more challenging to develop. Staff would joke with him, or ask him to help with greeting visitors. Older, more experienced volunteers treated him as an ally, sharing stories, asking after him when he wasn't there, spending time with him in the garden, and chatting with him on WhatsApp, all of which interactions he seemed to enjoy. He described people he met at the centre as 'friends,' and it was clear that he would come there simply to read a magazine, or to practice his English, even if there was no official reason for his attendance. He approached the creative mediation workshops we pursued together with typical equanimity. As we will see later in this chapter, Basir was highly conscious of the positive image of himself that he was constructing.

Through the majority of Basir's behaviour in the centre, including his participation in our creative mediation projects, I believe that he was expressing his voice through 'performative refugeeness', as defined in my theoretical Chapter 2 (Georgiou, 2019; Georgiou, Hall & Dajani, 2020). Essentially, he was always mindful of expressing his voice in particular ways, performatively. In this chapter I will explore the ways in which such performative forms of voice found expression for Basir and other participants. I will also examine whether that performativity was one privileged by a neoliberal system, as defined in Chapters 1 and 2. For Basir and others, performativity was expressed through rearticulated discourses that reflect ways that refugees are usually represented: positivity, victimhood, or entrepreneurialism (Ong, 2006). This is not to negate the possibility that these discourses were expressed in other ways outside Basir's sessions with me; it is simply to note that they were the utterances and actions which found expression in these particular spaces at these particular times, and that they have particular commonalities with expressions privileged by a neoliberal order (Carerra, 2014; Mavelli, 2018). These common voices also include entrepreneurial self-making, self-sufficiency, and/or resilience (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019).

As such, this chapter will explore my research question (RQ1) in relation to the self-representation of refugee voice[18]. Chapter 5, my second empirical chapter, will look at how recognition occurs, and Chapter 6, my final empirical chapter, will consider the social dimensions of participation and regulation for these practices. Within each chapter I will draw on the same typology of three different levels of publicness, and examine the process of 'becoming public'—micro, meso, macro—where these levels of publicness were present. Micropublicness is defined here as instances of voice communicated to intimate audiences, for example, immediate peers within a community centre, but little beyond this. The audiences for these micropublicness

[18] I will use the term 'refugee' here as a discursive concept which is rearticulated and contested. Otherwise, I will use the term 'participants' as described in chapter 1 and 2.

processes comprised myself, and a maximum of three other participants who were present in the workshop room at the same time. Mesopublicness is defined by engagement with any broader regional audience; so, reaching beyond the small community centre workshops, voices might be heard through exhibitions of participants' work in other institutional spaces, whereby they would reach members of the local community. Macropublicness, albeit mostly absent, refers to refugee voices reaching larger, national audiences. The quantity of material relating to macropublicness was significantly less than the smaller scales simply by virtue of the barriers to access that block refugee voices from reaching a larger publicness, but it is worth acknowledging this absence all the same.

In cases such as Basir's, this chapter will primarily consider media texts, with the context to mediation provided where relevant. Contextual information regarding media production includes such details as a participant's decisions on which aspects of voice to express, and their chosen means of expression. For instance, they may choose to shoot a video on their mobile phone of someone chopping vegetables, or to copy out a prayer by hand. As we will see in this chapter, many of the participants expressed their voices in complex ways, some with elements of conventional narrative, others without. We will see numerous expressions of voice here, from fragments of fantasy writing to prayers. In general, some voices struggled to find expression, while others found the endeavour more straightforward.

I will first consider how complex voices of victimhood emerge performatively in intimate spaces, accompanied by varying degrees of reflexivity, before moving on to forms of expression that are heard more broadly. Voice within national publicness was entirely absent from my own creative workshops, and this was indicative of the difficulties participants faced in being able to express their voices to the broadest audiences. Some of the workshops organised by the centres did receive national press coverage, and these are considered in Chapter 5, where I focus on recognition.

Versions of some of the projects discussed below were included digitally in a video co-produced with the LSE in July 2020, first published on the university's YouTube account and later exhibited at the LSE Department of Media & Communications' virtual exhibition in October 2020. Audiences comprised those following the university's social media accounts, as well as those who attended the Media and Communications Department's online exhibition in November 2020, i.e., mainly students and academics. External animators worked with the participants' material to produce the final text for the video. Though the participants had some involvement in this process, their input was lower than in other mediation processes. I will discuss this video further in Chapter 7, where I consider participation, and limit the current chapter to data where I had the greatest access to both the content and context for participants expressing their voices.

Micropublicness: Trauma, Victimhood and Fantasy

> I ask him to think about anyone in his life who has been encouraging about his creativity. He says "his psychiatrist," and he laughs about this. I say who does he admire and he says he likes *Avatar,* the series on TV. I don't know about it and I say, "Is there anyone on there you like?" and he says "Corra from the Avatar series". He says she is a strong gay character.
>
> Excerpt from fieldnotes 26th July 2019

In more intimate spaces, participants tended to rearticulate discourses around trauma, victimhood, and fantasy. I'll use two different examples to illustrate this: one, an oral testimony, the other a series of fragments of fantasy-related writing. Both participants were avid readers, as well as companions and friends to each other, but they had very different ways of communicating. One doodled in his sketchbook to avoid direct communication, the other was a lively, garrulous presence. Both projects to some degree rearticulated the participants' asylum claims, albeit in creative ways. The first project, the oral testimony, did this explicitly. The fantasy (self-)representation through creative writing was less explicit, reflecting the participant's persecution as an LGBTQ+ man in Saudi Arabia indirectly through his use of fantasy characters from television and movies.

I will begin with the oral testimony project. The participant, Hashem, is a former fast-food chef from southern Iran in his late thirties who I worked with over several sessions during our time together in Cardiff. I first met him at a local arts institution's opera performance at the Cardiff centre in July 2019. For this performance, which combined Welsh, Farsi, Arabic, and French lyrics, a local producer and writer had worked with participants on a musical piece that was ultimately performed by a professional operatic ensemble, with some participant musicians. At the launch event, participants were seated at tables with local residents, all watching the performance together. I sat between two Iranian participants, Hashem and Jamshid, both of whom I would go on to work with closely.

Over dinner—prepared by the centre's staff but with help from volunteers—Hashem told me that because of a brain tumour he was physically paralysed down the right side of his face and body, which made speaking and walking difficult; he also had persistent headaches. As our relationship developed at the centre, Hashem proudly discussed his two sons in Iran, including their proficiency in English, but emphasised that he had separated from his wife. We talked about Iranian food and music, and he sent me some of his favourite tracks. I also spoke with his younger son on Facetime about English football teams. After this conversation, a key waypoint in our development of intimacy and trust, when we bumped into each other, which was often, Hashem would ask after me and shake my hand. Alongside this warmth, he was keen to impress upon me the urgency of his situation: that despite his medical condition, for which he needed specialist attention, he was living with seven people in crowded conditions. I didn't immediately ask him to contribute to the project—my ethical approval was on the precondition that participants could give full consent, and I was not convinced that this participant would be able to do anything but agree, given the seriousness of his medical condition—but he

observed my work with other participants before insisting that he wanted to join in. It should be stated here that when it comes to study participants such as Hashem rearticulating trauma, these stories were only produced at their instigation; my ethical consent process did not allow for explicit inquiries regarding participants' circumstances unless these were offered voluntarily. However, participants often did want to share what they'd been through, and for someone to bear witness to their testimonies.

When we sat down to discuss possibilities for his engagement with creative mediation, Hashem said he couldn't draw as he didn't have movement in his hand, which frustrated him. Similarly, he couldn't join in with other activities organised by the centre, such as the centre's football practice, as he had lost the feeling in his right foot. As we developed our discussion, he said that he found learning English difficult, but that he would never forget what the English was for 'my wife left me.'

There was just one piece of creative media that Hashem wanted to produce: a letter to an unknown recipient about his 'sickness.' As with all the creative mediation practices in this chapter, such creative media was the product of a self-representation geared towards a particular audience. In this case, which was on the level of micropublicness, the direct audience was simply the two of us. When we began to try to potentially develop his stories for a broader audience—i.e., to investigate mesopublicness—through a walking tour and, at his suggestion, a video for a local exhibition accessible to the general public, Hashem was unavailable.

> About Sick [Hashem's title]
> I got sick about 10 years ago and got cancer or brain tumour. At that time, all the doctors had given up hope, saying that your tumour had grown too large. At that time they were desperate. A doctor called me to save me by the name of Professor Samil. He is famous. After my operation, there were problems with the right side of my body. At that time I needed some peace. At that time my problems started to get worse and my wife left me. I had severe economic problems and I was living with my son. Until I decided to emigrate because of the change of religion and…when I was saved I believed there was a God. I get here and saved my life. And I'm trying to make it healthy and live here and I can make up for that past.

This brave description of Hashem's difficult and troubling experience emerged already formed, quickly. It clearly recounts his medical history, a religious awakening, and a sense of obligation to compensate for past trauma. Here, I was acting as a 'witness' to these events (Hansen, 2004). As stated by Hashem, this was also an expression of thankfulness to a British citizen in the room. The account partly remediates the participant's medical history, which gives a clear religious and compassionate reason for his entry to the UK polity. As is typical of these mediation projects, it is not entirely devoid of examples of agency and hope—not least in his desire 'to make it healthy and live here.'

However, as well as what he decided to voice, there are clearly things that were absent from Hashem's account; gaps in his description regarding his personal motivations, or those of people around him: the

reasons for his wife's departure, for instance; or confirmation of how his economic problems came about. Instead, he frames most of the events described, positive or negative, as *faits accomplis*. He expresses his belief in the intercession of a saviour, first a doctor, then God, rather than his own conscious choice to improve his medical care, to seek out better job prospects, or indeed to take an active step to escape religious persecution. However, it is also an open account, in that it hints at a future still to be created. He says that arriving in the UK—not medicine, or his own agency— saved his life, and he equates Britain with an ideal state of recovery. The UK's hospitality seems to symbolise a utopian, quasi-religious ideal that is consistent with his belief in the life-saving powers of Professor Samil and God.

Unlike our informal conversations, which were much wider ranging, Hashem's explanation of his situation within the creative session implicitly forged what amounts to a clear human rights claim on medical grounds. Thus, there was a difference between what he told me inside and outside the sessions, as his 'performative refugeeness' allowed him different regulated opportunities for expression. Formally, he could only express his voice through media in certain ways, even if he expressed it in other ways beyond the mediation process. To think about this in a different way, it is clear that the participant was *speaking to* me, perceiving me as a confidant, outside the sessions. Within the sessions, he was speaking to me as part of my research, and therefore also expressing his 'performative refugeeness' to an audience beyond me, to whom he wanted to make clear his suffering and hope. In his mind, this wider audience's values aligned with an imagined and benevolent British nation-state.

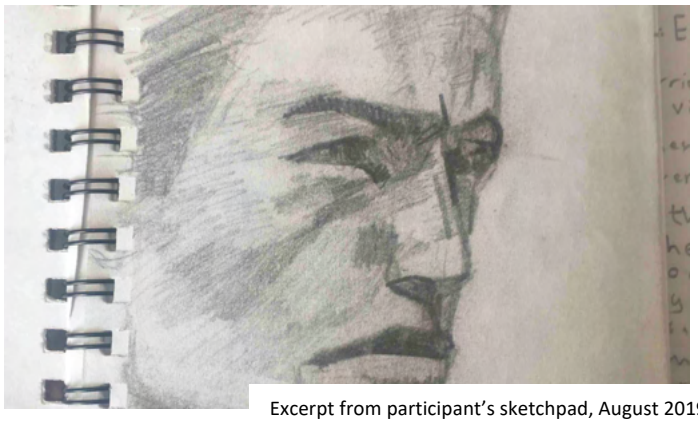
Our imagined audience is the mental conceptualisation of the people with whom we are communicating. 'The less an actual audience is visible or known, the more individuals become dependent on their imagination' (Litt, 2012, p. 331). When there are fewer cues regarding these potential audience members, as in mediated communication, people are more reliant on the imagined audience (Ong, 1975). Thus Hashem's *imagined* audience here is more powerfully benevolent than his *actual* audience.

This distinction between what participants were willing to say in the sessions themselves—which mostly aligned with what amounted to formal rights claims—and how they communicated to me elsewhere, offering more open accounts of their lives, is one of the principle pillars of 'performative refugeeness': that a formal setting, one where voice is promised, can replicate the circumstances of a participant's asylum interview. This is not to say that the participant's intent and feeling are not genuine—there is a clear sense of personal recognition in Hashem's account here—but that the account clearly adheres to particular kinds of voice through this media process.

Hashem title for his letter, "About Sick," frames his identity along salient dimensions of suffered trauma. Such (self-)representations hark back to Malkki's (1992) work on the subjective negotiation of experienced and performed identity (Häkli et al., 2017). What also draws one to this mediation's performativity is the information Hashem clearly *left out*—reducing himself to pure victim, defined by gratitude, as opposed to his

broader reality: someone with an identity constantly being negotiated along multiple dimensions, one in which he loves football, has a deep family life, etc., but which is absent from this workshop text. These discourses were thus highly regulated, even if clear dimensions of voice with affective and rights claim dimensions were evidenced. Thus, we see examples of voice which adhere to some elements of narrative, albeit a restricted and reflexive one, in such media. However Hashem's voice also finds expression in our informal conversations between sessions, about his family, for example, as well as in what he chooses to *leave out* from our formal interactions.

Fantasy through Micropublicness



Excerpt from participant's sketchpad, August 2019

We will now move on to a second example of creative media produced in an intimate space of micropublicness by Amin, a young participant from Saudi Arabia. Amin was a 22-year-old LGBTQ+ man with whom I worked from July to October 2019, first in Cardiff, and later in the London Boroughs of Redbridge and Croydon, before he was relocated to Birmingham. His engagement with creative mediation manifested itself through fragmentary narratives of fantasy fiction. As with Hashem, victimhood was rearticulated, but privileged in a deeper way through a greater quantity and complexity of material and voices produced. I attribute this to the close working relationships between myself and Amin, a by-product of Amin's background as someone familiar with Western forms of creative and cultural production. Although elements of his self-representations in these intimate settings had symbolic consistency with Hashem's, he was also able to develop them to contain greater reflexivity about his own 'performative refugeeness' both within and outside the sessions. This self-expression was, I should add, limited to intimate spaces, or the micropublic sphere—Amin's legal situation prevented his engagement in broader forms of publicness with wider audiences, and he frequently expressed hesitancy about sharing the work beyond the two of us, or beyond the circumstances of my research.

Given the complexity of his texts, I will briefly consider the social and cultural context to Amin's self-representations before moving on to the dimensions of voice themselves. Amin was a strong English speaker, from an affluent background, and familiar with many of the same Western cultural norms as me—films, television shows, books. He was a particular fan of JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, the book series *How to Train Your Dragon*, and the Nickelodeon animated television series *Avatar*. Here, I am aware of the need to be

mindful of my positionality, i.e., how I might fit into a network of power relations which can influence knowledge production (Kobayashi, 2003). The participant could write in ways that I was familiar with, which naturally facilitated communication between us, and he produced copious material. Though he was nervous and shy, he would often seek me out to share his work. We frequently had to renegotiate boundaries in our relationship, in which I would remind him I was a professional researcher and not his confidant. That I was able to issue this reminder was also an expression of the asymmetrical power dynamic between us.

Amin's expressions of voice took place over a number of different creative mediation sessions in which his feeling and experience were emphasised (which fits with the idea of voices sitting beyond rationality). Amin confirmed to me that his creative work aligned with established Western creative mediation practices *as a way of negotiating his own identity*. Reflecting back on our workshops together, he said in January 2020: 'I sometimes like to separate my stories from reality, but in terms of a character's identity I always want to write my own experiences. One of the main reasons that I write is not seeing myself in most stories on TV or books especially Disney and the ones I grew up with.' The participant told me early on in our sessions together that fantasy fiction is largely banned in Saudi Arabia. All copies of the *Harry Potter* series, for instance, first published in the UK in 1997, were taken off the shelves of Saudi Arabian bookshops in 2002 due to 'objections claiming they contain an occult-Satanic theme, violence, and have an anti-family attitude' (Anatol, 2009). Harry Potter movies were first shown in Saudi Arabia in 2018 (Spencer, 2018).

It is important to note the material and symbolic context to Amin's self-representations, and how these reflected his contingent circumstances. He drew on his biography before arriving to the UK, his refugee status, and his anxieties around how his identity interrelated with his asylum claim. Amin was in the process of recovering from significant trauma suffered in Saudi Arabia, because of which he left on a student visa in early summer 2019, before arriving in London and applying for asylum in the UK. He openly discussed being attacked 'by a neighbour,' in Saudi Arabia and talked about ongoing disagreements with his father, whom he described as wealthy and with whom he had argued over his being insufficiently devout towards his Islamic faith. He was in touch with friends from Saudi Arabia who visited him in the UK, though he had not told them of his asylum claim. He also revealed details of ongoing disputes with his mother, who he said had disowned him. After a brief period of homelessness, he was relocated to Cardiff.

During our initial sessions, Amin preferred to work on his self-representational material than to talk, and often seemed worried or evasive if I mentioned sessions involving group activities. He continued to express his reluctance to work with larger groups of men, particularly Muslim men, who he felt sure would disapprove of his sexuality. He also expressed displeasure at his accommodation in Cardiff, especially living with straight Muslims, who he felt victimised and judged him, and he had requested a transfer to LGBTQ+-only accommodation. He was engaged in the legal process of trying to arrange this, and our sessions sometimes had to be rearranged around meetings with his lawyer.

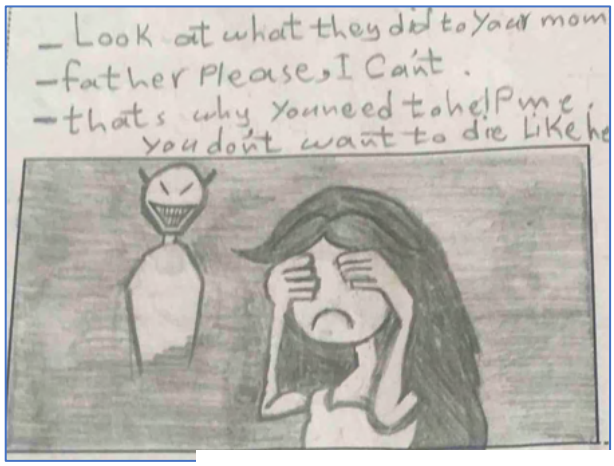
I asked Amin several times whether he wanted to work with video or drawing and he declined, saying he preferred creative writing. The majority of our sessions together were one-on-one, though as trust built between us, he acted as an Arabic translator for the creative media of other participants, always in small groups. It was clear that he was taking great steps to emphasise his sexuality during his asylum claim, including making a banner for Cardiff Pride, and announcing his sexuality openly through digital and offline communication with myself and other asylum seekers. These public displays of his sexuality included his communications with his lawyer. He was aware of rumours that the Home Office might make judgements based on performative or public displays of sexuality, and if unsatisfied, reject an asylum claim, a risk that he emphasised to me.

To move on to examples of Amin's media, it seemed as though his creative writing, though embedded in fantastical imaginary worlds, was also part of this very particular rights claim, itself contingent on his 'performative refugeeness' as manifested through his sexuality. As will be seen, his texts frequently tackled themes of persecution, injustice, and pain; and the right for people to have choice over the expression of themselves as subjects, which mirrored his asylum claim. However, because of the precariousness of his identity, as he saw it—including his fear of how other participants and British audiences might respond to him—these examples of voice were not exhibited as broader forms of publicness.

Amin's fantastical texts drew inspiration from fantasy television programming, including Nickelodeon's *Avatar* series, and reasserted his asylum claim in three main ways. First, they painted their protagonists' origins as unfailingly hostile; full of conflict, violence, and disagreement. Second, they featured thinly veiled metaphorical descriptions of Saudi Arabia as archaic and unfriendly. Finally, the stories used magical, unreal, and utopic solutions, as opposed to 'real-world' answers to problems. Amin's creative choices implied that he was obliged to find fantastical solutions to the material limitations on his possibilities for voice in the so-called 'real world.' These texts were notably performative, while being marked by what the participant excluded. For example, in unguarded moments outside the creative mediation sessions, Amin did criticise the British government. He was also consciously reflective about his remediation of utopic discourses (one drawing he showed to me, produced outside our sessions, described the UK as 'meathead isles,' and drew upon some of the texts which interested him, like *How to Train Your Dragon*). Overall, his language was framed in order to emphasise unreality over reality, problems as opposed to solutions, and injustice and escape as opposed to peace and security.

In this sense, despite the complexity of the affect and genres of discourse on display, I argue that the participant's voice aligns with normative forms of victimhood, and normative accounts of the triumph of good over evil; of fleeing from injustice to safety. There were also moments of voice beyond mediation where the participant revealed his disillusionment with these fantasies, and expressed his view that the UK is in fact a hostile and unwelcoming place. Throughout our time working together, he frequently communicated his sense of hopelessness about his situation; specifically, the bureaucracy of his asylum claim, the areas of the country

to which he was relocated, his loneliness, and his despair and alienation among the people he was housed with. *These are all important expressions of voice that remained unheard within the creative media text itself*. WhatsApp messages would frequently feature the skull emoji to express in bitterly comic terms his extreme frustration at the ridiculousness of his situation.



Excerpt from participant's storyboard, August 2019

It is worth noting that the characters who flee Amin's imagined hostile fantasy world are frequently painted as outcasts, or in physical or psychological danger, using the language of Western commercial movie content, as if aimed at a Western normative citizen. 'She's a person struggling with mental health and PTSD and wants to be the best version of herself,' begins one example. 'They become outcasts in the village; the first kid who is stolen from the moon people gave them a warning something isn't right,' starts another. 'The king is ordered to execute their father,' begins a third. The stories, overall, have a preponderance of heroes and villains, and often feature a son or daughter arguing with a powerful king or patriarch; thus, the participant constructs a (self-)representation where people who are struggling with their identities are unfairly victimised by structural or historic forces than cannot be successfully opposed.

In these texts the participant consistently explores violence and the abuse of power through fictional characters whose plight bears a strong resemblance to his own situation, backstory, and views on personal liberty. One of the most salient—and understandable—reasons the participant gave for leaving Saudi Arabia was the country's stance towards LGBTQ+ rights and freedom of expression. 'They will kill me for being gay,' he said in one session. 'It's terrible, they make you pray,' he said in another, showing me pictures of himself wearing a dishdasha robe. In conversation, he directly compared Saudi Arabian society to the dystopian fundamentalist world portrayed in Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*, which he had seen online and of which he was a fan. 'That's exactly what it's like there,' he told me.

We have seen how the participant's stories feed into (self-)representations of sympathetic individuals who are the powerless victims of violence. However, self-representation through these fragments of fiction is not framed as a means of material resolution; rather, a means of escape from real-world problems. For example,

the participant describes two stories where mythical objects and tools allow entrance into an alternative reality:

> A boy named Yuri discovered a magical tree on his way back home from school. He felt there's something mysterious about it. He touched the tree and started seeing people he'd never seen before. It's spirits of people [who] died years ago.
> Yuri met a spirit named Shiloh. They both have so much in common. The spirit world became his daily routine. It became his escape. It's the only place where he feels like he belongs. He would come back every day after school to Shiloh. They would sing jazz music and dance together.
>
> It's like a fantasy version of Damien Chazelle's La La Land, where they can be themselves without being judged by others.

This piece of descriptive writing focuses on a spirit world where the conventional laws of reality do not apply—lexical choices include 'magical,' 'mysterious,' 'spirits,' 'died,' 'escape'—and that may represent life beyond death or simply an alternative reality. The work does not discuss the participant's actual situation, or his identity in the world as it exists. Instead, it creates an entirely different world that allows its protagonist to be himself, to be loved and recognised. Given the participant's stated interests, it is also possible to see this text as a remediation of the discourse of fiction in publishing and television, specifically the genre of fantasy fiction, sometimes described as an escapist genre. The author also explicitly refers to a Hollywood movie*, La La Land*, itself highly self-referential about cinema's ability to transport audiences into a heightened reality. The participant claims his text will reiterate the dilemma of characters in that movie who fall in love, are separated by their character differences, but resolve their problems through their own fantasies. Similarly, for the protagonist in the participant's fantasy, difference in a normative world ceases to be a problem through imagination, and this is explicitly and self-referentially noted.

As discussed, for both participants included in this section, their expressions of voice were not the complete emancipatory route some might hope—the voices were limited in particular ways, even in these intimate settings. Outside the sessions, the participants expressed concerns about discrimination, material precarity, their accommodation, and the culture in which they found themselves. However, when using creative media, the participants mostly explored those elements of their identity which intersected with their more formal rights claims: their medical history as trauma, the persecution they faced, appeals to logics of helpfulness and victimhood. This was true even when incorporating superficially diverse symbols. Thus, the process of creative mediation as 'performative refugeeness' limited the participants' expressions; out of necessity, they articulated such rights claims in terms particular to their own cases. Rights claims based on victimhood chime with broader intersectional historic debates, including those concerning migrants, around claims to injury as the effect of economic and political structures that 'subordinate and disenfranchise social groups' (Brown, 1995; Banet-Weiser & Chouliaraki, 2021). There is no doubt that 'performative refugeeness' speaks to broader

dominant communicative logics of victimhood, though in this case, where there is a moral and ethical justification for these voices, their claims are barely heard beyond intimate settings.

The self-representations observed in participants' texts also rearticulated fantasy and escapist discourses, where 'real-world' referents did not apply (Bellin, 2005; Behlman, 2004). There were thus possibilities for reflexivity and extensive emotional voice—desire, fears, fantasies, resentments, anger—as well as the expression of personal complexity not possible as broader publicness. A private space allowed participants greater fluidity of expression and intimacy with a small audience (or those who they knew might read these texts as part of this research), with all possibilities contingent on the participants' personal circumstances. Participants are clearly struggling with complex expressions of agency, family, and the need to juggle multiple identities—as parents, sons, friends, sexual partners—yet these are highly regulated in the process of creative mediation, with the *normative forms of voice given privilege over the participants' own reflexivity and identity within the sessions*. Other forms of voice were seen outside the sessions—more cynical, ambivalent, or hostile, and clearly different from what was creatively mediated.

Therefore, as we move through this chapter, I argue that *refugee creative mediation as micropublicness clearly adheres to communicative logics of normative voice and rearticulates the appeals to benevolence observed within normative publics* as pertaining to refugees. Banet-Weiser and Chouliaraki (2021) argue that we exist at a historical moment in the West, whereby the struggles of the vulnerable have become pervasive across all social groups, only to be politically weaponised by elite groups who rearticulate victimhood in hegemonic ways. Victimhood functions as a structure of affective public communication that leads to competing claims to suffering and recognition (Chouliaraki, 2021).

We will see that as these voices open out into a mesopublic sphere they are joined by other forms of self-representation: welcoming, neoliberal entrepreneurialism, and mutuality—depending on the circumstances and individual—as the possibility of broader audiences expands. It is these (self-)representations within mesopublicness to which I now turn.

Mesopublicness: Welcoming and Mutuality

Group mediation project, July 2019

We will now consider self-representation as it occurs through mesopublicness, i.e., the process of becoming public through regional institutions beyond intimate communities. Here, creative media projects were developed with institutional gatekeepers, e.g., curators, who facilitated the possibility of exhibition to local audiences beyond the centres. Gatekeepers are defined here as those with the power to decide who has access to particular resources or opportunities (Carpentier, 2016). To illustrate this, I include data on projects developed for local regional audiences at an exhibition in Tyneside in November 2019. In this case, audiences comprised local residents, curators, artists, and volunteers as well as members of the public. Ideas were first workshopped in intimate spaces, which means that they found expression first as micropublicness, before later being expressed as mesopublicness as the projects were developed and exhibited.

Here, I will consider and compare projects that were exhibited and those that were excluded from exhibition. I will first look at two projects by Basir, the man from Iran whose case study opened the chapter. This will include a video project he led which drew on discourses around welcoming. His second project, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, depicts wrestling, and performatively employs entrepreneurial (self-) representation that adheres to Western mythmaking around 'triumphing over adversity' (Gilbert, 2017). After this, I will consider the use of mutuality in Jamshid's descriptive writing about wine, and in Victor's written piece on life expectations, which was later recorded aurally. I argue that these projects appealed to a sense of claimed equivalence between the participants and their listener. Media projects that were developed alongside these, but failed to find expression beyond intimate spaces, will also be presented, and the circumstances of their exclusion discussed.

The first specific creative mediation project by Basir was initiated by myself with the assistance of David, an artist working at the Tyneside community centre, after Basir had expressed interest in video. David and I worked with Basir on his videomaking and editing to produce a short video, in which he interviewed participants and British citizen volunteers about their feelings towards the community space. The participant was supported with his shot choices through a participatory editing process that saw him produce a shot list, which was then assembled by myself in a final edit. At Basir's own instigation, volunteers and participants were interviewed exclusively by him issuing questions in English, and their responding in their preferred languages—Farsi, Arabic, Kurdish, English and French—and these interviews were later translated by a local charity, the Northern England Refugee Service (NERS). The resulting film was screened at a local gallery space in November 2019.

Basir videoing a volunteer, August 2019

A still of the completed seven-minute video project is included at the beginning of this section. Basir's video clearly draws on ideas of community and solidarity as evidenced in his shot selection and the language used by his interviewees, where there is evidence that the participants are engaging as performatively as Basir himself. He approached his friends at the centre—the Kurdish and Iranian speakers, primarily, though also British citizen volunteers with whom he had a pre-existing relationship—and spoke to them in English or Farsi (depending on their preferred language) while they cooked, or undertook gardening, or were preparing for lunch. In the interviews, the participants speak apparently naturally into the camera, as you would to a peer, though they also appear nervous about where the video might be viewed, hesitating, and glancing to Basir for his approval as they speak. The cutaways—shots inserted into these talking head sections—show participants actively engaged in activities around the centre and have apparently been chosen to convey an almost idyllic communal life. The garden is framed as empty, tranquil, lusciously green, and the camera is handheld and circles the participants as they work. Participants are observed smiling and laughing in groups and at play; shots of a Kurdish asylum seeker playing with children as others chat in the background are redolent of a degree of communal familiarity and ease.

The participants are obliging, and it's worth noting the similarities of their speech in Basir's video to the language used on the centre's website. The centre's website describes a 'safe, welcoming environment,' which promotes personal wellbeing through a sense of 'place and belonging…listening, sharing and inclusion.'[19] These words evoke the idea of people from different nations being welcomed and listened to, something the participants seemingly choose to identify with—in notable contradistinction to the unhumanitarian legalistic framework beyond those walls. 'I am very happy in this gathering,' says Hashem when interviewed by Basir in the video. 'It is now two years that I've been in Britain. For the last year and a half I am coming. It is a very nice gathering. I benefit a lot and have fun. There are a lot of events and excursions that in which I take part. I am very happy and thank them very much for this.' Another participant addresses the audience as 'friends,' using collective nouns like 'everyone,' and emphasising the concept of 'welcoming,' This participant makes himself equivalent to his audience, appealing to a universal discourse of humanitarianism, human rights, and mutual

[19] In one way the participants are drawing here on an imagined community beyond the limits of their friendship group, one itself drawing on the discourses of humanitarianism (Norton & Kamal, 2003; Anderson, 1991).

respect. His statement that it's good to 'meet people from different countries' is similar to the project website's language around diversity and integration, itself redolent of politically liberal discourses 'that attempt to sustain contemporary liberal "commonplaces" such as difference, equality of opportunity and reducing inequality' (Kilby et al., 2013). Such ideas were rearticulated by centre staff in their discussions with me, and at communal lunches, to which visitors are welcomed and invited to share stories. The language choices and sentence construction that I have highlighted here portray the centre as a place of welcoming, but also where people might be encouraged to pursue their interests, provided these are in line with the centre's ideals.

As mentioned, Basir chose to interview people himself, indicating that he did not need help. However, his mediated voice, in terms of the kinds of responses he encouraged—he chose the interviewees, designed the questions, framed their answers, and had control over the final edit—was clearly aligned with the centre's aims. This triangulated with how I observed Basir's behaviour in the centre, which was different from our conversations in private or with his friend and compatriot Bijan.

Like all the texts seen in this chapter, the video was notable in terms of what it *excluded* or remained silent about: overt critique of the British authorities (e.g., the Home Office), solidarity with a country of origin, explicit personal details of places or names. The specific dynamics of these tensions and restrictions were contingent on the participants' situations. Some avoided discussing the past because they wanted to focus on the future, effectively using their stories as messages of self-esteem, as in Basir's case. Others were more careful in what they communicated to me for fear of jeopardising their asylum claims. 'It's difficult,' said another participant, from Senegal, when I asked him about participating with Basir's project. The participant remained pointedly silent when asked to participate, but later privately expressed fears of racism within European society.

Basir was close friends with Bijan, an Iranian project leader at the centre, on whom he often relied to translate material into English. When I met the two of them outside the centre, they would joke together in Farsi and discuss more honestly the difficulties they faced daily—their problems at college and in pursuit of their careers, their mental health problems, their lack of support from local government—but these conversations were uncommon during formal activities at the centre. It was clear that Bijan was sceptical about social and institutional media—'it's nonsense'; 'they make up lies'; 'it's too focused on celebrity'—while insisting that he did not want to be seen as a victim—'we want to forget about the past.' However, in 'forgetting about the past' it is clear that 'the future' is defined along particular dimensions of identity construction and (self-)representation: congeniality, gratefulness, openness, which avoid any obvious critique of the British polity. The construction of the idealised 'grateful' refugee subject denies refugees their individualism, history, and historical consciousness (Malkki, 1996). In keeping with this lack, in more intimate settings, and in his admissions to me, Basir was open about his performativity.

Basir[20] was always clear about the limits to what he would and wouldn't speak about. He did not offer up details of his past, instead focusing on 'hopes for the future.' 'We don't like talking about our stories, many of us suffer from mental health difficulties, so we try to forget,' he told me, as a proviso for his participation, saying he preferred to maintain his 'positive state of mind.' He also did not explicitly offer up details of how he had arrived to the UK, or his asylum claim—in contrast to some of the much more personal stories which we have seen offered up as micropublicness, which more explicitly reflected participants' specific rights claims.

With projects meant for broader audiences—Basir's video was edited and shown to local audiences as part of a group exhibition—participants are careful about the kinds of voice they express. These might, for example, be official discourses of welcoming that avoid any ambivalence. Beyond media, the participants are more openly critical of their circumstances. Thus, we again see differences relating to performative voice inside and outside the officially sanctioned voices of these processes. Some of these voices are conventionally welcoming, some of them are more conversational and critical beyond the media text itself.

(Self-)Representations of Entrepreneurialism and Silencing

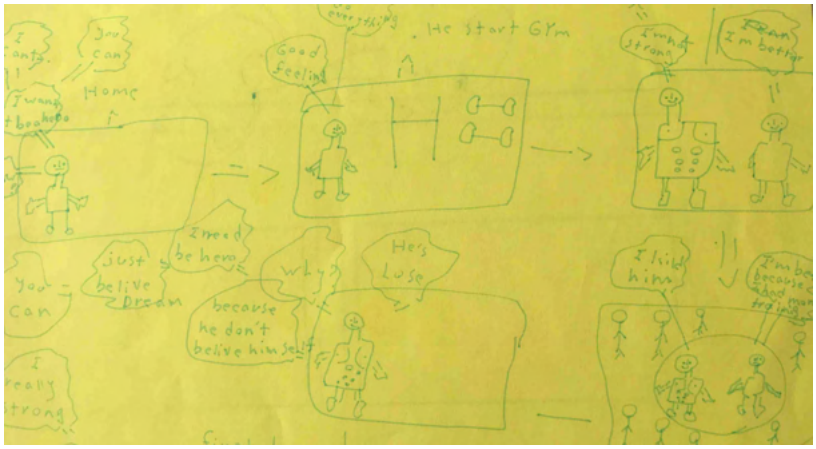
Extract from co-produced participant storyboard, January 2020

As I continue to investigate mesopublicness, I now turn to Basir's second creative mediation project, on wrestling. The way he spoke about wrestling clearly performatively engendered—and echoed, not necessarily causally, but certainly in common with—a spirit of neoliberally favoured competition and entrepreneurism, combined with a communal sense of helpfulness. I will discuss the content of interviews with Basir that came after the session, along with contextual information about his participation in this self-representation project, before going on to analyse his self-representation directly.

'I like wrestling because wrestling helps you,' Basir said, when interviewed several months after the project, reflecting back on why he chose this topic to discuss. 'It's a big opportunity to help yourself, to fight with a problem in your life. Because when you go to wrestling you have to fight with other people; it's good for making you strong. I want to be a good wrestler and be a champion, I hope. If I am a champion I will be a big motivation and I can help other people. I wish in my life to be helpful, this is my dream.'

[20] Iranian men were the most common asylum seekers I encountered in the two cities where I completed my fieldwork. There has been a spike in asylum applications from Iran in recent years due to a government crackdown on political orientation, illegal asset confiscation by the state, heavy-handed religious control, and the danger of persecution due to sexual orientation (Arian, 2019).

During the fieldwork period, Basir attended wrestling practice in Tyneside several times a month, and often described the wrestlers he admired in Iran, showing me multimedia imagery of Iranian wrestling on his mobile phone. He described it as something useful to his self-esteem—thus, a point of unmediated recognition, along the specific dimensions as described—and he enjoyed going to the gym, entering into training and travelling to regional competitions, in spite of the occasional injury that interrupted his training schedule. He could sometimes be conflicted about his passion, mainly because other centre participants, particularly men, teased him about it. However, when speaking on his own with me he took it seriously, and would describe it as an endeavour that required substantial mental and physical stamina and agility. When asked what he'd like to express, if he had the choice to express anything through creative mediation, he chose to describe a wrestling competition through a drawn storyboard sketch, because he felt this encapsulated a conflict between winning and losing that was significant to him.



Basir original storyboard, July 2019

In further descriptions of wrestling in Tyneside, Basir drew a map to show where he lived in relation to the gym, his college and the community centre—the most important places to him locally at that point. He then created a short storyboard with cartoon figures expressing a conflict about strength and weakness, and about triumphing over adversity. It begins with a hero—not a person explicitly named Basir but an unnamed everyman—apparently struggling with self-doubt. He goes to a gym, where he feels empowered, enters a competition and comes up against a more accomplished opponent. The hero loses the initial rounds because he lacks self-belief. Eventually, after continuing to move between self-doubt and self-belief, the latter emotion wins out, and he is crowned winner.

> "I can't" / "You can" / "I want to be a hero" / "How" / "I can do everything" / "Good feeling" / "He start gym" / "Look at him" / "I'm no strong" / "I'm better" / Competition / "I killed him" / "I'm better because I had many training" / "He's lost." / "Why" / "Because he don't believe in himself" / "I need be hero" / "Just believe dream" / "You can" / "I really strong" / "I can be winner"/ Final day, he's winner/ If you want to be a hero you just need to believe yourself and follow your dream.

We must be cautious about mapping Western discourses onto an Iranian participant's narratives; consequently, the following themes are tentatively included as redolent of, if not directly influenced by a Western, normative perspective. Basir did indicate in our conversations that he enjoyed Western professional wrestling and action films, though he did not directly say that he was drawing upon them as influences here.

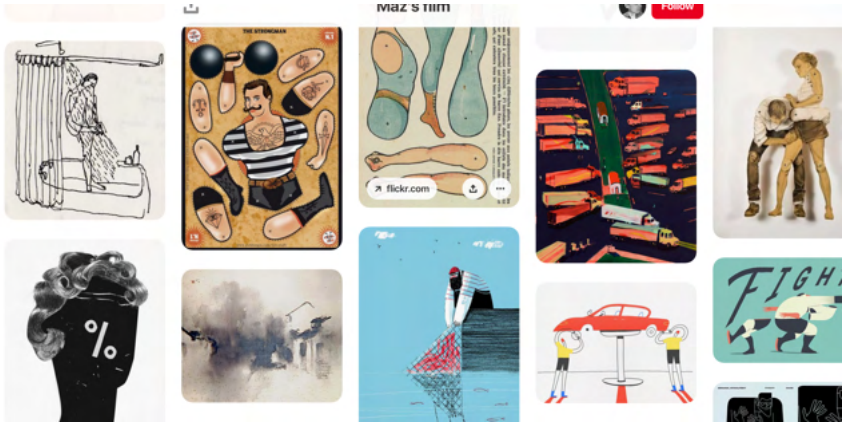
Basir's storyboard does not discuss his own or the protagonist's professional career, family or citizenship—instead it takes the tone of a parable, showing the hero as someone who learns to believe in themselves by effectively taking responsibility for their own progress. Clearly, the participant's call to 'believe in a dream,' and to link self-betterment with self-improvement echoes the competitive nature of sport (Davies, 2014)—though it is also redolent of normative Western discourse around sporting prowess and masculinity. The choice of words—'hero,' 'I killed him,' 'winner,' 'dream,' 'strong'—could easily fall into a logic of masculinity and heroism, as well as multifarious Westernised discourses about 'rugged individualism, an adventurous spirit, risk taking, displays of physical prowess and a high degree of personal autonomy' (Holt &Thompson, 2004, p. 26). Equally, this language could draw upon his experiences of Iranian professional wrestling and its transnational mediation. Thus, the participant, through his 'performative refugeeness', does not neatly fit into one order over another. Instead, he is ambiguously negotiating between these transnational cultural discourses, his British audience, and his own biography and experiences, with all of these providing the context to his self-representation in the moment of its creative mediation.

Basir's account of wrestling is clearly highly gendered, both in terms of goals and its employment of discourses describing embodied competition. There are clear similarities between this account and Lieblich et al.'s (1998) interviews and narrative analysis of stories told to them by migrants to Israel (p. 95), in which some young men felt they had matured and developed by assuming adult responsibilities after plunging into highly challenging situations. Basir's work does not refer to his own struggles, but instead takes his hero on a journey of self-empowerment.

Unfortunately, while these so-called 'successful' outputs gained audiences through exhibition, other self-representations, while equally valuable, were excluded. For example, in my first session with Basir, which was a group session, Issac, a man from Eritrea, began copying out prose he had looked up on his phone in Tigrinya—written in Ethiopic script, and thus difficult for me to translate. We were able to communicate about the contents of the sessions in French, but Issac declined the prompts and decided to produce work in his way. Because of the absence of a Tigrinya translator either on site or in Tyneside, the immediate contents of this Tigrinya text was not available until after the session. The mediation refers to Saint Michael, a Catholic saint.

> Saint Michael Archangel deliver us // We do us your will Saint Mickle // Don't stay away from us // So that the devil won't swallow us // The angel of Mercy // Come with an Epistle of Mercy // Come with an Angel of Mercy // Protect us from them! Amen

The text—which essentially prays for protection from devilish entities—is a version of the prayer to Saint Michael from the Eritrean Catholic church. I got to know Issac a little through our discussions around the centre and the photographs he showed me of his wife and family in Eritrea. He was an asylum seeker who, I later learned, did not have Leave to Remain and had received a letter from the Home Office seeking to deport him. He was sleeping on a friend's kitchen floor and had problems accessing the property. He had an equal grasp of English and French but was mainly fluent in Tigrinya. It is telling, therefore, that this participant's precarity limited his ability to contribute voice on a mesopublic level—largely because of the state's inability to protect him (although there was a language barrier, it was the state's inability to protect him that was more significant). Basir, on the other hand, had Leave to Remain, was more fluent in English, and was willing to mediate within normative forms of creativity. While these were the terms upon which voice was excluded from mesopublicness, Issac's decision was also agentive. It gave away as few details about his life as possible, but movingly, profoundly, and succinctly expressed his situation through a fragment of prayer. Thus, while this voice was not 'officially' included in media more broadly, it was an expression of voice all the same, insofar as it negotiated with the terms of hierarchical voice on offer and instead of aligning with them, rearticulated religious discourses of the participant's own choosing. It is clearly not a more conventional narrative like Basir's work; more of a prayer, Issac's text is a clear and distinct form of voice.



Moodboard project, Tyneside, Jan 2020

As we have moved through these processes of mesopublicness, we have seen how creative mediation projects are restricted by formal gatekeeping mechanisms that privilege particular forms of (self-)representation. Representations that do not engage with these easily identifiable Western norms, or are subject to precarity that undermines participation, are not heard by broader audiences, and instead engage in more complex forms of voice which reject or are ignored by the offer of mediated expression.

(Self-)Representational Appeals for Mutuality

Trip to Llanarch vineyard, Cardiff, July 2019

To continue with our understanding of mesopublicness, participants could be seen to appeal to a sense of mutuality within their self-representations, in ways that were absent at the micropublic level. I choose the term mutuality here to mean that participants are performatively appealing to a sense of sameness between themselves and audience-members. Rather than Honnethian solidarity, mutuality, following Jordan's (1991) definition, appeals to a subject's willingness to reveal their inner state, and valuing the process of knowing and learning about the other. It could thus be viewed as an *appeal* to recognition. Following our understanding of 'performative refugeeness', we can think of mutuality here also as a form of performed appeal to recognition, contingent on particular individuals' sense of affinity with a broader group; a sense of belonging (Van Leeuwen, 2007). As Van Leeuwen (2007) writes, 'the sense of belonging, is experienced by most people as crucial to their wellbeing' (p. 199). In this case, Jamshid's 'performative refugeeness' extended to his self-representations on his social media channels. As with the other examples of media as mesopublicness, Jamshid's work was exhibited at a local art gallery in Cardiff.

I met with Jamshid frequently in Cardiff, and we often grabbed lunch together. A middle-class building surveyor in his fifties from Shiraz, Iran, he was seeking asylum in the UK. We were introduced in July 2019 by Martha, a centre employee who initially acted as a gatekeeper while Jamshid and I built trust between us. He asked me if I could help fix a problem with his mobile phone, which I did, and our relationship progressed from there. He was a tall man who frequently smiled, and was often immediately visible at the centre due to his height and friendliness. As our relationship developed, Jamshid discussed his interests in winemaking and travelling. At first these discussions were personal; later, their subjects were extended into various creative mediations. He was obviously a well-known member of the Iranian community at the centre, clearly trusted by centre staff to engage with external partners.

As we got to know each other, Jamshid and I worked together in the centre's kitchen; we played chess together; he taught me some basic Farsi; I helped him fill out various forms of administrative correspondence. He was often in demand, volunteering for multiple activities simultaneously, and sometimes cancelling one in favour of another. He told me he volunteered so much because he got bored, and he tried to keep active

beyond the constant correspondence with his lawyers around his asylum application, which he found understandably stressful.

The work he produced in our creative mediation sessions was composed in Farsi and English, and in total comprised a participatory storyboard, film, and text portraying his love of viticulture in Iran—an illegal practice there for Muslims (Matthee, 2005). Our collaboration also included a participatory videomaking trip to Llanerch vineyard outside Cardiff. In conversation and in his texts he described the vineyard in his own words, as providing him the opportunity to compare winemaking practices in the UK with those in Iran[21]. In the latter, he had made wine to celebrate Nowruz (Persian New Year) with his family, and this had landed him in trouble with the authorities.

He seemed hesitant about the purpose of the creative mediation sessions, and was disinterested in and mistrustful of institutional media (as we will see in Chapter 6, many participants' experiences of institutional media in their country of origin often coloured their view towards all mediation). However, he was clearly interested in his hobby of making wine. It was something he spoke about with some enthusiasm, and often augmented our discussions by referring back to pictures of wine and viticulture on his mobile phone. When we discussed the possibility of exhibiting his media at the local art gallery, he was keen to participate; this is partly due to our discussing how he had control over how and what media he could produce.

Our trip to the vineyard took place in August 2019. I hired a car and the drive each way took around an hour, during which we made small talk. Jamshid seemed to feel that the effort I was making necessitated his opening up and telling me about his situation, though this was not something I explicitly asked for. He told me he had not seen his wife and child for nine months, and that he hadn't spoken to his family in three days because the police had taken their computers and phones, as well as books from his personal library. Because of my ethical consent process, in which I avoided causing undue stress, I didn't press him on the circumstances around this. He said Iran is 'bad to its people' and 'bad to the rest of the world.' We went on the tour of the vineyard, looked at winemaking processes there, which I had arranged and paid for, and I translated for him when necessary. He also tasted the wine (which I did not). With his permission, I showed the video he made on the trip to his friends, other Iranians in the centre.

> You are not allowed to buy wine in Iran. In Iran, I bought grapes from the garden to make wine. I completely dried the grapes for two hours on the roof of the house in the sun….my purpose in making wine was that it existed in ancient Iranian traditions. We use this in ancient Iranian celebrations like Yalda Night, and Nowruz. At Yalda Night, we go to see great family members, gathering there, telling poetry and storytelling, as well as at Nowruz's ancient celebrations, which are in the early spring. I kept some of the wine for

[21] He later expanded his original texts for the local exhibition in Cardiff, shown during November 2019.

> my son's wedding. which was unfortunately seized by the agents who stormed into my house. Most Iranians use [other] drinks. I think wine is better because of its naturalness.
>
> Today with Rob we came to a vineyard, and here they plant the seed, harvesting and making wine; and it was a very beautiful and astonishing garden, and it was very different to the gardens in Iran. The situation here was somehow like mechanisation but in Iran they do it in traditional ways. In Iran it is very traditional and here it is very mechanised. It was very beautiful sightseeing and we enjoyed a lot. Unfortunately in Iran making wine or any other alcoholic beverage is illegal. And government wouldn't allow it. But here you can make it freely and go to the market. And whoever likes it can use it and consume it. The one who doesn't like it won't use it. I see no problem in it being allowed. Here everything is free; a person can use it and enjoy it.

In these two versions of the same text, the participant is clearly constructing his identity around the cultural practice of winemaking, and its ability to unite people across national boundaries. This is underlined in a number of ways. First, in speaking to me on camera, he explicitly linked viticulture practices in Iran and the UK, while also comparing their differences: e.g., mechanisation versus 'traditional ways'; the housing of grapes in threaded rows versus earth-bound heaps; harvesting methods (by hand, or by machine); and the orientation of vines in relation to the sun.

Second, there is a focus on the cultural practice itself. While much of the detail in Jamshid's stories focuses on the technical details of wine making—how grapes should be harvested, stored, and fermented—this process is then placed within a broader cultural context and centred around family. By presenting the family in an almost entirely positive light—they are 'great,' they celebrate together with stories and poems—the stories suggest that winemaking is a cultural practice that helps build community, and that this knowledge can transcend political boundaries. However, we also see clear instances of Jamshid self-censoring when he uses the same kind of binary discourses that appear in the work of other asylum seekers. For example, in his videomaking project, he represents Iran as being universally bad and repressive, while the UK is shown as exclusively good: 'Here everything is free, a person can use it and enjoy it.' This is clearly an example of a creative mediation practice being used to define the participant's identity alongside particular axes, using a performative mediation of mutuality, in order to appeal to broader audiences. Jamshid later copied the text out in Farsi, and it was exhibited at a local gallery, along with a translation.

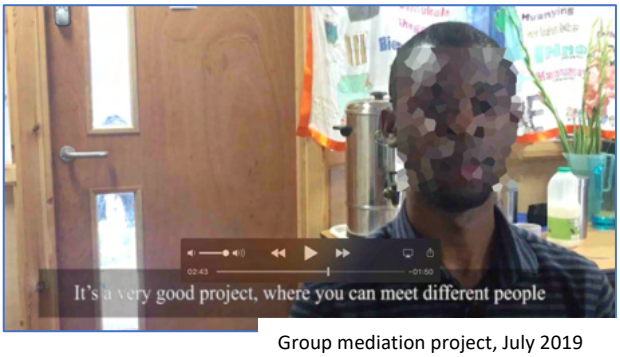
As with other participants, there was a keen distinction between the voice Jamshid expressed within this text, and in our daily interactions. As our relationship developed, he was keen to engage me in conversations focused on personal photographs of Iran stored on his mobile phone. He showed me pictures of his son, and of himself in various situations: travelling by Jeep through remote rural areas, growing wine, socialising with friends, and wearing a hard hat at work as a structural surveyor. Other photos showed him on organised trips in and around the centre where we met. These pictures – at famous tourist landmarks in Wales and England,

including Buckingham Palace – showed me a quick and clear picture of his life, which he later expressed as a way of demonstrating a positive attitude towards his relationship to British society. He also showed me photographs he had posted to Instagram (as with many of the participants, we followed each other on Instagram and were in regular contact on WhatsApp). These shared digital moments had an ancillary purpose, contributing to our mutual trust, built as they were outside formal channels. Digital communication often replaced face-to-face conversation for the sake of convenience, and Jamshid frequently turned to Google Translate to make himself clear; such moments of translation, occurring in real time, were central to our relationship.

Jamshid's Instagram posts often showed him smiling and visiting various landmarks in London and around South Wales—posing, issuing a 'thumbs up.' Significantly, they did not show anything of his life at the centre, where he spent most of his time, his volunteer activities there, or his accommodation. They did not completely mirror the photographs he would show me offline. This suggested that his performativity extended to forms of mediation and voice beyond institutional settings, to transnational publicness with family and friends.

Jamshid's asylum application was rejected by the Home Office in summer 2019 and he later successfully initiated an appeal on the grounds of being a minority Christian. When his asylum application was approved in November 2019, it was gratifying to see his wife and son appear in photographs online in the UK, though again there were obvious lacuna in what he was willing to show—the bureaucracy of dealing with lawyers, the poor accommodation, the boredom of waiting at the centre (Pottie et al., 2020). Unlike Basir, he did talk to me sparingly about his circumstances prior to arrival in the UK, but his trust was hard won, and may have related to the additional time we spent together beyond the centre's walls.

Patterns of expression are emerging from these individual case studies: participants' voices were markedly different within and beyond media texts, with participants being more open about their precarity when speaking in person. Frequently, the precarity of their circumstances obstructed participants from reaching broader audiences. Voices were articulated through numerous different genres and forms—written text, video, and audio—within and beyond narrative. So, although voice was restricted for various reasons, including precarity, these creative media did afford participants the opportunity to express themselves in more complex ways than the linear dominant voices seen in mainstream media, even when they rearticulated similar discourses.



Group mediation project, July 2019

Other participants, such as Victor, who I turn to here, demonstrated *the extent to which reflexivity around performativity could occur* within creative mediation. He did this by expressing different facets of the transnational rearticulation of mutuality to those seen above. Victor expressed mutuality not so much through descriptions of cultural practices, as by explicitly defining the mutuality itself within his text. As such, *reflexivity through creative mediation* is observed at different levels of publicness in these creative processes.

Victor was from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). He had been close to his mother, who died in the DRC some years earlier. He wanted the opportunity to reflect on his views on the expectations people have of themselves as they grow up, seek a career, and move through life. He indicated that pursuing a creative mediation project enabled him to come to terms with his mother's death, and to mediate the lessons he had learned. 'The work that we did, with reality, I think of my own mother who gave me life, she was close to me and I didn't know that one day she was going to disappear,' he said, referring to our sessions together when he was interviewed about it afterwards. 'The work we have done, it makes people to think about life, because when you look at life and face it, it is not exactly what you think, losing a close person or precious one, a beloved mother, it is one of the inspirations.' Thus, the participant's expression, in his own words, is an attempt to seek connection through the universalisation of his experience.

We met at the Tyneside institution in July 2019. Victor was affable within the centre, and did not mention the experiences of his life elsewhere, although I knew he had been suffering from depression, at times, and had been feeling isolated, which he communicated to me in moments of despondency. He often drew attention to the precarity of his political situation. Despite his amenability to our sessions, his psychological precarity often precluded his meeting at certain times – he would often not offer a reason for this (and why should he). When we met, he frequently described how he modulated his conversations with others in order to integrate. 'You have to learn to talk about the weather in Britain, as it's what the British do,' he once told me, with a shrug. In his view, it was obligatory for him to conform in this way; he did not perceive it as *his choice*. However, he was one of the first people to sign up to our mediation sessions, suggesting that he may have seen participation in our mediation work as being dutifully helpful. He was curious, and sat with me patiently while I explained the project in French. He took my explanations literally and completed our first storyboard task together almost immediately.

> Hello, I'm going to talk about the life of a man. The life of a man is very short and one of ceaseless movement. And then the experiences of reality of life. When we are born it doesn't take long. A man leaves home for his belief and development. After a while he changes to embrace student life. And school, and eventually you have to go and embrace a professional career. And that is also a challenge. After that you have to start a home or family and that also goes too quick. And finally, the final destination which is also a mystery. Which represents the end of every man, no matter the successes or achievements he may have made. No matter his race or social class. No matter all the man has become or achieved. He will arrive at a reality no one can avoid, which is called death. This constitutes the life of a man of which we are speaking. It is truly short and in constant movement.

To a Western reader, the text is not an individual's narrative but a generalised comment or summary on what unifies people. Rather than 'my life,' phrases such as 'the life of a man,' or 'every man' seem to establish the unifying properties of life—family, education, work, death—as opposed to characteristics that might distinguish people, such as names or specific details. This fits with Victor's explanation that it was an attempt to make sense of his mother's death in a universal way. He uses clear, generalisable language which is universal ('travail…homme…defils') and lacks cultural specificity.

At no point in this session does Victor refer to the character in the first person, nor to his own asylum case or mental health. When he drew a storyboard, he used generic stick figures to represent people at different stages of their lives. Such reflexivity allows the participant to subvert straightforward descriptions of victimhood into a manifesto of equivalence. With this work, Victor has refused to be drawn into an individualistic representation of success and entrepreneurialism; instead, he seeks to collectivise responsibility and *experience itself*. In this sense, Victor's chosen methods subvert the debate between massification and individualisation we see in parts of the mainstream media—collectivity and solidarity are extended here to mutuality.

I would like to end this section with one last mediation project, which also appealed to ideas of mutuality. I include it here because the participant is *directly discussing 'performative refugeeness' itself*. Kamran, an Iranian man, was introduced to me over lunch one day by another participant from Iran. We met only briefly that day, but he was part of a small group of men from Iran in Cardiff with whom I had already worked extensively, and they had discussed my research with him. He wanted to produce a project, he said in a message to me, 'that told the truth about refugees.' We produced a storyboard together over two sessions. We later reconvened for a third session when I returned to Cardiff in October 2019 to produce material for an exhibition at a gallery in the city. The participant was keen to contribute, and brought his wife along to the session to translate for him. He recomposed his original material, adding text to it and reconfiguring his drawings when we met at consecutive sessions.

> At one point in this globe there is a land with all its beauties missing a word and that word is free. Women in black cloth, men in stress and anger, and kids never have the joy of childhood, and the city has a cold face as if its beauty is always autumn. There is a young boy, watching scenes of freedom in a secluded house, determined to leave his land and pursue his dreams. He is facing many difficulties in this way, such as crossing a very cold tent between the borders and violent clashes with the border police and crossing land and high seas until he reaches the land. Her wishes come true. Where everyone is free, they can think, act and live. He sees a city where women are free, men laugh, and the sun shines, but he is not a happy man because he is lonely and thinks he is not here. It takes days for this young man to go through life and grow old to realize that the earth is for someone who is looking for freedom[22].

The participant emphasised the negative and authoritarian aspects of his home country, and framed the appeal of the UK as imaginary Utopia. He ends his text by saying that 'the earth is for someone looking for freedom,' alluding to freedom of movement beyond legal and political boundaries. In this way his text implicitly functioned as a rights claim. But he also drew attention to the fictive quality of this imaginary ideal to emphasise its contrast to the material boundaries he and his friends have faced in reality. In doing so, Kamran explicitly converted his voice, as expressed here, from a naïve one into a reflexive and self-aware account of imaginary or performed motivations.

As before, he was not explicitly critical of the British government, but drew attention to the arbitrary and fictional construct of the (un)deserving asylum seeker, both in the media and elsewhere, to present a more nuanced account of life before and after asylum. This acts in effect as an authorial deconstruction of the protagonist's imaginary narrative: the central character is not happy when he reaches his destination. Instead, he is lonely and alienated after migrating. Life is described as 'looking for freedom,' a universal human desire that is not sated by political membership. The participant does not individualise who he is referring to in the text, mirroring the collectivity and appeals to mutuality we have seen elsewhere. This text, then, refers reflexively to the idea that refugees are not merely individuals, but instead are subject to generalised desires and problems, a performative and reflexive understanding of mutuality that finds broader expression as mesopublicness.

These discourses are mirrored in the storyboard's pictorial descriptions, which feature binary depictions of home versus imaginary migrant life: protagonists with dream bubbles, hoping for a better world; Iran shrouded in a hellish dust; a woman in a hijab, symbolising unhappiness; an attacking police officer in a stark and oppressive-looking uniform; the refugee encampment. All of these descriptive images are in contrast to the happy, heteronormative couple with a child at the text's culmination. The tropes and symbols employed echo the mainstream media's homogenising representation of refugees as victims, crossing the Mediterranean

[22] This is a second, expanded version of this text, which the participant prepared for exhibition. An earlier version used a storyboard, including annotated sketches of the scenes as described.

and sleeping rough, even though many of the asylum seekers I worked with arrived in Britain by air. Kamran thus actively draws attention to the fantastical qualities of these cultural and mediated narratives—and instead presents a critical commentary that is alert to the difficulty of expressing voice in such regulated circumstances.

We have seen in this section how, within mesopublicess, participants employed discourses that conveyed mutuality in a variety of ways, using highly technical vocabularies as well as complex existentialist texts that framed the experience of refugeeness as an unrealised hope. Throughout the chapter, voices are seen to employ varied, highly dynamic, and affective modes of writing, within and beyond narrative. We will see other voices emerging as we move through the next two chapters, including participants who contest the terms of the voices they are offered; embodied forms of teaching that seek a promise of solidarity; and collective, negotiated forms of voice between groups of friends. These will contribute to a broadening of what we understand voice to mean.

Conclusion

Within the creative media projects described here, even though the processes operated with the promise of providing a voice, voices were only heard along the logics of particular neoliberal systems—the same neoliberal systems in which mainstream media operates to victimise and stereotype migrants and refugees (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017; Ehmer, 2017). It was my intention to show how and where these voices found expression, and under what conditions, in these community spaces; not to indicate proof of a direct causal relationship between this neoliberal system and participant behaviour, but rather to argue for the huge number of commonalities between a system which on the one hand denies refugees their voice in institutional media, while simultaneously limiting their forms of expression in the very kinds of media that promise to counteract that exclusion. In describing the contexts for the self-representation workshops, I hoped to extend our understanding of how voice finds expression in such contexts—not just in the workshops, but in the ephemeral interactions, refusals, and conversations that take place around them.

It has long been known that people seeking asylum actively seek out opportunities to relate the 'realities of lived experience' outside the formal testimony setting of the interview room and beyond a formal workshop setting (Whitlock, 2008), and one of my principal arguments is that such moments should be considered as pertinent opportunities for voice. Such opportunities include rejecting the terms of voice on offer, rejecting the promise of voice entirely, or expressing voice as a statement of precarity. Along the axis from micropublicness to macropublicness, various (self-)representations are silenced—those not adhering to a normative Western understanding of creativity, for instance—by gatekeepers who impose their own neoliberally defined logics.

What united the vast majority of these creative mediation projects was that the participants often rearticulated rights and liberty claims—the right to have rights (Arendt 1949), and the right to freedom of

choice—both in oral testimony (i.e., informal interviews) and in their own creative mediation work. These claims were often expressed implicitly in the projects, while most participants spoke more freely outside the creative mediation sessions. Texts sometimes used generalised language, descriptions, and statements of fact, with participants exhibiting varying levels of certainty and reflexivity. This reflexivity indicated a degree of distance between the idea and identity of the refugee as performed (Häkli et al, 2017), and participant identities beyond the sessions. This distance manifested in different ways across different kinds of publicness.

Once again, it is important to note the lack of macropublicness in this chapter. While voice emerges locally and regionally, broader expression at a national level were largely absent, at least within the participatory approach of this study—an unavoidable limitation of my approach, as we were not able to secure national platforms for these self-representations. We will see that there were opportunities for voices to be expressed and recognised through institutionally mediated processes run by others— e.g., partnerships with larger media and cultural institutions which had prior links with the centres—in Chapters 5 and 6, though as we will see, these alliances came with caveats around the nature of voice, recognition, and opportunity on offer. So, we have seen how these practices provided voice for participants along particular dimensions. The extent to which the participants felt they were recognised by these expressions, and how, is the subject of Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: (Mis-)Recognition through Publicness

Introduction

Open weekend workshops, Tyneside, Jan 2020

Having looked at the ways refugee voices find expression, I now turn to the question of whether or not these voices are recognised, with the intent of adding some much-needed empirical data to how recognition is experienced by refugees. I will focus on the recognition and misrecognition of refugees as these become relevant within the three levels of publicness I have already identified: micro, meso, and macro. As the chapter progresses, we will see synergies emerge with the findings on self-representation in the previous chapter. Building on that work, this chapter will discuss and analyse recognition, as observed in fieldwork, through Honneth's (1992; 2007) three-pronged approach to individual and social recognition, and its effects: self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem (as described in Chapter 3), along with van Leeuwen's (2007) concept of 'difference-respect'. While there is necessarily some overlap with my previous exploration of voice, I will try to keep repetition to a minimum. My focus here is not so much on the kinds of voice expressed, *as whether or not participants felt recognised, or their voices were acknowledged*. Examples are drawn from within and outside the creative workshop sessions. While this chapter focuses on recognition of refugee voices at the same field sites, I have tried also to focus on additional examples to those in Chapter 4.

Before I embark on empirical discussion and analysis, I will rearticulate Honneth's concept of recognition: here, I understand self-confidence as being related to people's ability to express their needs and desires, safe in the knowledge they are surrounded by a sphere of unconditional love and emotional concern. Love is defined as emotional concern for the well-being and needs of a person (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 182). Self-respect is exemplified by an individual's sense of having equal rights with others, and thus being publicly recognised as someone with an equal degree of moral accountability as everyone else—in the case of refugees, 'everyone else' refers to those who have citizenship status. Respect entails the recognition of this equal moral accountability, and is expressed in the moral and legal right to personal autonomy and the right to shape one's own life without being held back by the state, organisations, or other people. Finally, self-esteem is the positive self-evaluation of one's own particular abilities. So, esteem is the evaluation of particular traits and abilities against the background of societal standards of evaluation that are mostly implicit. Usually, these are normative standards of what is estimable; e.g., particular values that align with contributions to social good. Socially, this is manifested through solidarity, whereby people esteem each other's contributions to particular

shared goals. Misrecognition within this category leads to a denigration or denial of other people's ways of life (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 183).

To this I will add van Leeuwen's (2007) own dimension of recognition, 'difference-respect,' as described in Chapter 2. To clarify, 'difference-respect' is concerned with values that are identified as being important to a culture within a social group while not being required to be important 'to society' (van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 189). Further, 'difference-respect' involves recognising a culture's intrinsic value to the social group involved in a non-evaluative fashion (i.e., *without* holding them up to shared normative standards). As discussed in my theoretical chapter, recognition can help participants claim status as equal members of a community, 'partners in interaction' rather than people who must assimilate into normative neoliberal ways of life (e.g. economic contribution), in order to claim the rights due to them on human rights grounds (Georgiou, 2019). The extent to which recognition accompanies different degrees of publicness will be examined.

I will begin the chapter by discussing (mis-)recognition in micropublicness—as it relates to processes observed in the social spaces of the community centres—before moving on to examples of (mis-)recognition in mesopublicness as manifested in regional organisations. In this case, mesopublicness involves recognition by communities beyond the intimate environments of the community centre or workshop spaces, through a public exhibition, for instance. The chapter concludes with an analysis of macropublicness with regards to self-representations remediated through the presence or absence of recognition in institutional media geared towards national audiences. As we will see, despite the apparent neatness of this tripartite structure, hierarchies of recognition were observed both *between* levels of publicness and *within* them. As observed in the previous chapter, many refugees faced difficulties securing recognition beyond micropublicness. Therefore, in order to record meso- and macropublicness, I refer to existing texts on creative mediation in the centres where I conducted my studies.

Love and Solidarity through Mutual Endeavour as Micropublicness

Recognition within intimate contexts like my workshops, or the participatory creative work scheduled daily at the centres, was primarily experienced by participants through love and solidarity from their peers, centre staff, volunteers, and myself. I have illustrated this here with a series of vignettes from my participant observation.

In an interview with Basir in January 2020, in which he expanded on his comments in Chapter 4, he described the benefit to his state of mind of creative mediation as being partly due to its facilitation of his capacity to help others—thus reflecting a set of shared normative liberal values.

> I find the [Centre] and I joined them. It's a good place, a friendly place like a second home. We call it second home there are good and friendly people here. It's a good place….I wish in my life to be helpful, this is my dream. —Basir

Basir expressed his sense of familial belonging to this 'second home' as being reciprocal—he received the de facto love of this stand-in family, and was able to support others in turn as part of a shared endeavour. He does not refer to formal legal rights—such as his right to work or study—in these interviews. His concerns over a lack of these formal rights are only expressed privately, away from institutional settings, when we converse on the telephone, or meet up for coffee away from the centre. Beyond workshop settings, Basir is more open about the difficulties of his shift work, his language skills, and his desire to go to college once he is able to acquire an English language qualification.

In this sense, Basir's recognition is institutionally expressed along two of Honneth's normative dimensions, the first and third: love and solidarity. Outside his life at Centre B, Basir discusses his regular shift work at a local restaurant, difficulties with his mental health, and how hard it is to get a different, less precarious job. Basir is thus recognised and misrecognised in different ways simultaneously within micropublicness. This opens up the possibility that by providing love and solidarity, creative mediation offers a de facto replacement for other forms of recognition of which Basir is deprived, such as the right to secure work of his choosing.

Basir's sentiments were redolent of studies in which volunteering inspired the capacity to 'do good' rather than being simply a precursor to paid employment (Taylor, 2005), but we must be mindful here of their context within a framework of 'performative refugeeness'—that participants feel obliged to articulate discourses of helpfulness and gratefulness within institutional contexts where such values might be privileged. Certainly, gratefulness and helpfulness were encouraged by centre staff, who asked for help with volunteer work and hosted communal lunches where participants were encouraged to thank each other. When I left the centre in Tyneside on my final day of volunteering, for instance, participants applauded me for my help and presented me with a card that had been signed by them and pressed with flowers from the garden; when visitors came to lunch, the group was encouraged to thank them openly around the lunch table.

This ethos of welcoming was embedded in the work participants were encouraged to do when greeting people at the centre or inviting them to attend. For example, Bijan, a male refugee participant originally from Iran who also worked as a staff member in Tyneside, was charged with giving newly arrived volunteers and refugees a guided tour of the centre's garden. This included a polytunnel where the centre grew tomatoes and lettuce, an herb garden, and a football pitch. While such work was not aligned with Bijan's experience as a film student in Iran, he clearly gained feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem from it.

> I came to this country with my sister and my mother and if I was a rich man I would give all my money to the project because the world needs more places like this. When I came I couldn't work, I sat at home, I lost a lot of confidence because I didn't speak English so I came here and it gave me the opportunity to show my skills. Asylum seekers suffer from lots of problems like depression and anxiety and this gives them the opportunity to develop what they are doing and show they can do things. The main things we do are gardening and the arts programme. Later in the week they are going to give over parts of the

> garden to different countries, so different nationalities will have responsibility for different parts of their garden and they can bring their own vegetables and then they can keep them. We all have troubles, we have been through trouble, we don't want to just sit at home and think about it, it's good to get out and do something. —Bijan

This statement offers examples of Bijan's view of his own self-esteem as being connected to belonging. He contrasts losing confidence and being isolated by his inability to work or speak English with the agency he experiences when provided the opportunity to show his skills. He describes the centre as 'show[ing asylum seekers] they can do things,' exemplifying such agency. Thus he refers to a context where he is able to enact voice and be listened to through micropublicness.

As Bijan's words illustrate, the ability to do things is implicitly recognised as useful by the centre and the community around it, but on the centre's terms. Bijan describes his voice at the centre as a form of purpose to ameliorate self-esteem and to address mental health problems. This is in spite of his legal precarity (and therefore legal misrecognition), his lack of wealth, which limits the possibility of being part of this normative economic system, and his refugee status, which he associates with passivity and the need to be helped. Though he might *feel* this broader passivity as a result of societal regulation, the intimate recognition he receives at the centre both masks misrecognition and alleviates it. He heralds this recognition, which is experienced alongside the misrecognition that occurs around formal legal rights. As we will see, recognition and misrecognition through legal rights is felt broadly, at intimate as well as more expansive scales.

As shown by Bijan's words, and as I observed within the centres myself, gardening is a practice affiliated to creative mediation. Participants have some agency and opportunity to express their sense of self creatively through the selection of plants to grow and care for, albeit in a hybrid practice also associated with well-being and sustenance (Lee, 2014). Here, we see 'difference-respect' emerging through such practices—recognising the value of a culture to the culture involved, in this case based around sub-cultures of cooking and/or nationality. For example, I had numerous conversations with Beatriz, a Ghanaian chef, about her growing covo, a green vegetable similar to kale, grown in Zimbabwe and South Africa and transplanted to Tyneside. This was something she took pride in including in her cooking at the centre, warmly introducing me to it in shared meals, and making me liquidised covo as a bitter but refreshing morning drink.

Such horizons of solidarity through the labour of volunteering allowed participants to work in equivalent roles to British citizen volunteers, but also to teach them; to gain esteem through exhibiting competence and sharing their own knowledge (Szasz & Bailey, 2018). While working in the Tyneside garden over a number of weeks alongside a local volunteer there, I entered into the knowledge hierarchy between a British volunteer and an Eritrean participant, Gebre, as we all shared labour. During these sessions, I spoke to the British volunteer about the city and his own life. He told me that local charities provide small amounts of financial aid when some people's asylum claims are rejected, as people can often end up homeless. 'The government

hopes they'll just go home of their own accord,' he said. While we spoke, Gebre approached to oversee my work, indicating how to turn the soil over, which plants to leave intact, and how to notice and remove the delicate roots of strawberry plants by hand before using my spade. This was part of a longer process of care and mutual respect that continued over a number of days. So, while the British volunteer was *speaking for* the participant, because of the language barrier, unconsciously denying them the opportunity for voice, the participant responded in a quiet and embodied way: by taking over from me when I was weeding around the strawberry plants improperly, and showing me how to work properly. Thus, recognition here is intimate and ephemeral, but still important, even if it is framed and side-lined by the British citizen volunteer's voice. This form of 'knowledge exchange' mirrors contributions of refugee micropublicness seen in studies of community centres elsewhere (Guruge et al., 2015). The participant is expressing his resilience and independence, which exist outside the neoliberal language framework laid down by the British volunteer and the centre. The socially and politically powerful opportunities for voice and recognition—the framing of structural language around finance and law, the right to speak critically about the state—are occupied by the British citizen, whereas ephemeral, embodied moments of recognition are more important to the participant. In this situation the participant's individual skills are recognised, as a form of self-confidence and self-esteem, alongside 'difference-respect' for his abilities. However, while the participant is recognised in some ways, at the same time he is misrecognised by the British citizen's attempts to express solidarity in speaking for him, thereby unconsciously occupying his opportunity for voice, which results in a moment of misrecognition—of denigrating his way of life, or at least ignoring it. Thus, another multidimensional understanding of recognition—working antagonistically and complementarily in different ways at different points—emerges.

It is worth expanding here on my observations of how misrecognition sometimes accompanied performativity with respect to gratefulness. Participants were often on the receiving end of attempts at solidarity, but in ways that did not respect their values in other contexts *important to them*. A Kurdish participant, Sarya, discussed her self-esteem at the Tyneside centre as being centred on 'a replacement family' there, while also describing her need for legal recognition by the British state through the approval of her asylum claim.

> One of my kids went to Germany and the other to Sweden; if I had more time I would talk about right now what is going on. I am so happy I came here I found a new people, new friends, all in the Project and they are all helpful, I want to say thanks to the government to bring her to a safe place. I learn English with so many people from everywhere and that's really nice and helpful for me. —Sarya

Sarya referred here to a renewed sense of self-esteem and gratefulness, without mentioning the months she had spent in a refugee camp in Lebanon. I learned about the camp from speaking to her outside formal interviews and creative mediation sessions, and from her Kurdish friends and family, who also attended the centre. Again, in our formal sessions, her sense of recognition was clearly highly performative, and expressed in terms of thankfulness. 'I want to say thanks to the government,' she said—performatively enacting a

gratefulness that is customarily expected from newcomers in exchange for the fragile sanctuary offered by the asylum system (Jackson, 2020), without actually acknowledging their right to asylum. As we see later in this chapter, when Sarya was participating in broader creative mediation sessions with Kurdish women, she was a regular, enthusiastic, playful, and humorous participant, actively coordinating and encouraging the participation of others. This sense of self-confidence and self-esteem was often lost in individual mediation practices, where she felt compelled to solidify her thankfulness. However, recognition was able to emerge in more playful, messier ways congruent with a less linear and normative conception of voice, which certain forms of creative media or mediation could not facilitate.

Still life drawing, by Viyan, Tyneside, September 2020

Hierarchies of recognition were also expressed along gendered lines that were reinforced by some centre activities, for example those pertaining to memory. When a group of women took a tour of the garden, they were urged by a female facilitator to pick herbs as a prompt for their drawing workshops. The facilitator took four French and Arabic-speaking female participants to the project's polytunnel, where they picked fennel, mint, ginger and garlic. One participant, Babacar, said the fennel reminded her of her grandmother's chicken at home in Syria. Another participant, Viyan, a former nurse from the DRC, described how mint can be an effective analgesic. As part of our creative workshops in Tyneside, the participants took the herbs back to the centre and drew them. When the contents of this and other similar creative mediation projects (e.g., a collage produced by a group of Eritrean women at the behest of the centre) were analysed, their subjects revolved around domestic interiors and homemaking. These participants obviously rearticulated domestic discourses, e.g. through participants' sensory memories of ingredients associated with preparing meals for their families in their countries of origin. Here, recognition emerged through shared memories of mutual experiences that aligned with gendered divisions of labour.

Thus, these drawing workshops themselves were clearly forums for the participants to express recognition to each other, but they also reaffirmed particular stereotypical conditions. Those who did not engage in these activities did not enter these particular spaces of regulated love and esteem, but their expressions of recognition and belonging came out in other ways: in short conversations with each other at the edge of workshops, or on the telephone, in Kurdish, Farsi or French. Some women rejected the terms of the most

prominent forms of recognition available, preferring to sit at the edge of workshop sessions, either silently or conversing with each other. Such moments, which also expressed recognition but were less immediately apparent as articulations of voice, are nonetheless important to acknowledge.

Participants' expressions of self-esteem within the mediation sessions—Honneth's third dimension relating to 'positive self-evaluation' (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 185)—were triangulated with my participant observation data from outside the sessions. As we move through this chapter, we will see how different dimensions of Honneth's recognition framework found expression at different points—either as recognition through self-confidence, self-respect, or self-esteem, or misrecognition as violation, the denial of rights, or denigration.

I have shown how participants were observed in situations of shared labour with citizen volunteers, and how they expressed affective and emotional feelings of love and self-esteem. In this respect, a normative sense of achievement was rearticulated in relation to belonging or to labour practices, chiming with the well evidenced link between voluntary work and refugee self-esteem (Tomlinson & Carrier, 2003). It is my argument here that such normative examples of recognition were enacted as part of one dimension of recognitive 'performative refugeeness', and that they offer a critique of traditional Honnethian recognition, from which 'difference-respect' is absent. In other words, recognition in Honnethian terms could only be provided incompletely by the centres, as they attempted to compensate for the participants' lack of legal recognition with other kinds of acceptance, including boosting self-esteem, along restricted dimensions. I argue that this recognition was also sometimes undermined by *misrecognition of what was important to participants,* by speaking over them, or ignoring their attempts to be recognised as agents rather than stereotypes or passive spectators. In studying how recognition finds expression, we must be mindful of how these different dimensions often act in opposition to each other.

Studies have suggested that community centres are highly gendered spaces (Tomlinson, 2010), and this was evident at the Tyneside centre, where women took on most of the meal preparation. This situation was resisted by some female participants, who didn't want to join these mostly female-only spaces, where they would have to replicate or expand on what they saw as discriminatory labour. 'I cook enough at home,' said one participant, though she declined to be interviewed or participate in formal activities. In general, however, dissenting voices such as hers were not prominent.

Misrecognition as Mesopublicness

Beyond intimate micropublicness, regional and/or local opportunities for voice and recognition as mesopublicness emerged, through exhibitions in local gallery spaces. However, in these contexts, participants received recognition sporadically, with different institutions' value systems around recognition sometimes in mutual conflict.

In an interview in April 2020, the director of a local creative mediation organisation in Tyneside, whose gallery was exhibiting participants' work, discussed how her organisation positioned itself outside the traditional concerns of market-oriented art institutions. Her institution, she claimed, occupied a hybrid role between the non-profit gallery sector, whose members acted as de facto cultural gatekeepers, and a globalised neoliberal art market (Velthuis, 2014). The director highlighted that community-focused practices around self-representation are frequently instrumentalised in order to win more funding; i.e., they do not value voice as much as what voice can bring in the way of economic benefits. She highlighted her own organisation's promise that 'everyone's voice is valued,' a Honnethian commitment necessary for recognition, and was quick to point the finger at participatory projects that are tokenistic, extractive, and ephemeral.

> Shifting the mindset of the more traditional institutions is immensely challenging, and it's hard not to think that those who espouse change so quickly are doing so under the pressure to conform and box-tick for their funders. Adopting a new model requires meticulous research, a long-term strategy and a genuine desire for change. There must be a continuous, open and reciprocal dialogue with your internal and external communities, where hierarchies are dissolved, and everyone's contribution is valued. Only then can a vision and a new direction be embraced by everyone. But the constraints of our political economy make this a very difficult thing to do, particularly for larger organisations. On the face of it, galleries are being more vocal about societal issues and proclaiming reformations within their institutional walls. This may seem progressive, but these calls to action and fast-track changes are often tokenistic. We are instead increasingly seeing strategies, commissions and outreach programmes facing a backlash from those they are intended to help. This criticism and opposition arise because they lack the holistic considerations needed in their design, creating a paucity of care and support which can heap unforeseen pressures on vulnerable and marginalised communities. —Respondent

The talk here is of a 'new model' independent of conventional funding mechanisms. The director casts doubt on the claims of the broader artistic community and heritage sector with regard to its commitment to participation, instead suggesting a degree of tokenism—participation without power (Arnstein, 1969). She pays tribute to the possibility of recognition, but qualifies that possibility with her critique of the political and economic structure of gallery communities, using academic discourses of marginalisation, hierarchy, and care. Participation can only occur, she says, if 'hierarchies are dissolved,' and 'everyone's contribution is valued.' This critique, which is aimed at other institutions, omits reflexive discourses about her institution's own complicity in hierarchies of power. The problem is framed as one of larger institutions, beholden to the market, 'not getting it,' rather than a broader structural problem around (mis-)recognition in which her institution is similarly implicated. We saw in Chapter 4 how such organisations principally use gatekeepers and British citizen artists in their creative choices. The community arts organisation in question was bound up in and benefiting from the very networks of power its director critiqued—like its competitors, it invited powerful sponsors from local elite arts institutions to its events, and courted prominent donors from the private sector.

As an institution, it benefited from other forms of support: a network of contacts who had contributed labour and expertise across the sector, and who attended its openings and workshops, or helped market its work on social media.

The competitive tensions between elite gatekeepers fed into other kinds of (mis)recognition. A launch in October 2019 of the community organisation's group show in Tyneside initially seemed to offer an opportunity for recognition to some participants, whose work was exhibited to local audience members, including residents, curators and artists. The exhibition promoted a digital map 'of everything that is helping people to meet their material and social needs in ways that don't harm people or the planet.' In alignment with the solidarity economy, ventures shown on the map included cooperatives, fair trade initiatives, or alternative currencies 'to build cultures and communities of cooperation' in the Gateshead and Newcastle area (Miller, 2010). I arranged to meet members of the community project at the beginning of the launch: Victor, Amin, two other participants, and local institutional directors. We were greeted by the exhibition organiser, but it was clear that as host of the event she had numerous commitments and people to talk to. Multiple artists who had contributed to the exhibition were there, and the event was well attended. After a while I noticed that I was playing host to my participants: we were in our own group, separate from the other attendees, who were mingling together in small groups, clearly comfortable in this social environment.

Exhibition launch, Tyneside, November 2020

We were enjoying each other's company, with both Basir and Bijan in high spirits, but at one point I felt we should extend ourselves beyond our circle, so I asked one of the organisation's team to come and explain the rationale behind the exhibition to the participants. He kindly agreed, and discussed some of the thinking behind the exhibition design—who had designed the chairs that one could sit on in order to watch Basir's media text, for instance. One of the participants asked a question, but the rest stood passively silent. Following this, I explained the participants' work to a senior curator from a major local institution, who seemed uninterested. He did not make an effort to meet the participants, and did not engage significantly with their material when I offered to show it to him.

In describing these interchanges, I am reminded that we should be wary about projecting our personal expectations onto such situations. The participants themselves showed no interest in the curator, and seemed happy speaking to each other, if naturally a little uncomfortable in a setting where we did not know a large number of people. From conversations with them in this setting, it seemed that their priority was the love and esteem already described above, and available to them as refugee micropublicness, with the risks of misrecognition beyond immediate spaces deemed high. Victor described the need to make small talk at such events as a social pressure to integrate (similar to his feeling bound to discuss the weather in order to fit in with the British, as mentioned in Chapter 4).

Reviewing my fieldnotes from the evening, it is clear that one staff member from Centre B was understandably more upset about a client being evicted from their accommodation, and the complex and challenging internal politics of her organisation and its volunteers, than she was about the occasion we were attending, which she had deprioritised in the face of these other concerns. In line with the staff member's priorities, within groups of participants, the distress cause by lack of legal recognition took precedence over the possibility for other forms of recognition, especially when this recognition came with such a lack of 'difference-respect' as it did here.

The participants were *recognised* by being included in the exhibition (albeit on the institution's terms) and paid for their labour, where possible. Many people independently viewed the participants' work (and some audience members were later asked for their opinions on this work, as we will see below). However, it was clear that the participants weren't recognised as artists in the same way as the other people in the exhibition. They were afforded some forms of recognition as micropublicness when making the work, but were peripheralised (or shown indifference or mistrust) within the event itself. Any recognition experienced throughout this chapter was on emotional/sociocultural grounds and highly contested, with tensions between different sources of recognition, and between legal and cultural possibilities. Even when recognition through mesopublicness was afforded, there were clear tensions around the terms of its engagement—and the huge difficulties of legal misrecognition undermined the more delicate kinds of recognition afforded in more intimate contexts. Thus, the profound effects of legal misrecognition on participants' lives often overshadowed the subtler forms of recognition they experienced.

As Taylor (1994) writes, cultural rights might take the form of *negotiated claims* for dignified representation, and the maintenance and propagation of distinct cultural identities and lifestyles. In reality, the claim to recognition in a democracy might manifest itself through antagonistic forces: claimants in opposition to state elites and political-administrative apparatuses. It is this tension which we see at the event described above: a tension between administrative 'elites' as mesopublicness and participants' enactment of voices as micropublicness within these broader settings. The complexities of this conflict are not discrete, but are part of an ongoing hope to build on rights claims with formal legal recognition (Pakulski, 2007). The indifference of some participants and audience members to mesopublicness might also represent a broader neoliberal order

that seeks to shore up legal forms of exclusion occurring through all forms of publicness. Such indifference occurred, in this instance, despite the institution's engagement in a local campaign for cultural recognition through solidarity, a theoretical claim for Honnethian recognition that proved more complex in practice. We should also add that the participants were free to reject the offer of recognition being extended, and it is clear that they were more enthusiastic about the intimacies available to them as micropublicness than the offer of recognition on someone else's terms. In essence, that offer of recognition actually functioned as misrecognition, or at least a highly limited form of recognition.

The lack of legal recognition and respect was reinforced in other ways in broader contexts. At a workshop I ran during an 'open studios' weekend at the same gallery, I invited audience members in the exhibition space to reflect on the participants' stories. This audience included people who had entered into the space from the local community and those working in a complex of studio spaces attached to the gallery. They were asked to produce their own written reflections on films by Victor, Sarya and Basir. While many respondents rearticulated discourses of encouragement, and listened carefully to the respondents' stories, one British member of the public became irate, and questioned the participants' motives.

> Are these people who want to integrate? Why? I'm going to educate you, the young have a lot to learn from the old. You should try living homeless for a month, you would not last two days. It's a question of education. The guy from the DRC should have talked about women as well as men. People need to be educated from the cradle to the grave. Why have they come here—are they economic migrants or have they had trauma? —Respondent

Here, we see the interviewee ignoring the narrative of mutuality within Victor's self-representation, described in Chapter 4—his reflexively framed 'life of a man,' through which he sought solidarity or recognition from others. In response, this audience member showed a lack of reflexivity himself, vaunting an apparently socially liberal attitude around gender equality while 'Othering' the participant in the process. Victor is misrecognised formally as someone who lacks education, entering the UK for economic reasons, rather than a refugee fleeing a war-torn country. In this sense, the respondent blocks his own ability to offer recognition. His concern over employment echoes illiberal libertarian discourses in mainstream British media concerning benefits and the role of the welfare state—discourses around inactivity and economic dependence which have little or no connection to people's motives for coming to the UK (Cummings et al., 2015*). I include this to demonstrate the impact of misrecognition*, and as we will see, examples of this misrecognition are keenly felt by the participants—as much as recognition itself.

Exhibition preparation, Cardiff, October 2019

The effect of this misrecognition is the opposite of Honneth's self-confidence and self-esteem. Masoud, an Iranian man I met in Tyneside and participated with in creative mediation sessions, and with whom I later worked on a film in London with another participant, discussed the emotional effects of such misrecognition, while elaborating on the lengths to which refugees must go to secure recognition. As we have seen in the audience member's account, recognition and misrecognition might sit side by side in the same individual.

> It's hard when you're a refugee. It's hard. There are some people who hate you and some people who like you. Those people who hate you, they know nothing about you. The one who likes you is good guy. They want to help you to build your life. These people are good people. Humans. But sometimes they focus too much on the refugee story. They think that you always have to talk about it. So, when you're a refugee you will receive a new identity. An identity that before you want to get to know it—society already has an image of it. So it doesn't matter where you're from, your culture, what potential you have, your past. Now you have a new identity. Some people think you don't know how to brush your teeth. And some people think they need to teach you how brush your teeth. —Masoud

Here, in a discussion that took place while he and another participant worked on a film together, Masoud talks of the classic binary—of refugees whose identities are perceived by others as dream narratives or nightmares (Smets et al., 2019; Orgad, 2014). This is an identity foisted upon Masoud, an identity within which he lacks agency to define himself—creating, in essence, a lack of self-esteem. In the above statement, 'you will receive a new identity' is passively framed. 'Some people think…,' suggests that he feels he is being infantilised. The participant was an experienced actor, journalist, and theatre professional who had appeared in Iranian films with some of his country's most celebrated actors. When we first met in the North East in July 2019, he was keen to impress upon me his acting career very quickly. It was obviously a source of self-esteem for him to be clearly recognised in his country of origin; by comparison, the different level of recognition in his new cultural context was a source of poor self-esteem, a lack of 'difference-respect' that aggravated the misrecognition he experienced on a personal level. When we met in London later that year, the participant was working precariously in the construction industry, and he emphasised mental health difficulties engendered by his sense of alienation. He expressed his desire to be recognised for his talents and experience—for his uniqueness, for 'difference-respect'—rather than subject to the expectations he felt were being thrust upon

him. Thus, misrecognition affected refugees along particular axes, against their own wishes for recognition on their own terms in line with those parts of their identity which they themselves valued. *Recognition is fragile—it is constantly won and lost* relationally. This participant contributed to the centre's creative mediation sessions, but they were not enough to supply him the recognition he felt he deserved, because they were so out of line with Masoud's sense of self.

Participants frequently reasserted their need for legal recognition, a demand which, as observed briefly in Chapter 4, sometimes emerged as a direct challenge to my status as interviewer. It is my argument that such refusals to accept the recognition on offer might be considered legitimate examples of voice that exist in the interstices of creative mediation and help us critique the normativity of voice as it is usually conceived. Participants often framed their rejection of voice in terms of their fear of legal misrecognition or worse, reflecting discourses around the right to freedom of movement or expression. Below is a response from a participant in Cardiff who was often called on by the centre to participate in creative mediation activities:

> I can't do anything without papers. I want to work and I can't. Rich people are treated differently, without opening their mouth. If you go to a club and you're wearing expensive clothes they will treat you differently. In Senegal if you went there someone would put you up in their house and they would feed you, but in Britain they wouldn't, and I'm amazed by that. People look at me strangely in the street and I have to work hard not to be affected by that —Respondent

We see in this interview a participant who felt misrecognised by British citizens in what he perceived as superficially tolerant multicultural spaces to which he had been dispersed, assuming that he might be greeted with the same civility as would a visitor to his country of origin, Senegal. The participant related the way he was treated with regard to his perceived class or wealth—whether or not he was 'wearing expensive clothes.' In this sense, his rights as a refugee or potential as a citizen were subjected to entrenched forms of Othering within a classist British society that again refused to recognise him on his own terms—to offer him 'difference-respect'. Because of this precarity and his fear of misrecognition, the participant felt unable to engage in self-representation through creative mediation. However, somehow, he was able to express his voice here—to draw attention to the social inequalities he experienced, and which he felt unable to express in official spaces, where he might encounter the very people he perceived to be misrecognising him.

It is evident that participants frequently experienced legal misrecognition by the formal apparatus of power surrounding their asylum claims, and subsequently by institutions, which socially excluded them from the welfare community as 'qualifying citizens,' while offering recognition along predetermined lines which failed to meet the participants' own needs (Bales, 2015). Another example of this arose one lunchtime in Cardiff, when I met Mohammed, a participant with refugee status with whom I was practicing English. He was despondent about his language skills, and this was troubling to him because of the vulnerable state of his mental and physical health—he was recovering from a broken back which he'd suffered when his house in Aleppo had

been bombed, and had since been resettled in Cardiff. He asked for assistance logging into his Universal Credit account. The correspondence he showed me indicated that he would be called that week by a member of the Department of Work and Pensions who only spoke English. I presumed there had been a miscommunication between Mohammed and the Department of Work and Pensions and that he was due to be interviewed by government officials around his eligibility for financial support. He was unlikely to be able to engage in physical work, as he clearly had trouble walking. Thus, his opportunities for respect were undermined by systemic failures at several levels. He was excluded from even supposedly open-ended and participatory forms of communication in intimate spaces as well as his possibilities for formal recognition (I should emphasise that his spirit and determination endured, despite this).

In summary, we have seen institutions frame their intentions towards recognition with ideals of equality and equivalence between participants and citizens; while this recognition does occur at the micropublic level in discrete ways, the reality of broader embodied and mediated encounters sees participants misrecognised in a number of different dimensions. As publicness expands, there is clearly an axis of recognition which leans towards greater risks of misrecognition, but different forms of recognition and misrecognition are often negotiated alongside each other. While on the one hand, misrecognition often occurs in relation to social status and usefulness to elite audiences and the neoliberal economy, there is also a tension between participants' rights claims and the rearticulation of exclusionary stereotypes through audiences' liberal discourses around benevolence. These tensions are unique to mesopublicness—as you might expect, there are fewer chances of misrecognition in intimate spaces, with the risks increasing as participants' work reaches more people.

Misrecognition in mesopublicness is supplemented and reinforced through formal mechanisms of institutional misrecognition in the asylum accommodation and welfare systems. Without the illusion of protective solidarity of self-confidence and self-esteem that many of the participants sought and received in more intimate contexts, mesopublicness was a highly contested process. As publicness emerged, the greater the risks of misrecognition, and the rarer the opportunity for recognition on the participants' own terms, without resorting to tried and tested dimensions of 'performative refugeeness' privileged by institutions.

In this context, then, self-representations emerged alongside normative dimensions of recognition in which the participants became the recipients of benevolence and inclusion. This type of recognition maintained clear hierarchies of power that privileged British citizens, though participants also experienced recognition in smaller, ephemeral moments of resistance or face-to-face communication. These moments are notable examples of 'difference-respect', when participants enacted agency over the terms of their own recognition. Such examples feed back into my argument that alongside normative dimensions of voice we should consider the significance of ostensibly smaller moments. Someone demonstrating a gardening technique, or refusing participation in a gendered task, or pointing out the social Othering that takes place in a city, or conducting a conversation with friends within a larger event—these are all moments which contest the normative

dimensions of voice on offer and are claimed by the participants as instances of self-esteem and 'difference-respect'.

Mediated Recognition as Macropublicness

In this final section I will turn to a critical discourse analysis of mediated recognition in national institutional media, related specifically to creative mediation work in which I did not participate at the centres. While there are numerous recent analyses of refugee self-representation in national news media (e.g., Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017), analyses of refugee mediation in institutional media that consider those hosting creative mediation or 'promises of voice' is much rarer. The texts described here are a form of macropublicness, national publicness aligning within and around national institutions associated with the British nation-state, either institutionally—i.e., involved in the official mechanisms of government—or in terms of a national-scale audience. Thus, this includes national broadcasters or web platforms where appropriate. I will pay particular attention to previously defined discourses of recognition that are rearticulated therein.

The first of these texts, a news report about the death of a participant at the Cardiff centre, begins with an account of the participant's rights claim.

> [His] journey to Britain began in 2009 when he fled Afghanistan, leaving his wife and two young children, in the hope that he would one day see them again. "When I asked him if he was OK, he broke down in tears outside his house door," Katy recalls. "He said, 'I got a letter from Home Office. They tell me no again. I don't know what to do. What can I do? I can't go back to Afghanistan.'" He was clearly very afraid of going back. The impact of this news regarding his Home Office appeal was devastating and the change in comparison to how positive he had been when things were more hopeful was blatantly clear. It was sad to see the change in his emotional state."
>
> *The Independent*, July 2020

The opinions of centre staff quoted in the article are privileged above those of the participant's friends or family. The account is framed as a comparison between the participant's reported self-confidence and self-esteem, and the supersession of this by what is clearly unjust misrecognition by the state. So, through a statement like 'he was clearly afraid of going back,' we see two forms of recognition emerging. First, the rearticulation of discourses of recognition afforded by the institutional media to the British citizen volunteer quoted in the article, simply by virtue of the article's (re)mediation of her words. Second, we note the rearticulation of specific discourses of recognition towards the participant and his family, framed through the voices of others. While partly due to necessity, the absence of interviews with those affected directly means we cannot make claims around the participant's own stated or felt recognition. The tragic circumstances of Mumtaz's asylum claim and his legal misrecognition are relayed by third parties, on their terms.

Below are two excerpts in which creative mediation projects at the Cardiff centre are described in terms of their positive community benefits.

> The team behind the highly successful Choir, a musical project for refugees, asylum seekers and the wider community that runs out of the Centre in Cardiff, is to launch a Community Interest Company (CIC) to lead the choir into an exciting new era. [People] have formed the new entity to ensure a sustainable future for the project, which they describe as "a lifeline" for many refugees and asylum seekers.
>
> *Wales247.co.uk*, November 2020

> For small businesses it's a great opportunity to forge links with the community and we have lots of MiR regulars who get in touch before we've even started planning to state their interest in hosting something. Over the years we've had art in the hairdressers, the bakers, charity shops, schools and libraries. Hard-to-reach groups are also very high on the agenda for MiR. Every year we seek out new partnerships and invite community groups to engage in art-based activities both in the build-up to and for the duration of the festival.
>
> *WalesOnline*, March 2013

As before, participants remain voiceless in these texts, their feelings and circumstances described by others. As Choularaki and Zaborowski (2017) state, such texts reinforce 'triple misrecognition,' wherein refugees' voices are deprioritised and subjected to decontextualisation and massification—in a denial of their individuality and their capacity to be seen and feel like political actors (p. 632). The creative mediation projects are described above from facilitator perspectives, with superficial recognition of the participants, but none of their individualised stories. When refugee voices are supplied with the possibility of recognition, they revert to familiar typologies of victimisation and rights claims.

We *do hear* the participant's voice within the following text. The article outlines a collaboration between a local charity and Centre A in Cardiff. It describes one of the participants, the pseudonymous Mikal, as he recounts the conditions of his arrival to the UK coast via sea.

> The charity has just started working alongside Centre A. Mikal is from Eritrea and today is the first time he has ventured beyond the barbed wire fence at the camp's main gates. The 31-year-old arrived on the UK shores earlier in the summer and was brought to Pembrokeshire a few weeks later. He came alone, bundled onto an inflatable dinghy with 17 other people fleeing horrors we can only imagine, he said. "There were women and children, pregnant women too," he says in near-perfect English. "We left Calais at 4am but after a few hours we had no idea where we were. When you're in the middle of the ocean, there's no land or anything for you to know where you are."
>
> *WalesOnline,* November 2020

We see assumed and implied passivity and collectivisation here through the use of 'bundled,' 'was brought,' 'we had no idea where we were,' emphasising the vulnerabilities of the nameless children and pregnant women as part of a bare apolitical context. Despite the participant's involvement in creative mediation, his recognition is regulated along the same discursive dimensions as coverage of refugees more broadly within the European press in recent years (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017; Chouliaraki, 2017). We get little explanation of the historical and cultural context to the participant's decision to leave Eritrea, beyond a reference to unimaginable horrors.

In the following set of texts we move on to examples in which participants' rights claims are subordinated to the liberalised logics of the British nation-state. First, the account of Gnagbo, who learned Welsh at the Cardiff centre:

> Gnagbo fled Ivory Coast after recording a rap warning against rebel forces just before they took over his city. He spent time in south-east England before being settled in Wales. He began to learn Welsh in the centre for refugees and asylum seekers in Cardiff. "I loved it," he said. "People could see I was devoted to it and I was encouraged to keep on learning. I was lucky." Gnagbo now works as a carer and a teacher, and volunteers for Cymdeithas yr Iaith. He also gives half-hour Welsh language taster sessions at the Welsh Refugee Council – after learners have had an hour of English tuition. "But everyone should have the chance to learn," he said.
>
> *The Guardian*, March 2020

This text from *The Guardian* describes a participant, who engaged in creative mediation in the Cardiff centre, and presents his skills as a route to economic worth, overshadowing the possibility for more nuanced kinds of recognition or 'difference-respect'. The text sees Gnagbo's recognition as conditional on gratefulness, benevolence, and integration through his learning the Welsh language—itself subject to interdiscursive nationalistic tensions with English. So, from this text, it is possible to infer that Gnagbo is embracing traditional discourses related to Welsh nationalism, itself a response to the colonising spectre of government in London. By learning and teaching the Welsh language, he effectively declares himself to be unthreatening and interested in nationalistic Welsh concerns about the erosion of Welsh national identity.

In the following text, we hear Bijan articulating the self-confidence and self-esteem he experienced through micropublicness—and his gratefulness for love and solidarity.

> When you're at home and you don't have anything to do, basically you feel lonely.
> When I came here I could see life is going on for people who are in the same situation as me.
> So it was really helpful to see; "oh there are other people in the same situation as me and they go forward, so why not me?" You can't imagine how difficult it can be, when you are in an area you don't know, you don't have any friends or family, and also you cannot speak the language other

> people speak. But I find a job, in this project they offer me a job. You can see how different my life can be with Centre B.
>
> BBC News, December 2020

In this final example of national mediated macropublicness, Bijan explains how being offered a paid job at the Tyneside centre improved his self-esteem. This description is framed for an apparently benevolent audience within the broader context of misrecognition that Bijan is experiencing from the state and local authorities, who cut off local and regional health funding during Covid-19, regardless of the threat this might pose to Centre B. Thus, Bijan's recognition occurs alongside the recognition of the centre itself, and is subordinated beneath it—the centre's misrecognition is the reason for the platform running the article, not the ramifications of the pandemic for Bijan's health.

We have seen in this brief section the rearticulaton of various dimensions of recognition with respect to creative mediation that mirror refugee misrecognition more broadly, including victimisation and collectivisation. Institutional views on worthy forms of recognition are privileged. There are some opportunities for reflection on participants' *need for recognition*, and their expressions of its reception, but only along narrowly predetermined and highly regulated dimensions. When participants express the positive effects of emotional or psychological recognition, these are often manifested alongside the misrecognitions afforded by the state, the media, or citizen actors; or else they emerge in a dynamic of tension with such misrecognitions.

Conclusion

To recap, we have seen how voice was afforded particular, restricted possibilities, and that voices existed beyond media in complex, contradictory ways. Recognition, in practice, is offered in equally messy ways—with some forms of recognition in conflict with others. We have seen how recognition occurred through amelioration of self-confidence and self-esteem, but much more rarely through respect, with a lack of legal respect often overriding the benefits of these other forms of recognition. Participants could be recognised in one dimension and misrecognised in another, and this dynamic often fluctuated. We might argue that most successful recognition was accorded to voices which adhered to pre-determined rules, methods, and guidelines favoured by a neoliberal order. This order demands that refugees occupy an impossible dual position: abject victims and entrepreneurial subjects, who only deserve political and economic recognition because of their extreme suffering or their ability to 'pay back' the British state and society for receiving them.

Recognition between participants, and by citizens towards participants, necessarily found expression along discrete dimensions. We saw how participants described experiences of self-confidence and self-esteem as being integral to the intimate spaces in which they worked. Yet, as audiences expanded, the risks of misrecognition as economic migrants/ungrateful/not suffering enough to deserve welcome, also grew. We saw examples of solidarity *between participants* as well as recognition *of participants by citizens*, the latter often with an absence of 'difference-respect', which would entail recognising participants on terms important

to them, rather than to gatekeepers. This might simply be due to language differences, which sometimes prompted British volunteers to 'speak for' participants. This lack of 'difference-respect' was also expressed through the experience of refugees who did voluntary work within a community centre, hoping to foster skills around employability, but were generally not consulted on their views as to how these volunteering systems were organised[23]. Thus, any sense of belonging by participants as defined in Chapter 4 emerged along specific normative dimensions of integration in institutional settings.

The discussion in this chapter revealed empirical evidence to underline and critique the importance of Honneth's three dimensions of recognition for those excluded or controlled through their legal regulation and misrecognition by the state (Sirriyeh, 2018). Instances of recognition through love and esteem might occur between participants and with volunteers and professional staff. Conversely, misrecognition emerges through disparities in cultural worth and civic membership leading to status inequalities between actors. Swerts and Nicholls (2020) argue that participants' status as active citizens depends on the tension between their appealing to a sense of normative 'deservedeness' within a civic society and the enactment of the equal right to be seen and be heard, and it is partly in these terms that recognition has been observed here. Recognition might be promised but is rarely enacted as macropublicness, and when it does occur it seldom opens up spaces for refugees to act and speak as equals, often reinforcing existing hierarchies.

Thus, we should treat the answer to the question of who is allowed to speak and who is listening with some caution. On this subject, various tensions became apparent—between self-confidence and legal misrecognition, between self-confidence and self-esteem and a lack of 'difference-respect', between legal recognition and 'difference-respect'. These were manifested as absences, tensions, and misrecognitions, that shifted and changed between different actors at different points.

It is also worth highlighting again that there is a distinct difference between self-respect as defined by Honneth (1995) and differential esteem based on 'individual differences in achievements, capacities and other valuable features' (Laitinen, 2012). As we have seen here, though a version of Honnethian subjective esteem is achieved to some degree among participants, differential recognition is absent. A massified and generalised misrecognition of refugees continues to be manifested at different levels, and this has its roots in mediated, symbolic, and material forms of misrecognition, alongside particular, exclusionary dimensions of participation. It is to these forms of participation that I now turn.

[23] Because of the complex interplay between 'performative refugeeness' and recognition—which in Honneth's eyes, draws on social psychological, philosophical and political traditions—there is a psychological ambiguity around whether recognition is taking place as observed. A refugee might say they love a particular group of people or a particular space, for instance, but this must be triangulated with other ethnographic data, insofar as this is possible, and where not, these ambiguities have been left standing.

Chapter 6: Participation in Creative Mediation

Introduction

In this final empirical chapter, I revisit the creative activities initially introduced in Chapter 4, but here I focus more acutely on the social processes around voices more than the voices themselves. I consider contextually who engaged with these creative projects, and how they did so; I also examine what prevented others from participating. To this end, I address my second research sub-question, which considers how participation is enabled and regulated in self-representational creative practices.

Because participation beyond micropublicness was so limited, for reasons already identified, not least funding constraints, and the risks as perceived by participants, here I mostly concern myself with participation as micropublicness—i.e., the terms under which participation occurred, almost exclusively in the context of the centres. After examining my data, it became clear that the terms of participation were set by factors operating at local, regional, national, and transnational levels. While refugee voices were mostly heard on a local level as micropublicness, the regulation of participation was manifested more broadly; through local rules and behaviours, regional funding networks, national laws, as well as through transnational cultural factors such as participants' race or ethnicity, all of which affected these localised voices.

In the first section, which addresses micropublicness, I will explore how trust and mistrust in centre staff and myself emerged as important dimensions of participation. Mistrust might be manifested as a participant's refusal to be involved, or through negotiation of the terms of their engagement (Petherbridge, 2016, p. 16; Carpentier, 2016). Here, we will explore how and whether participants' experiences converged with the centres' promises of voice and engagement, and whether these promises regulated mediation in specific and predetermined ways. This exploration will include how centre staff and artist facilitators determined engagement with participants. Second, the chapter will consider regional regulation through funding resources. Third, we will consider whether the terms of participation were aligned with and around national institutions associated with the British nation-state; e.g., institutions involved in the official mechanisms of government, including laws (McCallum, 2011; Amin, 2012). This will also include an examination of how participants' mistrust of domestic and international mainstream media affected their engagement. Finally, I will consider how transnational cultural factors, including language, national cultural differences, race, and gender were entangled with participation. I will briefly outline whether and how these mechanisms of regulation and facilitation were echoed beyond the workshop spaces, in broader mediation processes of mesopublicness and macropublicness.

Local Regulation/Facilitation of Participation in Micropublicness

(Mis)trust and Resistance

In this section on the local regulation of voice in the workshop spaces, we will see a variety of ways in which participants expressed their mistrust and/or resistance to me. Sometimes this was in response to perceived surveillance, or to what they considered an attempt to impose my values. They might challenge these values,

refuse participation, or negotiate specific terms for their participation, either with me directly or among themselves. I will consider these factors first by looking at interview material, and then by referring to my observations of participants in a particular group mediation activity.

The reasons participants gave for rejecting participation entirely included a fear of surveillance and the potential negative effects any representation might have on their asylum claim. Despite my volunteer/researcher role, many participants saw me as equivalent to other institutional actors, including centre staff. This was compounded by the centres' aims for initiating creative mediation, which diverged from how participants wished to express and control their voices.

From the following quotations, all recorded during my participant observation, we see a number of participants rejecting the terms of voice on offer. In the first quotation, a participant described their fear that participation might compromise their asylum claim:

> If I contribute, maybe I can't eat. If I contribute, I lose twice. —Participant

Here, the participant articulated their supposed 'opportunity for voice' as presenting a heightened risk, indicating their mistrust in imagined audiences. From the participant's perspective this precluded the possibility of voice. The benefits of voice and recognition clearly lost out to the material risks.

As a reaction to previous experiences of regulated voice, others rejected the terms of participation by provocatively challenging my perceived status as interlocutor. Such rejections posed a direct and deliberate challenge to the normative dimensions of participation and my own apparent liberal benevolent position.

> I'm from Baghdad, my family apart from my sister was killed in 2007. Since I got to England I've been smoking drugs and drinking at my hostel. The police in Athens beat me and broke my tooth. Do you take drugs? —Azim

To briefly expand on the background to this second quotation, towards the end of my fieldwork in Cardiff, I met a group of three young men with whom I initiated a creative mediation session— Azim, a man from Baghdad, Iraq, Abdullah, a man from Syrian Kurdistan, and Khaled, a Palestinian man who had arrived from Lebanon. Azim initiated a conversation which he soon steered towards his origins: he told me much of his family had been killed in 2007 during the Iraq War. He still had brothers in northern Iraq, but he didn't speak to them much. He also had a sister. All of his siblings were married, while he was not. He expressed the fact that he didn't feel free, because of the expectation that he would get married, thrust upon him by his family. He had a girlfriend who was Shia back in Iraq, but her father saw pictures of them together on Facebook and 'caused problems.' He left Iraq and made his way to Turkey, from where he reached Athens by boat, a process he described as 'straightforward.' He subsequently learned English from volunteers in Athens, and has friends

all over Europe. He lifted up his shirt to show me a large tattoo of the word ‘infidel’ written in English and Arabic.

Since he’d arrived in the UK, Azim had been ‘smoking drugs and drinking’ at his hostel, as he said. He also said he’d seen dead bodies in Athens, that he’d been beaten up by Athens police because of his drug use—he showed me a chipped tooth—and that he had slept rough in Greece. If the Home Office asked him whether he took drugs he said he would tell the truth. He asked me whether I ‘took drugs’ and I said no. I asked him why he was asking me this, and he said he ‘didn’t care any more,’ expressing a loss of hope in his future. He wanted to tell people this, but he didn’t want to ‘make a video’. The participant stepped outside the conventional boundaries of voice to draw attention to his drug-taking habits, testing the authenticity of the claim that all forms of voice were being welcomed. In terms of participation, there were clearly limits to acceptable kinds of voice in the context of the centres, and this participant was emphatically highlighting these restrictive terms by not engaging in the voices on offer.

In a third quote, a centre employee highlighted some of the racism participants had experienced from citizen volunteers, again drawing attention to the regulation of the spaces in which participants were expected to participate, through the prejudice of some of those facilitating sessions.

> We had a volunteer who was very racist.... Members of the local community don’t understand why the government is giving asylum seekers free meals and not them. But that’s not true. —Centre Employee

The centre employee quoted above also described racist attacks on participants who had been pushed off their bikes by local youths, prior to the fieldwork period. Evidently, there were instances of racism both in the local community and among volunteers, suggesting that although such matters are not tackled overtly, racism and prejudice inevitably feed into the terms of participation of these mediation processes. Evidence of racism inside and outside the centre was relayed to me by participants as well as by this employee, and clearly affected the trust participants felt in the safety of engagement. Thus, there are complexities around participation and trust within micropublicness, with the terms of participation being constructed relationally along particular dimensions of ‘acceptable’ voice in complex, mutually reinforcing and/or antagonistic ways.

Rather than refusing participation entirely, or challenging my perceived status as interlocutor, some participants engaged with creative mediation by negotiating with me and among themselves. For example, at the Cardiff centre, Kamran and Jamshid were both willing participants in one participatory videomaking session. Before we began, however, Kamran was insistent that we discuss his need to learn concrete videomaking skills to support his wife’s wedding photography business.

At both sites, participants were much more willing to engage in craft or spoken performative processes than they were in creative media practices. Partly, this reflected the widespread ambivalence asylum seekers in general express about representation (Kutscher, 2018; Bozdag & Smets, 2017). Many participants did not want to be recorded, and expressed concern that their images might appear publicly without their direct approval, despite my assurances around consent. At one group mediation session in Cardiff, after we had completed our exercises, a participant insisted on deleting all footage from the iPad, even though I had only used it for ease of demonstration. Throughout my fieldwork, I observed a widespread fear of surveillance among participants, a phenomenon that resonates with the work of other scholars who have expressed an increasing concern with the effects of digital and analogue surveillance on asylum seeker populations (Pinelli, 2015). This fear of surveillance aligned with the highly performative uses of social media I observed by participants, as discussed in Chapter 4 (Lynes, 2017; Chouliaraki, 2017). Because of their suspicion of recorded communication, many participants in both cities spoke of communal spaces fondly, recognising them as areas for knowledge-sharing where there was an absence of constraint determining what they should or shouldn't say.

Sometimes participants in Tyneside negotiated their engagement and participation within a group of their peers as tensions emerged with gatekeepers.

Group mediation project, Tyneside, August 2020

In a group mediation session in Tyneside organised by the centre with a group of Kurdish women, one participant, Sarya, recounted her arrival to the UK, including her separation from her two children, who are in Germany and Sweden, respectively. The session was led by Deborah, a local artist working with the centre. Deborah used a box full of prompts—shells, lolly sticks, jewellery, and wool—which she placed in the middle of the table. She asked one of the women to pick a prompt, and then say a sentence responding to it. The participants were asked to pass the object on to the next person after adding a sentence. We asked Sarya what kind of response she'd like to share with the group, and she recounted a ghost story. Sarya began, and each group member then added a sentence, each person referring to a prompt they had chosen.

> Once upon a time, someone cut their finger trying to cut some tape. They were trying to balance a stick between their fingers like a plane. They were amazed! They used a peg to try and put the

> finger back on their hand! Sarya thought about when she was six or seven years old and they used to make jewellery with soft pink wire and beads and sometimes they would prick their fingers. She put her hand in the sea and found a shell; another shell was found, she was amazed by the shape of the shell but it was sharp and pricked her finger. They boy went to hospital, he should have gone quickly to get it sanitised and they stitched it back together. —Group mediation session, September 2019

> Halfway through the session, Maryam disagreed with the direction the exercises was going: she said it is 'stupid…I've had to go to the emergency room, and had serious problems,' protesting at the levity of the narrative. —Fieldnotes, September 2019

Working together, we had tried to develop the creative mediation activity with the whole group, using a Kurdish interpreter. As we see above, the group's collective work quickly became medical in theme, emerging primarily out of the memories of Amira, the most vocal participant. However, partway through the activity, it was obvious that Maryam, another member of the group was upset by the direction in which the mediation activity was going, accusing others of making light of serious issues relating to hospitalisation. In contrast to this, other women present, especially Sarya's daughter-in-law Yezda, smiled and joked throughout the exercise. Upon this occasion, there were clear tensions between participants over how voice was to be expressed, as members of the group attempted to negotiate with each other over the direction and theme of the creative mediation. Such negotiations suggest mutual conflict resolution through discussion instead of opposition—a form of *collective voice* that defies narrative simplicity, which must be understood through social as opposed to symbolic dimensions. It is also clear in this instance that the women present were more likely to express voice collectively, in contrast to the individual male voices observed in Chapter 4.

While there is not adequate room here to completely theorise trust, it might be useful to think of it as a key component of such microprocesses of communication—an implicit assumption that communicative acts are honest and will be listened to. By extension, trust through communication can be taken as necessary for Honnethian recognition, if trust is taken to mean the goodwill we have towards others; Honneth refers to an 'assumption of being given positive consideration by others' (Petherbridge, 2016, p. 16). If, as Petherbridge suggests, trust is a necessary precondition for Honnethian recognition, this interpretation might be extended to include processes of participation around voice. When trust is present, effective negotiation around participation is possible—when absent, participation is rejected entirely.

We have seen in this section how many participants rejected the terms of participation on offer, expressing their voices through disillusionment, mistrust, and fear; these voices were heard ephemerally through such moments of resistance. However, broader acts of resistance and negotiation found expression through collective forms of refugee voice.

Institutional Dimensions of Participation

To maintain the focus on local factors that might determine refugee voices at a local level, I turn to the institutions themselves, and how their 'promises of voice' were communicated through official statements and staff behaviour, both of which may have contributed to how and why participants employed the particular voices they did. I will first consider institutional public-facing texts, before looking at the views of the staff members and external facilitators who organised creative mediation workshops in the centres. Following that, I will describe how the nature of these workshops was contingent on the rules and rituals of particular centres, with gatekeepers much more 'hands-on' in Tyneside than in Cardiff, partly due to the former's smaller size, which allowed for such intimacy. I will finish by discussing how the attitudes of centre staff towards participants framed the terms on which participation might take place.

Institutional publicity material at the fieldwork sites advertised them as spaces for facilitating integration, and rearticulated discourses of hope, empathy, and community as occurring within this context. As described in Chapter 3, I collected public relations material from both sites across online platforms. This material related to the centres themselves and to specific creative mediation projects within them; for example, the local national arts institution's concert at the site in Cardiff during July 2019.

Excerpts of text from both centres' websites explicitly name integration as one of their priorities. 'Our main aim is to help refugees integrate into their local community,' reads the Welsh centre's website. 'We encourage integration,' reads the Tyneside centre's. The Tyneside site states, both on its website and in its annual report, its aim to share information about its values aligning around 'encouraging integration' of refugees in the North East through supporting the experience of 'living through the asylum process.'

Integration here is expressed normatively, 'implying a one-way adaptation by newcomers to fit in' (Vasta, 2007), but stops short of describing assimilationism—the process of expecting participants to fully conceal cultural differences. While these official texts do indicate interest in 'hearing refugees' stories,' the priorities of integrationism are more evident. Such texts attempt a balancing act between discourses that are positioned between the two extremes of assimilation and multiculturalism; what McPherson (2010) describes as integration's capacity to embrace 'two-way approaches' within an equity framework for citizenship (Ager & Strang, 2008; O'Neill, 2001).

The websites reference staff members' insistence that they provide 'positive' stories as opposed to the 'negative' portrayals of refugees and asylum seekers seen in the mainstream press. The Cardiff centre's public-facing website has a section on 'client stories,' and frames participant voice in terms of integration and citizenship—the latter being assumed to refer to compliance with national norms and laws. Narrative and voice are given equal weighting with cultural engagement—reflecting broader policy movements in the UK away from multiculturalism and towards integrationism (McPherson, 2010).

> The centre has gathered some touching stories from our clients over the years…. These stories have been collected…even just by engaging, socialising and integrating with Refugees and Asylum Seekers that visit our centre [elements redacted to preserve anonymity] —Cardiff centre website

On this website, elements of which have been removed to preserve its anonymity, the Cardiff centre's public-facing communication, which situates participants as 'clients,' speaks to the growing neoliberalisation of the charitable sector (Costas Batlle et al., 2018). The website also complements the language of its annual financial report.

The centre's financial report describes the centre's function as 'promoting knowledge and mutual understanding between different racial groups and faiths,' as well as 'raising awareness, eliminating discrimination and educating the public about refugees and the lives of refugees.' Another passage in the report states that: 'Our aim is to improve their conditions of life and general wellbeing, while building skills, resilience, confidence, self-esteem and purpose.' On the one hand, the use of the word 'client' binds participants directly to the neoliberal order through overtly economic language; on the other, the centre's rhetoric rearticulates therapeutic discourses of 'self-esteem' and 'purpose,' in conjunction with those relating to citizenship, such as 'promoting knowledge' or 'mutual understanding.' This combination of citizenship and psychotherapeutic messaging is output-focused: the centre intends to deliver these outcomes for its clients, through specific kinds of participation.

Such texts discursively frame the context in which participants might express their voices, steering them towards what are essentially mediated mission statements. Though there is no doubt some degree of recognition, at no point are these aims framed as fully participatory. British citizens are not being encouraged to share responsibility with refugees for mutual understanding and access to rights. The centre's stated aims mask refugees' precarity by engendering neoliberal resilience as the route to their wellbeing, consistent with a wider focus on resilience in neoliberal discourse (Neocleous, 2013; Walker & Cooper, 2011).

The centre's public remit, as described, clearly reinforces normative conceptions of citizenship as the context within which voice is valued. In its public statements, participants' stories are presented as normative multicultural liberal promises that echo the priorities of funders across local government and the private sector; for example, Arts Council England's website talks of using the arts to 'help refugees become part of the community' (Arts Council England, 2018). As seen in Chapter 4, such discourses were echoed in workshop participants' self-representations when they spoke in terms of welcoming, entrepreneurialism, and self-reliance. One participant is quoted on the Cardiff centre's website as describing how the centre 'can't do the impossible but they give you hope.' It is not possible to directly point to causation between centre mission statements and the priorities expressed in participants' voices—but it is worth noting their similarities.

If we extend this analysis to the actual format of the participatory sessions taking place in the centres, the tension between the prescriptive discourses around participation and how it manifested on the ground in actual decision-making processes can be evidenced. Take, for example, the following press release for a project with a local major arts institution at the centre in Cardiff. Witness how discourses of 'hope' are employed in the text publicly advertising the event in July 2019.

> Based around the theme of 'hope' the evening will bring together a unique mix of classical music [text redacted to preserve anonymity]. Join us for as special evening…from our latest community project. —Centre press release, July 2019

The project's multicultural aims around 'hope' sat in tension with the reality of the event's production processes, which enacted a hierarchical relationship between citizens and refugees. The event, a fundraising dinner with accompanying performance, was planned for several months, and was filmed for marketing purposes for the organisation's website. It featured professional singers performing in languages that included Farsi and Arabic. As the performance built to a crescendo, the singers moved from the stage into the audience and encouraged the participants, who were seated, to join in by clapping and singing along; however, the participants were not properly audible and were not part of the official performance. It was clear that many of the participants were enjoying the music, swaying and dancing in time to its rhythms, but it wasn't clear that they had a real choice to opt out of performativity in such a public setting. It was also clear they were being *sung to*, rather than *singing themselves* as part of the official performance.

If we turn now to conversations with the staff and external facilitators organising participation, we can hear echoes of the official discourses, mission statements and funding priorities noted above. When asked about how opportunities for voice in participatory work were conceived, one staff member immediately acknowledged the structural limitations of the participants' circumstances, and the need to address broader institutional imbalances around participation. Here, a member of staff discusses the commissioning, production, and decision-making process around a participatory radio project in Cardiff.

> Interviewer: 'How did the project work?'
> Respondent: 'We worked with this writer who'd done something with us, she'd won a big prize on [BBC] Radio 4 and she had used these stories to inspire her writing and she had been working on a musical with this guy. We used workshops. Initially they had wanted it to be just women because of the underrepresentation of women [in public life in Wales] but I had said it was mostly guys here and they asked the group if they minded opening it up to another sex and they didn't. So I was there the whole time rounding people up because I was being paid to do it. The numbers varied but the smallest number we had was seven.'

Here, we can see how the aspirations for these projects—such as the desire of organisers to redress gender imbalance through participation in self-representation, as normatively defined—conflict with practical realities. The project described above, a participatory writing production, was popular among participants, but was dependent on funding being available for the facilitator to be able to help recruit participants. In this interview, the staff member shores up the project's validity by emphasising the writer's connections with major media and arts institutions, using the words 'big prize' and citing BBC Radio 4 to underline the institutional gatekeepers' legitimacy. In other words, she is employing institutional legitimacy to underline the relative power and expertise of those involved, linking such productions to media institutions as broader mesopublicness. She is deferential to the institutional normative needs around gender balance, but is unable to fulfil these needs due to the practical realities of centre demographics.

The gap between institutional aims and reality reverberated across numerous different facets of centre life. In an interview at the Cardiff centre on 25th July 2019, a local staff member who was helping me to recruit participants for the workshops articulated a degree of fatalism about participant mistrust. As we have seen, while many participants did refuse to be involved, this was for a complex range of reasons that included their own biographies, perceptions of the media, and fear of surveillance. As well, the nature of the centres' own stated aims affected who was approached to participate, and how they responded. In this case, as in others, someone with institutional power—who negotiated with participants on my behalf, suggested participants to me, or mentioned me to participants around the centre—framed the terms of access.

> A client I was confident would come to the workshops is not keen because he has recently experienced being in a film where he was promised it wouldn't be used anywhere and it has ended up on a website and social media stating all the name and places people are from. We will have some work to do to encourage people in unless you feel like you have met anyone who would be keen. Maybe Amin will be in later to ask but I don't know how he will be feeling as he had to go to court yesterday. I'm also hoping Jamshid will come. —Staff member, Cardiff centre, July 2019

In the above statement, the staff member suggests a tension between my own desire to recruit and the centre's capacity to facilitate this. Whether or not participants' own fears aligned with the way staff framed these questions of mistrust, institutional assumptions inevitably framed how I was to encounter and interpret participants willingness to take part in the workshops. This left considerable room for uncertainty on my part, as aside from the explanations presented in the previous section, many participants gave no reason for not participating. Members of the centres' administrative staff in both locations immediately referred to recruitment for my research as unlikely to succeed, based on their observations of failures to build truly trustworthy engagement in the case of previous artistic research projects.

Administrators' expectations at the Cardiff centre were that ambitious projects should be avoided, and they repeatedly told me that participants might find it difficult to commit long-term over a number of weeks. A few staff members said that this assumption was linked to participants' competing commitments, and the strain of the asylum process on participant mental health. While well-meaning, staff fatalism, protectiveness, concern, and mistrust in Cardiff influenced my own perspective towards the participants—however unconsciously—and primed me to believe they would be unlikely to attend repeated sessions. However, my experience proved otherwise, with many of them continuing to participate once we had developed trusting relationships. Such constructed narratives, whether or not they are based on prior experience, can result in the effective denial of individual agency to potential participants, while representing them as incompetent to make informed decisions, assumptions in which researchers—unwittingly or otherwise—may be complicit (McAreavey, 2013).

In an interview that contrasted with the one above, an employee of a major international charity working at the centre clearly pushed back against broader 'Othered' portrayals of asylum seekers and refugees as victims —defending them against what he saw as just another interviewer coming in to communicate stereotypes. 'There are positive things happening,' this employee insisted, clearly exercised at what he saw as a broader narrative that refugees were somehow incapable. 'It does take its toll though, if people are mucked around about their status. But refugees are incredibly resilient people, much more than you and me, they have taken incredible risks to get into the situation they are in now.' The interviewee was equally insistent that refugees were a 'positive' as opposed to 'negative presence' in society—responding to one binary categorisation with another. He further acknowledged the emotional burden of precarity, as well as the participants' will and need for agency, which complicates the straightforward hierarchical distribution of power as described in the centre's official discourse.

Alongside negotiations among participants, and between participants with the centre(s), the role of external artist facilitators, especially in relation to their own practice, was clearly important. In August 2019, a music teacher engaged in weekly workshops with refugees in the Cardiff centre, with recordings of these sessions used in the centre's publicity material. During the sessions, participants were encouraged to sing a variety of songs provided by the facilitator, and also to bring their own songs from their countries of origin. In one session, a participant from Angola sang a Brazilian folk song, while a woman from Honduras contributed a song about corruption by Polache, a famous Honduran singer. A woman from China sang a popular song in Mandarin of specific cultural and emotional importance to her, inspired by the precarity of her arrival and life in the UK. High, regular and enthusiastic attendance at these sessions suggested that they generated esteem due to the personal importance and cultural relevance of the songs participants had brought, but were still structured around a white, facilitating citizen and multiracial, non-citizen participants.

In this setting, participants were encouraged to communicate songs that were meaningful to them, and rehearse them in a way they felt comfortable with, but the process was structured along practices and

dimensions of participation lain down by citizen facilitators. That is not to negate some obvious positive effects on participants' self-confidence; they frequently enthused about the sessions, especially Kamran, who had a pre-existing interest in music. But we should not fail to acknowledge the broader imbalances that these processes reify. 'The numbers do vary but it is largely well attended,' a British citizen facilitator told me after one music session. 'The good thing about our project is that people can tell their stories or not, but they don't have to share them, only if they like. We are from an outside organisation who do a lot of work around this—we have a level of expertise.' Even while this facilitator is describing participants' agency, they are rearticulating a hierarchical discourse around proficiency and expertise, suggestive of the structural inequalities that are otherwise masked in the sessions. In Tyneside, creative mediation professionals spoke of the difficulties of reconciling their own practice and expertise with that of the participants. One respondent spoke of it taking 'a long time to warm people up to my ideas…I meet with people for a long time and really explain what I'm doing. I don't know if that is more satisfying than going in and speaking to people and seeing what you can do.' The emphasis here is on participants warming t*o the facilitator's ideas*, and not the other way around, which may help explain how and why voices are encouraged in particular directions.

The relationship between myself, the staff, external facilitators, and the participants shaped the kinds of decisions which took place around creative mediation workshops. In Tyneside I had a closer relationship with centre staff, partly because, by virtue of its smaller size, the centre had a more established community of volunteers and participants. The centre ran group sessions with staff and external partners as part of its regular arts and ESOL programme[24], and all these activities took place in the same room that people ate, making it easier for staff, volunteers, and participants to socialise and build relationships.

Partly as a result of this more intimate setting, Tyneside staff had a greater input into the format of my sessions, frequently offering suggestions for what would and wouldn't work; these suggestions were difficult to refuse, echoing as they did conventional gatekeeper distributions of power-sharing. On the one hand, I was working more closely with other volunteers in Tyneside than in Cardiff, and I was more likely to recruit successfully. On the other, my closer relationship to centre staff—with whom I had a more collegiate, collaborative relationship, within the aims of the centre—meant that the possibilities for forms of participation that went beyond the centre's aims were more limited.

[24] In Tyneside, these sessions organised by the centre took place four times a week—on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. On Monday, a group of Syrians and Kurds, a mixture of genders, described by centre staff as 'recently arrived to Tyneside' as part of the Syrian Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme, would engage in group ESOL classes.

Collage work, Tyneside, July 2019

As an illustrative example of this closer, more regulated relationship in Tyneside, early on in my fieldwork I established a series of worksheets in English, Farsi, and Arabic which were rejected by a member of staff at the centre, who felt they might exclude those without literacy skills. As a result of this intervention, the worksheets were dropped. Centre staff said that, supplementary to the options I had initially planned for my sessions, I should offer either collage material or photography with disposable cameras. This was suggested, but I had little opportunity to reject this given my dependence on their gatekeeping. Thus, my choices were much more rigidly defined in this context; particular forms of participation were favoured and leveraged, shifting the project towards an instrumental, goal-oriented approach, as opposed to something process-oriented, where the outcome was of less importance.

In Cardiff, recruitment was more challenging than Tyneside—due to it being earlier in the fieldwork period, and there being a larger and less intimate social space. I ended up offering participants a smaller range of opportunities for (self-)representation overall and we produced less material together. The labour relating to recruitment, and therefore the terms of participation, fell almost entirely to myself and the participants. As a result, participants were more likely to redirect participation beyond the formal settings of creative mediation in ways which did not always adhere to the wishes of gatekeepers—namely, by simply refusing to take part in mediation. It may seem paradoxical that along with a more restricted range of activities there could be more diverse opportunities for voice, but since refusal is itself a form of voice, this must be considered. In Tyneside, when participants were presented with the same options, self-representation was more common, but the dimensions on which it could take place were highly regulated.

As I noted earlier, while limiting the ways voice was expressed, this set of rules had a knock-on effect on the quantity and quality of creative outputs: much more material was produced in Tyneside, including collage, drawing, group video digital storytelling, and audio work, as well as storyboarding and written material. In gatekeeping in this way, the centre regulated access, insisting on particular methodological approaches, ethical pre-conditions, or the inclusion of particular participants in the research, which accorded with the gatekeeper's reality (George, 1996; Lee, 1993). The difference between these two settings is what Emmel et al

(2007) term differing levels of 'formality' (p.3). We might take formal gatekeepers to mean 'those working with the community to achieve a particular end,' with this formalisation being clearer in Tyneside than in Cardiff (Emmel et al., 2006, p. 4). The more formalised the gatekeeper's relationship, the greater their regulation in exchange for access[25] and the more limited the possibilities for participation in creative mediation and therefore voice.

Thus, in this section, we see several more dimensions of participation emerge, particularly the inevitable alignment between the centres' stated aims and beliefs, the influence of institutional staff members, and my own decision-making and that of participants. From the beginning, there were clearly forms of participation that were privileged and others that were discouraged on a local institutional level. These goal-oriented approaches to participation align with the definition of normative accountability discussed in Chapter 2 (Ball, 2003; Sheely, 2018; de St Croix, 2020). Voices which resisted institutional decisions, in this highly regulated context, extend our understanding of how participation is evaluated through accountability within these institutions. For instance, Centre B's 2022 annual return to the Charity Commission includes positive quotes from participants regarding the charity's impact, necessary to demonstrate the institution's 'public benefit' (Charity Commission, 2022). There was a clear accountability incentive for me to offer a broader array of creative mediation activities as discussed, through collage, or workshops that weren't dependent on literacy, for instance. Decisions which contested such incentives helped create spaces for reflection in participants' own terms (de Croix, 2020, p. 2).

The views of staff and external facilitators, the organisation of the centres, the participants' mistrust and negotiation between themselves and with me, all affected the kinds of participation that took place. We might conclude that creative mediation projects made allowances for voice as long as this voice fell within existing hierarchies of privilege between those with and without formal citizenship rights within the centres. Such work essentially becomes *socially commodified* to the centres' ends, even if there are opportunities for smaller forms of 'micro-resistance' within this framework (Miles, 2014), with participants refusing to take part in specific creative choices. While creative mediation participation has an obvious advantage for institutions, who are pressurised by the funding landscape to extend their reach, this occurred without always allowing for a critical evaluation of their production processes, or indeed reflexivity on behalf of the refugees themselves. My own processes, as we have seen, allowed some fluidity, within obvious limits and subject to similar criticism about their reinforcement of my own goals and sensibilities.

In the sections below, we will see how participants' opportunities for reflexivity in creative mediation, was further complicated by other factors determining the participants' time, including the broader funding networks in which the centres were positioned.

[25] In some cases I observed how there was mutual competition between facilitators. Some sessions were crowded, while others had relatively few participants. In the latter case, participants were asked to stop what they were doing by centre staff and told to join other activities as a way of evening out numbers.

Regional Funding of Participation in Micropublicness

To continue the exploration of participation in creative mediation as expressed and heard in intimate spaces, I will discuss the effects of larger scale funding systems. I will first present data indicative of how the different creative economies of the two cities impacted on participation as publicness, before exploring data on the ways local staff members sought to appease local funders.

The differential power of funding impacted production of (self-)representations in different ways in the two cities, and in both places created a hierarchy of participation whereby the views of those higher up the funding chain were privileged. As ever, this regulation intersected with various culturally contingent factors among refugees: languages, families, gender roles, and race, as well as local and national rules and laws. The level of each centre's investment in creative mediation influenced expectations around participants' engagement, but also their own negotiations with other actors involved in production, including myself, staff, and volunteers.

First, I argue that different regional creative mediation funding ecologies across the two sites provided distinctive regulatory frameworks for creative decisions. Participants collaborated with me closely in both cities, and though I do not present exhaustive data relating to the sites' funding regimens here, during my fieldwork I observed fewer financial resources available to support projects in Cardiff. In Tyneside, both a local arts organisation and a national arts centre provided artists ready to participate in my work, and offered exhibition space, tours, and workshops; although, as we have seen, specific (self-)representations were privileged. It was much easier to arrange to meet artists, facilitators, and centre staff in the North East. Compared to the rest of the UK, Newcastle and Tyneside have had copious financial challenges, with Newcastle council famously announcing it was bankrupt in 2010—but it is still a city with almost double Cardiff's GDP (Brookings Institution, 2014). There may have been reasons at play other than financial ones, but even within the context of the pandemic, Arts Council England's (ACE, 2021) budget is over seven times higher than that of Arts Council Wales (ACW, 2021). Tyneside hosts galleries that include the Baltic and the Laing Art Gallery, both of which regularly engage in participatory work. Beyond National Museums Wales, which focuses on historic collections, there are no major contemporary art galleries in Cardiff.

Within each site, the differential funding landscape created a hierarchy of participation whereby local authority gatekeepers were privileged above local community centre gatekeepers, who were in turn privileged above local volunteer citizens, with refugees inevitably and unfortunately having the least power to influence production decisions. These power differentials influenced the way facilitators behaved when they discussed regional institutional gatekeepers during mediation projects.

> Interviewer: 'How well organised is Refugee Week in Cardiff?'
> Respondent: 'Welsh Refugee Week doesn't have a coordinator because no one had put in a funding application because people don't have the time—people are really busy.'

> Interviewer: 'Is there a push for participatory practice in Tyneside?'
> Respondent: 'There is a lot of money floating around to do socially engaged work. There have been briefing documents floating around at Gallery A for this kind of work. There is a political agenda for institutions to be more radical here.'

In the interviews above we can observe the degree to which funding shortfalls were experienced on the ground. In the first interviewee's response, we see how organisational precarity relating to labour and funding caused logistical obstacles to seeking further public funding. In the second interview, we are informed about a relative abundance of funding available in Tyneside, framed as 'a box-ticking exercise' to ensure the inclusion of institutions in diversity schemes. The idea of 'radicalism' here is presented by the interviewee as having been appropriated by institutions in order to meet funding provisos from the Arts Council England that support participatory creativity as it meets the funders' criteria (Arts Council England, 2020). Note that this use of the term 'radicalism' does not refer to radicalism that might challenge normative hierarchies of power, or allow participants to step outside their own performativity or challenge gatekeepers' decisions.

The centres' dependency on local authority support was also manifested in staff behaviour towards those funding their work. In a creative mediation session that was part of an 'open day' at the local authority town hall in July 2019, it was clear that the Tyneside centre's staff were adapting their behaviour to appease partners and senior stakeholders. When an employee from the council appeared, the arts facilitator leading the session switched her behaviour, instructing the refugee participants to focus on the work instead of their discussions with each other, and to turn their attention away from their phones. These requests raise ethical questions about whose needs were being facilitated in the session, and suggest that a degree of discipline and control was being applied in order to encourage participants' performativity. When I spoke to one of the participants, the arts officer stopped me and asked me to engage with members of the public instead. A volunteer told participants not to be on their phones when they were manning the stall. One of the participants responded by saying that he was going to be evicted from his accommodation later that week, and was stressed by his impending homelessness. In this instance, he was in a position to negotiate his participation, but in a reactive, as opposed to proactive position. What this example shows is that sometimes participants had to 'perform refugeeness' within a pressured environment that instrumentalised the relationship between those who spoke and those listening or recognising them, which reproduced broader hierarchies of unequal participation. Identifying these limitations is not to diminish the genuine feelings of welcome and recognition that the participants experienced, and sometimes communicated to me; rather, to point out how they occurred within decision-making moments that took place within a hierarchy of power.

By placing paid staff in the centres under considerable political pressure, at times the ensuing tensions threatened the ethics of care toward participants. On 23rd August 2019, one senior staff member in Tyneside told me I should approach a Kurdish family with some written worksheets I had prepared in Arabic. While I showed the family the exercises, the staff member came over to observe. The participants began slowly answering the sheets individually, but the staff member intervened to tell them to undertake the exercise as a group activity instead. One of the older participants said she couldn't read or write, and I informed her she didn't need to participate, but the staff member intervened again and told the woman that she needed to build up her independence, as she was shortly travelling to live in London with a new husband. The woman was visibly upset. She could feel the value of her voice being marginalised at the very same time that it was being encouraged by institutional actors for reasons and in ways that overshadowed her own needs. In this situation, my own presence was built into a complicit, mutually pressurised framework of performative participation. After the incident above, the staff member in question apologised to me privately, and explained the long hours she was working; she later made the point that activities should be undertaken in English. So again, we see the effects of funding on the pockets and priorities of the constituent actors, and their subsequent influence on decision-making and participation (Carpentier, 2016).

The examples described above reveal a complex, regulated hierarchy between funders, staff, and myself along an economic axis. To put it in simple terms, without funding, participatory creative mediation becomes more difficult, but with it come inevitable compromises that affect production and relate to the neoliberally defined orders of 'performative refugeeness' described earlier. I will now consider how these creative economies were further influenced by the national regulatory regime that participants must face.

National Regulation of Participation in Micropublicness

In this penultimate section, I will move to the national factors, both material and symbolic, that regulate and facilitate participation in creative mediation in intimate spaces. First, I will consider the national rules, regulations, and structural rituals imposed upon participants that enforce their accountability to government, while creating precarity around their employment and accommodation, as well as the legal rules regulating their settlement, and the settlement of their families within the UK. While not all of these factors directly concern creative mediation, they clearly impacted on participants' free time and thus their ability to take part. Secondly, I will consider how participants' mistrust in national media interrelated with their willingness to express their voice.

Participants' freedom to spend their time how they chose was beholden to the state and lawyers, Home Office officials, as well as the state's often inappropriate provision of infrastructure around participants' lives, including accommodation. Griffiths and Yeo (2014, p.531) have described the period of asylum seekers waiting for a decision on their application as one of 'chronic insecurity,' within a precarious legal space. A combination of poor accommodation and restrictions on asylum seekers' right to work exacerbated participant precarity and therefore limited their opportunities for (self-)representation.

Ongoing issues around the relationship between accommodation and universal credit, both nationally resonant issues with regard to refugee safety and rights claims in the UK (Bowden & Morton, 2021), had local impacts across both sites. An employee in Cardiff described how she tried to help participants with the growing pressures they faced to survive:

> I help people with universal credit as the system has changed. People often end up homeless because of the benefits system; there is a lag between coming out of accommodation and getting your benefits. That's when people often end up on the streets. —Respondent

People frequently referred to their living conditions as dehumanising. In Cardiff, Hashem described his need for physiotherapy since suffering a stroke, and the inappropriateness of his living space in light of his needs. Often people talked about being housed with people whose languages they did not share. Amin described living with 'homophobic Muslims,' and asked to be moved several times, missing some of our sessions as he dealt with his living situation. Government-sponsored accommodations in both cities were well known for their lack of space and cleanliness, as well as their inadequate facilities and unfinished repairs. In winter, wait times to get through to telecentres in order to report accommodation issues could run to several hours. Here, we see a participant describing how the local contractors charged with maintaining his property frequently failed to fulfil their obligations.

> My boiler was broken for two weeks and they didn't come to fix it. They never fixed it. Every time there is a problem, I have to ring up the provider but they are useless. —Respondent

Staff members often expressed their concern and distress about participants being removed from their accommodation while they appealed against rejected asylum claims. 'The government doesn't do much to support those who are appealing against a negative asylum claim,' said one staff member in Cardiff. A group of Turkish asylum seekers in Tyneside told me they were asked to travel several hundred miles at short notice to have their fingerprints taken by the Home Office. Such pressures were a significant source of tension and strain for participants, affecting their physical presence and mental focus, which made regular creative mediation sessions challenging. When these issues arose during the course of the workshops, they naturally took precedence.

Such difficulties resonate with Butler's definition of precarity, 'the politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death' (Butler, 2005, p.25). Lewis et al (2015) have specifically extended this definition to asylum seekers in the form of 'hyper-precarity,' the interplay between 'neoliberal labour markets and highly restrictive immigration regimes,' (p. 582) which combine to create unique conditions of chance, uncertainty,

and dislocation. What we see here is that such precarity exerts a regulatory effect that restricts participants' capacity to express their voice in these settings.

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work while their claims are being processed, which leads to significant financial pressures, as well as loss of self-esteem (Bloch, 2008; Burchett & Matheson, 2011). At both centres there were some schemes in place for participants to learn skills to make money, once their claims were settled, but these were difficult to maintain long-term. One Iranian participant in Tyneside, for example—now employed part-time by the centre—learned to make jewellery, which he hoped to sell for a profit, but this occupation did not match his university qualifications or subject specialism in Iran. During my time at the Cardiff centre, there were nascent attempts to have participants tie-dye t-shirts for sale, but this initiative was disrupted by participant unavailability.

The disparity between participants' qualifications and the work they were able to find affected their self-confidence and self-esteem. Numerous participants cited recurring depression as a result of this disparity and its associated lack of personalised recognition. Alongside such mental health problems, participants suffered other ailments that required treatment or rehabilitation, including a brain tumour, eye trauma, broken bones, missing limbs, and severe burns. When participants had refugee status, they might sometimes need to cut short our workshops for their shift-work, which included catering, caring, and taxi driving. All of these jobs, and the people who do them, are part of a neoliberally legitimised precariat.

The above instances of social and financial insecurity for participants relate to a system and network of power beyond their control. This system caused uncertainty in their lives that restricted their ability to contribute to the project, either consistently or at all. Uncertainty saturates asylum seekers' lives, from the point of their initial dispersal across the UK, to the instability of accommodation (Darling, 2014; Gill, 2016; Phillips, 2006; Stewart, 2011), to the ongoing risk of detention (Gibney, 2008), all within the opaque British asylum and appeals system (Thomas, 2011; Webber, 2012). In terms of the workshops, such factors intersected both longitudinally, affecting when participants were available; and psychologically, creating a heavy cognitive burden that led to participants not having the will or capacity to take on matters beyond their core administrative problems. We will see in my next section that these issues were compounded by participants' perceptions of the regulatory symbolic regimes that might determine their representation.

Mistrust in National/International Media

Moving on to institutional media, we will see how participants expressed significant mistrust of mediation both domestically and internationally, for reasons that include but are not limited to misrecognition. Misrecognition has been considered elsewhere in this thesis in greater depth; here I note that mainstream media also had a regulative symbolic constraining effect on participation through the participants' broader mistrust of opportunities for voice.

One Iranian interviewee in Tyneside was extremely critical of BBC Persia—especially its coverage of Iran. Another participant clearly articulated a negative view of the Iranian government, which he associated with state-run media. He asserted that around '85 per cent of the people in Iran' were opposed to the government. Here, the participants expressed negative preconceptions about the BBC, highlighting the hashtag #IslamicRepublicofBBC, which cites what Iranians see as biased coverage by the broadcaster—but also trepidation towards their own domestic media. This wariness was common for participants from countries whose media systems exhibited strong degrees of censorship, usually in conjunction with government ownership of media institutions. Some participants primarily understood media through their domestic experiences of state-controlled media, and assumed UK media was similarly untrustworthy.

In the following quotations we see how participants in Tyneside viewed institutional media in their countries of origin. Jamshid refrained from criticising the British media, but indicated suspicions towards Iranian media as being heavily controlled by the Iranian state. Aaban revealed a similar suspicion of Moroccan media. Basir described the media more broadly as biased and negative, and rejected his own family's engagement with it.

> You couldn't even make a video in Iran, you'd be put in prison. There is no fusion between law and religion in the UK but there is in Iran—there the media is governed by the state and there is no freedom of speech. —Jamshid

> In Morocco, you could say something is happening well, but you couldn't say if someone is sick. The media has secrets. —Aaban

> I do look at the media but it doesn't tell the whole story. In Iran the media focuses on the negative, people want to think about the positive, but you do need to see what's happening in the world. My father watches the news back in Iran, but I don't and I close the door when it comes on. —Basir

These participants are drawing on their own experience to explicitly associate media with government. In their accounts, media is a government tool, whether for soft power or more heavy-handed ideological purposes (Nye, 1990). They are also highlighting the negative skew of traditional news values, and generational differences in news consumption (Fisher et al., 2020). Other participants criticised mainstream media for its negative framing of events, and stated that 'it didn't tell the whole story,' including with regard to refugees. Bijan expresses his mistrust of the BBC, which he later explained he shared with his father, reflecting a degree of scepticism towards Western media organisations, which he and his father perceived as being biased against Iran.

> For every hundred stories with the BBC, there is one lie, but the lie is the one that matters. I know the UK media is hostile to refugees but I mainly use it for information around Brexit and for information on visas. —Bijan

Here, Bijan is articulating discourses of mistrust, both in terms of the damage British news organisations have done to the perception of Iran in the West, and also in their demonisation of refugee groups. Such lived experiences seemed to clearly contribute to participants' behaviours—the refusal of many to engage in mediation, or to only participate in highly restricted terms. Lola, a volunteer from Kenya in Tyneside, linked mediation with corrupt governance. She talked of international misinformation in Kenya around the coup in 1982, saying that 'there was violence for a short while and the government suppressed it; there isn't always violence in the whole of a country but people think there is.' Her experiences in the UK were little better: 'They lie about wars…the country says there is no war but they fund it in places like Syria,' she said of the UK government—highlighting her anger towards discourses of stereotyping and hypocrisy in which the British state is seen as civilised and African countries violent and poverty-stricken (Harth, 2009; Ayers, 2012).

Participants also expressed ambivalence towards social media: 'It's a tool, like a knife, you can use it to chop bread but you can also use to hurt someone,' said Basir. A participant from Senegal discussed in detail the 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal. 'You don't find out about it until afterwards,' he said—hinting at broader problems around transparency and mistrust with regard to institutional mediation. These sentiments echo the findings of recent research into mistrust of journalists by refugee groups, who perceive that journalists approach refugee interview subjects with negative preconceptions (Pantti, 2019).

These observations match previous studies which show that those who already mistrust media are more likely to extend their mistrust to include UK media (Felton, 2015). Many participants came from countries with significantly curtailed press freedom, such as Iran, a country whose government is consistently negatively portrayed in Western press coverage. Many participants had observed the British media's stereotypes of refugee groups while still in their countries of origin, and this helped define their participation in our creative mediation sessions. Given the widespread mistrust of media, perhaps it is no surprise that participants did not immediately react positively to the opportunity to create their own media text. They were already deeply cynical about the ability of media to supply meaningful voice. Their resistance provided opportunities to understand the importance of voice beyond text; for instance, the refusal to participate.

Participation through Transnational Dimensions of Language, Class, Race and Gender

In this final section, I turn to broader cultural factors that might affect participation at a local level. As I have noted repeatedly, obstacles such as language requirements, intracultural differences between participants arriving from the same country, and racial and gendered factors all play a role in the limits and possibilities of participation. Inevitably, this section reflects the specific data gathered within this project, and should not be taken to represent the entirety of these complex topics.

The issue of language requirements reflects the pressures placed upon participants by the British state. Language skills among refugees are directly correlated with their chances of finding employment (Auer, 2018). Given that I was working mostly with people who had been in the UK for a matter of weeks, various forms of

translation were used so that we could understand each other: paid translators, digital translation apps, and translation between participants, who sometimes spoke different dialects of the same language. Outside the workshops, the lives of participants were broadly affected by a lack of English language skills. Many of them faced difficulties in gaining access to healthcare and further and/or higher education. Once their claims were resolved, a lack of language skills would have an effect on employment opportunities. Navigating these difficulties added considerably to the demands on their time. One participant described how his need to learn English, which he wanted to study in order to go to university and get a better paid job, was tied to short-term changes in scheduling on behalf of his college and his own voluntary commitments at the Tyneside centre. While he found these commitments useful, they imposed time constraints.

> I'm trying to learn English, so I have to leave to go to my class; I have conversation class and also lab work at City College; I have to have a certain level of English to get into university. —Bijan

Bijan's words here convey his sense of urgency about the need to learn English—thereby to engage with an audience of British citizens beyond the centre's micropublicness, as part of broader normative processes of democratic participation. Language requirements were repeatedly highlighted by participants as both entry point and barrier to citizenship. They often expressed frustration around the bureaucratic rules relating to language acquisition; for instance, to gain entry to university, participants needed to prove proficiency in both spoken and written English, which might be at different levels. Volunteering largely aided the former, but not necessarily the latter (Hassemer, 2020). As such, volunteer activities, including participatory creative mediation projects, might be undertaken with the implicit promise of symbolic and social capital, including language, required for success in the 'marketplace' of citizenship (e.g. the asylum process) and also the national labour market.

One might hope that promises of voice would encourage participants to speak in a language of their choosing, even where the economic pressures to learn English are so powerful. But in making language a prerequisite for creative mediation, a participatory process implicitly upholds the market-based logic of language acquisition. There was a clear preference towards workshops in English by both centres. While by necessity communication sometimes took place in French, Farsi, or Arabic, with the help of translators, this power gradient of different languages, with English at the top, might still incentivise participants to participate in this logic, rather than feel emboldened to explore languages and cultural forms chosen by them.

Many other tensions played out between the regulation of cultures, languages, races, and class during mediation. Some participants would disparage others from the same country who they deemed to be of a different social class or sexuality. One Iranian refugee poured scorn on another Iranian's account of his reasons for asylum.

> He is telling you the truth, but not the whole truth. I hear the same thing from Iranians, which is that they are reading the Bible and the police come and they ask their pastor and the pastor tells them to leave. I know people who are poorer who have gone through Turkey, instead of flying here. People who have a more valid claim, yet there are others who are gaming the system. —Respondent

The participant also implied that if someone wanted to relocate their business to the UK, it might be more expedient to do so through an asylum claim, than by other means. In the statement above, he cast scepticism over a fellow participant's account of his arrival to the UK. He also said that many Iranians go on to do great things, 'which is why the government doesn't have a problem with them, they know they're not going to cause trouble,' implying that there were other, less worthy asylum seekers from Iran as well. In my fieldnotes from 14th August 2019 I described the meeting in which the respondent made his comments about the other participant. There is no evidence that the person he referred to was not telling the truth, but it is interesting to note how participants sometimes policed each other's asylum applications according to their own values around deservedness. Sometimes participants performed refugeeness in alignment with the dominant discourses they encountered. In other cases, the heterogeneity of groups was reflected in how participants contested others on the basis of their race, class, gender, or sexuality.

In a number of cases, Black participants reflected on their deep awareness of racism in countries they'd passed through on their way to the UK. Several participants from French-speaking African countries, including the DRC and Gabon, told me of experiencing racism in France and Belgium, where they had friends and family. They were more reluctant to explicitly criticise race relations in the UK, possibly because of my own position as a white citizen. Others were less reserved, and decried the racism they experienced in Tyneside and Cardiff. All of these factors, no doubt, played some part in whether or not individual participants volunteered for the creative mediation workshops—and their sense of possibility around expressing their voice and participating in terms of their choosing.

As described above, we have seen multiple factors that determined participation at a local level: whether or not participants trusted me, local rules, regional funding mechanisms, national laws, transnational cultural factors, and domestic and international media. Within this broad regulatory order, some participants negotiated with set regimes of engagement. For example, some questioned the security of participation, or challenged its hypocrisies, or rejected participation with mediation processes as defined. Their challenges to me and each other, and their expressions of mistrust or dubiosity, became important learning points in the fieldwork, revealing how participation arises through uneven forms of engagement within local, national, and global systems of power.

Exclusion from Participation in Mesopublicness and Macropublicness

In this final section, I wish to highlight briefly how many of the factors that regulate participation as micropublicness also do so at broader levels. For example, if someone is prevented from participating in micropublicness because of the precarity and uncertainty of their circumstances, it is even less likely their voices will be heard more broadly.

With the help of two final examples, I would like to illustrate how the decision-making power of gatekeepers affects participation in processes operating at larger scales. When Basir's video for the local gallery in Tyneside—which I took to be an example of mesopublicness—was nearing completion, the project needed to be translated into English and the editing finalised. Though he had been heavily consulted on its production earlier, as the project neared completion and we needed to prepare the material for display, Basir was unavailable, so I met with the curator on my own, even though I had wanted Basir to be involved from start to finish. In this curatorial meeting, it was clear that I was able to use the technology at my disposal to facilitate this exhibition—I had easy access to the technology to edit the video, at short notice, in the required format for exhibition, under the pressure of deadline. But Basir didn't engage with the technology as I had hoped in order to produce the final video in Adobe Premiere. Gatekeepers in his life – his employer, his college professors – regulated the degree to which he was able to extend the reach of his project beyond the centre.

After I returned from fieldwork, as part of my work with the LSE Press Office I engaged with the professional animator Ignatz Higham and asked him to initiate a participatory animation process for Basir's storyboard on wrestling. The content of these projects was broadly similar to those projects explored in Chapter 4, so I have not described them here to reduce replication. However, the participatory process differed slightly: Ignatz supplied Basir different moodboards to choose from, taking inspiration from contemporary Persian forms of animation. The moodboards were inspired by Basir's original conception for the images, but aligned stylistically with normative Western standards of professional animation. The storyboard from Basir's creative mediation was subsequently animated in a co-production video project with producer and editor James Rattee at the LSE, with Basir narrating the video using audio recorded into a mobile phone, and James offering Basir choices and options on how to develop the presentation of his storyboard. It was thus on these terms that Basir's media found expression beyond the sessions themselves.

The video was later distributed on the university's social media feeds. Out of any mediation project in this study, this media text by Basir was heard most broadly, but on terms decided by the institution and not the participant—with the LSE press office ultimately deciding on the selection of shots, interviews, and cutaways. I spoke to Basir regularly during this period. He would pick and choose when to respond to my messages. While he was vocally supportive, polite, and interested, he clearly did not feel significantly empowered to challenge or determine how he was being presented. In general, during this study, when participants engaged with larger institutions and broader audiences, there was a trade-off. Their voices were more visible, but their control over the processes and terms of expression was less apparent. When they expressed their approval,

there was never any attempt to negotiate different possibilities from the ones suggested to them. Basir's responses exemplify this.

Conclusion

As we come to the end of these three empirical chapters, patterns emerge concerning the kinds of voices that may be expressed in these creative projects, as well as the factors that might be inhibiting some refugees from expressing their voices. In this chapter, we have seen how gatekeepers' decision-making affected the potential scope of voices. We saw evidence that the community centres' rules and the prescriptive properties of their website communications were echoed in the participants' expressions of voice. We saw how both centres advertised their commitment to give refugees voice—including through creative mediation activities—by producing 'knowledge' and 'mutual understanding.' Yet this promise occurred in the context of officially sanctioned forms of knowledge generation. Participation in the centres' own creative sessions was often highly determined by decisions made by those with greater power, including myself. This left little space for refugees to redraw the parameters of their engagement with creative mediation. The symbolic and material boundedness of refugee subjectivities and rights intersected with systems of "Othering" and normativity which defined the parameters of voice to be expressed through 'performative refugeeness' institutionally, regionally, and nationally. Nationally, the draconian/inhumane limits of the asylum process combined with reductive representations of refugee humanity in mainstream media provided a national discursive backdrop that disrupted even the most ephemeral opportunities for participants to represent themselves in diverse and autonomous ways.

Together, these three empirical chapters have revealed that as audiences grow, the opportunities for voice become solidified around particular regulated dimensions of self-representation. The risks of misrecognition become more profound, and the terms of participation more rigid. National, regional, and local regulation shores up symbolic and material exclusions.

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, regulatory power relations were deeply intertwined with self-representation as voice, and also with creative mediation as an attempt for recognition. Across the chapters, I have understood institutionally organised creative mediation to provide an articulation of refugee self-representation both materially and symbolically, within broader regulative and systems of power relations that predominantly shaped the forms and limits of 'performative refugeeness'. While some forms of expression were possible, these were constrained along particular lines, in particular ways, across many different forms of creative mediation, despite this mediation's formal fluidity. While participation in micropublicness offered highly limited opportunities for recognition, including self-confidence, we might question the extent to which such processes give refugees a voice. The answer to this is only sometimes, and only in particular ways. Evidently there is value in questioning what constitutes voice. A refusal, a silence, a negotiation around form, an absence from a text, a collective negotiation, are all legitimate forms of voice that are otherwise underconsidered in the dominant literature.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Introduction

This thesis focuses on refugee engagement with creative mediation in order to understand the relevance and multiple meanings of voice, recognition, and participation for displaced and resettled individuals. It does so specifically in the context of the intense regulation and perpetual precarity that confront refugees in the UK. In order to illuminate the concepts explored in this thesis, which have become associated with the democratic process and inclusion of different subjects in society, I have attempted to examine how refugees construct their sense of self in the UK, in particular when they get the opportunity to do so through forms of creative mediation that include artistic and fictional self-representations. To fully articulate this context, I have employed the concept of 'performative refugeeness'. This has enabled me to construct an understanding of refugees' presentation of the self within environments which are highly regulated and, when it comes to media production, according to terms that have been pre-designed for them without their input.

In this final chapter of my thesis, I reflect on my main findings, consider their contribution to media and communications scholarship, and make recommendations for future research. In my empirical chapters I have developed various strands of thinking that stem from my original research questions and sub-questions in terms of how self-representation through creative mediation might provide and limit opportunities for refugee voice and recognition, and the ways in which participation is facilitated and regulated. I begin this concluding discussion by showing how my findings responded to these research questions. I then consider their implications for relevant theory—particularly in relation to the core concepts of voice, recognition, and participation in and through creative mediation. In each case I outline the significance of the findings for these areas of research, and identify particular strands for future inquiry. I consider what this might mean for participants, centres, and practitioners. The third section reflects on the limitations of the thesis, following which I conclude with some questions for future research.

Findings

My intention for this thesis was to consider how creative projects that promise refugees a voice actually work, from the inside out, given their promises of voice. My aim was to evaluate whether refugees gain a voice through such projects in practice, whether they are recognised, and what might prevent voice or recognition from happening. My intent was to conduct these projects myself, and to study how other people do them. I have considered voice and recognition with participants primarily as self-representational processes (Thumim, 2012; 2017) which were performatively enacted in different moments, contingent on the material and symbolic resources that participants had access to. Having conceptualised refugees' engagement with creative mediation in terms of publicness (Kavada, 2020; Kavada & Poell, 2021) in Chapter 2, I then explored how refugee self-representations enabled access to publicness—publicness being considered mainly at the micro and meso levels, but also, to a more limited degree, the macro level. These explorations took place in relation to community centres, regional artistic institutions, and national institutions, respectively, corresponding to a rising scale of audience.

Using empirical investigation, I have tested the assumption that media is at the centre of meaning-making processes (Silverstone, 2005, p. 189; Thumim, 2012, p. 53). As was shown, there were plenty of opportunities for voice beyond the media itself. These include rejection of the voice on offer, breaking through the fourth wall of 'performative refugeeness', or production of work which, for whatever reason, was difficult to develop collaboratively. The role of creative mediation in providing new ways to value voice speaks to debates in the field around the centring of media within its parameters (Martin-Barbero, 1993; Silverstone, 1999). My approach to mediation has been to link the very particular and mostly localised production of creative media outputs to systems of wider publicness. Such an understanding of mediation, informed by literature as well as my observations in the field, confirmed that participants' self-representations were produced contingent on their assumptions about who would consume the media products they created, and for what purpose (Ong, 1975). I adopted an analytical lens to examine data according to what level of publicness participants seemed to engage with on different occasions, thus referring to their self-representations as being framed within contexts of micropublicness, mesopublicness, and macropublicness. This analytical framework helped me address my research questions more effectively.

RQ1: How does self-representation through creative mediation open up or restrict opportunities for refugee voice?

I consider the question of voice principally in Chapter 4, in which my research revealed how voice emerged through a rich, diverse, and contradictory set of media produced by participants—everything from fantasy fiction to technical writing about wine. Despite the different kinds of media employed, participants often reproduced the discourses they would be expected to discuss in their asylum interviews. Thus the 'promise of voice' is not quite the promise of *any voice*, even in these creative circumstances. We should reflect on whether such projects are genuine promises of voice, as opposed to solidarity—and thereby view projects which promise voice with some caution, especially when it comes to the way they are advertised to refugees and UK citizens.

This is not to say that within this context the participants were not engaging in meaningful or affective self-expressions. It became apparent that for each participant the desire or need to find voice related to different elements of who they were and who they wanted to address as their audience: they produced media referring to displacement, but also accounts that reflected deep personal, often affective voices relating to gender, sexual, and racial identities. Participants mobilised different discourses and a range of formats, through auto-ethnographic narrations, to produce complex, reflexive accounts of the self of a kind rarely seen in the multiple representations of refugee identities that regularly appear in institutional media. Importantly, it was the lack of prescriptive methods of media production—wherein my relationship with participants was privileged above the text they produced—that opened up the opportunity for different *kinds of voice* to find expression creatively. These often contained an affective component of fear, hope, anger, empathy, disillusionment, sadness and playfulness—sometimes, silent or interrupted. Though regulated, these findings still expand and challenge the rational linear accounts dominant in the literature.

'Performative refugeeness' was seen to manifest as micropublicness through different discourses both inside and outside creative mediation processes. Inside, participants such as Hashem rearticulated discourses of victimhood and thankfulness, a constrained version of the multifaceted identity he was constructing beyond these settings. Inside the sessions he would discuss his 'sickness,' but was much more playful and open beyond them, when he talked about football, his family, and living with a disability. Media production partly limited his self-expression through the assumption that his media would be judged by an unstated, distant, benevolent audience. Whether or not these audiences existed in actual fact, my observations confirmed that imagined national audiences were often in the participants' minds, at least in these smaller settings.

There was a remarkable fluidity in the forms that voices took as micropublicness, *expressed within and beyond narrative*, including the re(mediation) of fragments of Western fantasy genre texts, collaborative documentary-making, and drawing based on sense-memory; these imaginative modes of communication also became an escapist way of articulating imaginaries of sanctuary, when physical sanctuary was most acutely needed. This occurred in complex ways that related to participants' unique identities, the structures regulating those identities, and their hoped-for self-actualisation. We might think here of Amin's use of escapist, fantasy genre writing, which he used to negotiate the topic of his sexuality, and to articulate very intimate and affective understandings of his need for asylum. He employed fragments of narrative to express his position, as opposed to the explicit, fully realised account that conventional conceptions of voice might suggest.

None of these creative (re)articulations were linear or straightforward. In micropublicness and beyond, participants were able to express reflexivity around the constructed nature of their mediation—to reflect on the constructed nature of their voice and its expression as 'performative refugeeness', and their disillusionment with this performativity. I think here of Kamran reflecting on the common refugee imaginary of a 'better life,' and his disillusionment with this idea. Various kinds of affective and emotional voice were expressed, through fear and disillusionment as well as hope—for example, Hashem's hope for a new life in the UK, or Amin's search for meaning in an alternative reality.

When it comes to mesopublicness, it was evident that speaking to audiences beyond their immediate community altered the presentation of the participants' selves. Even though my open-ended approach to mediation aimed to allow participants to produce diverse forms of media, when refugees felt their voices might be heard more broadly, restrictions of voice began to enter their work. Self-representations were produced in the context of the ongoing insecurities that are typical of the status of asylum seeker (whose right to remain can be withdrawn at any point) and within a neoliberal context where refugees are expected to act as entrepreneurial, self-reliant, and resilient individuals against all odds. This meant that voice was often geared towards representations of 'performative refugeeness' via the entrepreneurial, resilient, well-behaved, and/or grateful refugee; for example, Basir's expression of positivity through wrestling, Jamshid's appeal to the universality of culture through wine-making, the co-produced documentary by various participants which discussed 'welcoming' and 'family.' As

before, 'performative refugeeness' concealed the terms of the participants' precarity, aligning their mediation practices around neoliberal concerns.

At this intermediate level of publicness, we saw the silencing of participants who were less able or willing to conform to Westernised standards of creative mediation—e.g., Issaac with his prayer—as certain voices were more likely to be pushed aside by the gatekeepers who decided who and what would be heard. At these levels of publicness, some discourses around particular intimacies were also lost—participants started concealing individual and intimate relations and connections, speaking perhaps to what they and others have come to expect from media representations that are more broadly circulated: the massification and stereotyping of refugee voices within a narrow set of themes and discourses, as seen regularly in the public sphere. In the context of mesopublicness, participants like Victor, Amin, and Basir were at pains to speak in general terms and to exclude personal details from their texts. At this scale, many participants who had the skills also chose to develop products that might be more familiar to larger audiences—the resolution shown in Basir's wrestling storyboard as opposed to Amin's fragmentary fantasy texts. As before, the tone and content of this media was inextricably related to participants' rights claims. We also saw a high level of complexity, such as Victor's account of 'the life of a man' in which he reflected on the nature of *experience itself* as a means of connection between himself and his British citizen audience.

When it came to macropublicness, self-representation through creative mediation was almost fully absent—with the exception of the LSE film produced by the university's press office. This comes as no surprise, perhaps. The rigid systems of control of refugee mobility and access to larger publicness remain largely monitored and restricted by authorities, local gatekeepers, academic institutions, and the media. Thus, in intimate publics, participants were able to articulate their individuality through detailed texts, but such details of personal and individual voice were lost in work produced for larger audiences—not least because participants' creativity became subjected to filtering by artists and professional media producers.

SQ1: In what ways does such self-representation through creative mediation enable or restrict refugee recognition?

This research sub-question was primarily addressed through data discussed and analysed in Chapter 5. Here, I considered self-representation through creative mediation, applying four dimensions of recognition: Honneth's love, respect, and esteem, and Van Leeuwen's 'difference-respect', which I essentially took to mean an acceptance of values important to the participants *on their terms* e.g. the celebration of Nowruz in Iran, which Jamshid discussed in relation to his winemaking, or the hospitality of life in Senegal, which another participant compared to his life in the UK.

In situations of shared labour at the micropublic level, participants expressed feelings of self-confidence. Self-esteem was manifested in embodied and intercultural ways when participants engaged in *showing* and *teaching* each other and myself—e.g., teaching me how to garden, or working mutually on language skills by passing

written notes between us—rather than being passive recipients of instruction or benevolence. These shared labour situations provided them with opportunities to be aware of their capabilities in a way that counteracted the many exclusions they experienced. Against a backdrop of limited recognition or misrecognition, participants showed determination to find recognition in subtler, less obvious ways. These might include demonstrating to British volunteers their own skills and knowledge, such as a favourite style of cooking, or photographs of their favourite cars back home.

However, participants did not always receive 'difference-respect' in these contexts; that is, acknowledgment of the value of their selves and self-expression in ways specific and important to them, rather than to the surrounding culture in which they now found themselves (van Leeuwen, 2007). Findings suggest that 'difference-respect' is an important dimension of the extension of Honneth's conception of recognition to refugees. Participants were not always recognised as *individuals as opposed to being defined by their refugeeness*—a response exemplified by the well-meaning volunteers speaking for participants in the garden; or, on another occasion, participants being peripheralised at a social event that was supposed to showcase their creative mediation. Participants repeatedly insisted that they were being patronised—'sometimes they focused too much on the refugee story,' was a common type of refrain. Future projects which hope to engage with refugees and asylum seekers in reflective ways should grapple with whether their methodologies are suitable for the citizen-practitioner or for the refugee themselves. Recognition of *what is important to participants* should be a clear priority.

As mesopublicness, we saw how competition between institutions and rules for access to limited and highly desired funding for creative forms of refugee self-representations further constrained the level of recognition extended to participants. Many funded creative projects were driven by outcome-oriented participation, so those who took part would be recognised only if they could or would comply with such institutionally delineated formulations of creativity and voice. Sometimes, the conditional recognition of refugees seemed to result from a lack of reflexivity in the mission statements of community-focused, creative mediation organisations; other times, from structural constraints. Local and regional organisations were less than open about their own complicity in accepting the narrowly framed criteria for funding of creative media. Tensions around funding found expression socially through some forms of recognition in situations where funders were present; for example, a presentation at the local council, or a fundraising dinner. This differential respect reinforced existing power asymmetries and failed to proffer love or respect to the supposed beneficiaries of mediation. Participants were often sanguine about this and expressed the feeling that their own need for respect, and the possibilities for recognition within intimate settings, in more highly controlled ways, were more important than the opportunities for the (mis)recognition on offer with broader audiences. The implications of this for future projects might include an assessment of whether focusing on love and solidarity in more intimate spaces, with the associated benefits, outweighs the negative effects of exposing participants to potentially damaging forms of public exposure.

Beyond the centres, participants felt that they experienced recognition only along prescribed parameters of either benevolent compassion or celebrated refugee entrepreneurialism. I observed how these were difficult opportunities to negotiate, given the power imbalance between participants and stakeholders or gatekeepers. Participants pointed out the damage to their self-esteem and self-confidence from being on the receiving end of this reductive set of options—of being patronised as well as made out to be purely either vulnerable or resilient. In drawing attention to misrecognition beyond the opportunities for creative mediation, participants often exercised their voices much more freely, highlighting in sophisticated ways societal hypocrisies (e.g., having to talk about the British weather in order to fit in), and pointing out that the offer of recognition was only on institutional or governmental terms. Many participants felt that they experienced double misrecognition: from the state regarding their needs and rights—their right to work, their right for state assistance in the wake of huge human rights violations—alongside public misrecognitions that reinforced the conceptions of European benevolence towards 'Others.'

Finally, I considered mediated recognition in the context of macropublicness through various texts written for national audiences about the institutions I studied. Here, participants were represented either as entirely voiceless or beholden to the decision-making of third-party interlocutors e.g., journalists as mediators of their voices. In these contexts, participants' voices were deprioritised, decontextualised, and massified; therefore, they were misrecognised in three different ways.

SQ2: How is participation facilitated in creative mediation and how is it regulated?

The facilitation and regulation of participation was principally discussed in Chapter 6. Here, we saw various symbolic and material factors influence the kinds of participation which might take place. We observed a lack of trust that limited engagement, with participants feeling insecure about the possible use of their voices in ways that could be counterproductive to their asylum applications. When trust was missing, participants rejected the terms of participation on offer by expressing their fears and also by challenging me as a facilitator. Such rejection of mediation drew attention to the limits of participation when trust is missing.

However, as we have seen, it was precisely these dimensions of reflexivity that at times enabled participants to contest and break from the expectations of the contexts in which they were asked to express themselves. These challenges and rejections called out the possibilities for participation on offer, and questioned the value of participation under such restricted and predetermined circumstances. Examples of such challenges include asking me whether I took drugs, and pointing out how participating might make people 'lose' not only their chance of asylum but also their perceived access to already limited state resources including cash and accommodation. When trust was established, participants felt more willing to engage, but also to set their own terms of engagement; for example, deciding the format of their media texts, or choosing the people they wanted to work with in producing them. Being open to these rejections and negotiations is an important and hitherto neglected opportunity to foster refugee voice on participants' *own terms.*

Participants' views on mediation were naturally shaped by their previous experiences with it in the UK, and their wider views and (mis-)trust of mass and social media. Low levels of trust in media also influenced their level of trust towards creative mediation processes in the centres. Importantly, participants were generally aware that mediation involves both the production of refugee representations and creation of a record of the same—one that they have little control over. Given their precarious situation and dependence on keeping 'a good record' as asylum seekers, the latter was in itself a source of great concern.

Institutions framed the terms of participation through their adherence to policies of integration which fell just short of assimilation. This was apparent in the material published on their websites; e.g., referring to participants as 'clients' and discussing the importance of their integration into UK society—with such discourses in effect echoed by participants. Projects which did not comply with the expectations of funders were pushed aside, quietly or vocally. The above priorities privileged voice within parameters that excluded the more ephemeral, embodied moments which might usefully contest the terms upon which participation was offered. Access often elided with control, with gatekeepers exerting their influence to varying degrees over the terms under which participation took place—for example, asking for sessions to be held in English in Tyneside, which limited the ways in which participants might seek voice.

Participation was expressed in a variety of ways that intersected with questions of language, class, race, gender, and sexuality. Relationships in the centres were aligned along differences and hierarchies which were expressed among refugees as well as between them and the institutional actors. Racism was often mentioned by the participants, especially participants of colour, and many of those who raised the subject of racism refused to take part in mediation. Female participants expressed their dubiousness towards the gender-stereotyped opportunities presented to them by the centres, such as volunteering in the kitchen to help prepare meals for other participants; when female voices were heard, this was in collective as opposed to individualistic ways. Certain kinds of relationships were privileged, which influenced decision-making around mediation. For example, men without childcare responsibilities were more likely to volunteer, as were those who were favoured and promoted by the centres for their amenability. People would acknowledge these imbalances in modest, ephemeral interactions which did not find expression in creative mediation, but reflected significant awareness of their unequal opportunities to participate. For example, as mentioned earlier, Amin pointed out that he was afraid of other men in his accommodation, and therefore shied away from group work. As stated, it is in these small performative 'breaks' that participants seek to contest the terms of the regulation of their participation.

In both cities, the structural terms of participation depended on the financial security of funding regimens, which were better developed in Tyneside. This difference filtered down to the kinds of participation which took place. The absence of strong funding structures in Cardiff meant a concomitant absence of facilitators helping recruit participants in the Cardiff centre, which in turn meant that participation took place on terms less obviously designed to appease that funding power, but also made the media texts ultimately more difficult to produce. In both places, however, funding structures determined the kinds of 'performative refugeeness' which were observed, according to

a hierarchy of participation between actors with different levels of power within this landscape. Participants who could speak to the priorities of the funding landscape by being available and amenable (for example, those not requiring frequent meetings with their lawyers) were clearly favoured.

Implications for Theory and Opportunities for Further Research

Voice and Recognition

Participatory practice has long been critiqued for reaffirming existing power structures (Yang, 2012; Corneil, 2012; Zoettl, 2013), although this is less well understood in terms of the complex negotiations around voice among refugees, and the moments through which the promise of voice can lead to recognition in circumstances of displacement and resettlement. This study speaks to and aims to contribute to literature on voice and creative participatory research by providing a critique of naïve accounts of voice and participatory forms of mediation that position them as being, by definition, empowering. At the same time, I hope to contribute to an expanded understanding of how the emergence of voice through the regulatory but also participatory production of refugee self-representations can facilitate rich but also contradictory meanings. As we saw, such voices are often resistant, or heard outside the constraints of media production itself. They also reflect the negotiations that take place when participants seek and partly find recognition only if their refugeeness is performed within highly institutionalised contexts. These voices are sometimes angry, antagonistic, loving, grateful, joyous, but are all highly streamlined by performativity and mediation and are highly contingent on the regulatory context of participants' lives.

If we take Kay's (2020) idea of 'communicative injustice' to apply to the 'multiple ways in which women, LGBTQ+ people, people of colour, working-class people, disabled people and other "others" are denied a voice that is sufficiently expansive, complex and meaningful…to allow them a position of full citizenship and personhood in contemporary culture' (p. 9), then we must acknowledge the potential limitations of creative mediation in advancing, in a substantive way, participants' citizenship and recognised personhood, given the restricted dimensions along which voices are expressed. It is useful, however, to reflect on the empirical evidence discussed here to extend Kay's critique of Couldry to the case of refugees: to the ways the voices of participants in this study sometimes defied hegemonic narratives within creative mediation, by being obstructive, difficult, initially unnoticed, embodied, mutually antagonistic as well as mutually reinforcing of collective imaginings. These small acts of resistance took place even under the imposition of neoliberal logics of so-called promises of voice. Participants' voices were highly constrained by the system in which they found themselves, though some benefits were found there, mostly in the form of recognition in intimate settings. To be clear, this recognition was contingent upon participants adhering to particular rules of voice that benefitted some but further marginalised others who did not want to and could not adhere to the given rules of representation and mediation. Recognising the 'messiness' of such resistant voices may prove to be a fruitful strand for future research and participatory practice, while encouraging the investigation of how more diverse methods of participation and visibility are necessary to expand opportunities for voice beyond these limited dimensions. Any project in a community centre that promises participants a voice should be viewed with some

caution—voice itself is as important as the kinds and types of voices that are heard. This understanding of voice and how it is represented in these creative settings complements and is strikingly similar to existing analyses of discourses around migration in mass media contexts (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017; Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017), despite the promise of alterity offered by these more intimate creative sessions. This similarity was clearly evidenced through interviews with multiple creative facilitators in both cities, as well as through my own work.

There is a lack of empirical data relating to recognition theory with refugees, and this project shows the complex, mutually contradictory ways that recognition takes place in practice. It is useful to see how different facets of Honnethian recognition might interrelate and either complement each other or act antagonistically (Honneth, 1995; 2004). Given the absence of legal respect—such as a successful asylum claim—complete Honnethian recognition is often difficult for participants. Yet, in spite of the absence of legal status, other forms of respect toward individuals, according to values important to them—their choices, their interests, their beliefs—are possible. The extension of theorisations of recognition to further understand the importance of such individualised respect in relation to refugees, as well as how recognition theory might accommodate these complexities, is another contribution of this thesis, and speaks to an emerging body of literature on epistemic injustice in recognition theory (Petherbridge, in press). Thus, going beyond legal recognition to *recognise individuals for the cultures and traditions important to them*, should be an important component of any participatory practice with refugees. Arguably, more individualised forms of recognition replace narrow legally-bound conceptions of respect, which highlights the need to acknowledge that respect is required at all levels of existence—from the intimate micropublicness of everyday life to the macropublicness of nationally-bound communities. The search for broad forms of recognition should be viewed with some caution; participants felt just as, if not more recognised in specific, tailored sessions which respected them for who they were—than in broader forms of publicness, which were often associated with greater threats of misrecognition. The quest to bring a wider range of refugee voices to broader audiences, and to challenge misrecognition which might happen along the way, is worthy of deep reflection and action by practitioners, institutions, and academics.

<u>'Performative Refugeeness'</u>

As anticipated, 'performative refugeeness' emerged iteratively beyond official spaces of asylum. There were 'breaks' in ordinary moments of contestation, claims to recognition, and reflexivity on performativity, along with a certain cynical detachment from both. Remember, for example, Kamran's disillusionment with the refugee's imagined perfect story of seeking sanctuary: 'it takes days for this young man to go through life and grow old to realise that the earth is for someone who is looking for freedom.' Remember also Azim, the participant from Iraq, who asked me whether I smoked drugs—essentially calling me out and breaking through the fourth wall of performativity that existed around benevolence and welcoming within the community centre. Participants negotiated their performativity both within and beyond media in regulated but also affectively connected spaces, such as the intimate space of the workshop room, where Amin began to bond

with Irshad by translating his Arabic into English. More research is needed on how and why participants performatively enacted their identities differentially in spaces that were free from the expectations and assumptions of institutions that regulate their everyday lives. When not constrained by institutional discourses on who refugees are and how they (should) speak, many participants demonstrated high levels of reflexivity, awareness of the regulatory effect of local, regional, and national institutions on their voices, and in resistance to those regulations they openly and honestly spoke about the challenges they faced (witness Amin's "Meathead Isles" map, taken from a popular fantasy book series but remediated to critique the UK). Further research on 'performative refugeeness' within and outside structured forms of mediation could usefully complement emerging scholarship on migrant and refugee digital self-representation (e.g., Marino, 2015; Chouliaraki, 2017). Clearly, different forms of performativity intersected with variations in class, gender, sexuality, race, and nationality, and these must be understood as culturally and contextually constructed. How different narrations of the self might emerge intersectionally in these spaces where voice is promised is worthy of further analysis, considering the literature around 'performative refugeeness' (Georgiou, 2019; Georgiou, Hall & Dajani, 2020; Bruinenberg et al., 2019; Malkki, 1996, p. 380).

Participation in Creative Mediation

We saw in Chapter 6 the various ways in which terms around participation were influenced. These included participants' trust in me, their previous experiences of mediation, and the various rules, funding networks, and laws which limited their behaviour in very particular ways. Such constraints determined the languages participants spoke in, the possibilities of using different media (e.g. collage versus video), and the limitations on their time, such as meetings with lawyers. We saw how participation was not, by definition, productive of autonomous voices, as it was always constructed within multidimensional systems of regulation that ranged from regulation of class, gender, sexuality, and race within the community centres, all the way to institutional regulation through regional funding networks and national laws. Given that trust was observed as a necessary precondition for participation, and therefore recognition, it is a potentially fertile area to consider in future study, especially through Petherbridge's recent writing on the links between recognition, trust, and vulnerability (2021), whereby trust is a necessary precondition of Honnethian recognition. As such, I argue that precarity and questions of regulation and (mis)trust must be central to future considerations of participation in creative media, especially among marginalised groups. Given the constraints on voice and recognition observed in this study, a degree of mistrust was perhaps wise on the part of participants, and was one of the means by which they rejected some of the forms of voice on offer.

This study helps bolster empirical evidence of the ways in which self-representation among refugees might foster different forms of voice, recognition, and participation, and the usefulness of different empirical approaches to this end. Tensions emerged between the rearticulation of normative refugee identities and the ephemeral moments that allowed for complex forms of voice which challenged the power imbalances in these mediated processes. Creative mediation, despite its assumed flexibility, was shown to reproduce, albeit unintentionally, many of the same rearticulated discourses of dominant institutional mediation, despite a

methodological approach which attempted to give participants greater control over decision-making. Interestingly, as a side effect, the norms of creative mediation provoked a number of different possibilities for voice *beyond* media, especially when participants were keen to express their voices outside, rather than in the context of creative mediation processes. This might herald new possibilities for understanding voices not only as speech acts, but also as embodied and affective (intended) acts that sometimes end up becoming regulated and mainstreamed through mediation. This is particularly important when we consider marginalised groups, such as refugees.

Publicness

In all the empirical chapters we observed different scales of publicness, defined here as the process of becoming public, with public defined as 'what is visible or observable, what is performed in front of spectators, what is open for all or many to see or hear or hear about' (Thompson, 1995, p. 123; Georgiou and Titley, 2022). Kavada and Poell's (2020) conceptualisation of publicness tethers it to contentious politics (p. 195). Here, contentious politics was understood through Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) definition of 'interactions in which actors' make claims bearing on other actors' interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programmes' (p. 7). Clearly, given the precarity and intense regulation of their lives, such contentious politics is almost impossible for the vast majority of refugee subjects studied here. Accordingly, this project recognises how contentious politics in the case of refugees is constantly controlled by systems of regulation, within which mediation is one avenue. Voices were heard in different ways at different scales of publicness, with different discourses increasingly constrained as publicness operated at larger scales. Participants expressed intimacy in smaller spaces; e.g., Hashem's reflection on a better life, which was clearly lost at a larger scale, as questions of privacy and surveillance became more prominent. This exemplifies the tension between refugees' normative orientation to claim access to the public sphere and their exclusion from this same sphere, and might bolster the utility of publicness as a fluid concept with which to navigate such contexts. While alternative media informed this thesis, it was not a central part of its conceptual backbone. Nonetheless, this study might help us understand how mediation and alternative media theory can be relevant to highly regulated systems to which people seek entrance, while simultaneously being excluded (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987, p. 19; Ruiz, 2014, p. 47).

We also saw various examples of non-linear voice in micropublicness contesting the terms on which voice might be valued within a neoliberal society; while these could not be claimed to be 'coordinated efforts,' they are nonetheless valid forms of becoming public—of making claims to speak as subject-citizens. A more complete conceptualisation of publicness as a microprocess might extend its theorisation to subjects whose voices are highly regulated. This was manifested here not just as contentiousness, but also as mutual solidarity and negotiation in defiance of the ways that commonality was normatively defined, and the ways that publicness has been conceptualised. A theorisation of publicness which acknowledges the role of these solidarities in shaping publics at the margins might extend the meanings of publicness beyond the mainstream, to include those seeking publicness alongside asylum and normative citizenship status.

Implications for Future Creative Mediation Projects

Future creative projects at the centres might usefully implement some of the learning experiences of this thesis. Reflecting on how voice is framed in advertising such projects might be one measure; it is worth considering whether love and solidarity are what is being offered, rather than the understanding of voice highlighted here. Using the term 'solidarity' in place of the more liberally acceptable 'voice' would be a more accurate description in Honnethian terms of these self-representational processes, if we take solidarity to mean 'a felt concern for what is individual and particular about the other person' implying recognition of 'one another in light of values that allow the abilities and traits of the other to appear significant for shared praxis' (Thijssen, 2012, p. 456; Honneth, 1996, p. 129). In considering solidarity in this way we should be mindful of institutional discourses of solidarity used to mask or replace caring gaps created the erosion of the welfare state in favour of privatised neoliberal logics. This is less important than empowering communities to 'engage meaningfully with decisions as to how communities are run' (The Care Collective, 2020, p. 33) and care as a social capacity based on interdependency and the 'common ability to provide the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive' (The Care Collective, 2020, p. 9).

Building trust through sustained engagement in order to foster 'difference-respect', over and above voice and normative forms of liberal recognition, will help avoid misrecognition in intimate spaces. Focusing on intimate spaces as opposed to broader arenas for recognition might help limit the opportunities for misrecognition by unsympathetic citizens. Solidarity beyond the funding mechanisms of the state, outside institutional walls, might help limit the regulatory effects of using neoliberally ordered voices in appeals to funders. Seeking out ways for participants to use their existing skills to teach others, and to have input in designing and implementing creative processes through meaningful negotiation, is preferable to ephemeral interactions. Such sustained engagement might not repair participants' trust in the media, but could well help build more concrete possibilities for solidarity. Currently, participants face situations where they are often used, through 'promises of voice,' by media, cultural, academic, and charitable institutions, to meet these sectors' needs rather than their own. A more radical oppositional politics, where solidarity, care, and negotiation are favoured above the current limited horizons of institutional voice, might stop the cementing of this terminology, and better serve participants.

Limitations of this Thesis

Methodological steps were taken to address questions of limited recruitment of female participants, principally by working with institutional gatekeepers to support female-only workshops where possible. However, it is still worth mentioning the challenges I faced, especially when it came to the recruitment of women in the centres in which I conducted this study. This was due both to the limited numbers of women who attended these sessions—those attending the centres were mostly men, and when women attended they were often charged with childcare, which was financially expensive to replace—and to the demographic

gender breakdown of those arriving to Europe to seek asylum (Phillimore, 2016). There were also unconscious gender biases at play in the structure of sessions that involved female participants. For example, female facilitators in women-only sessions often employed gendered prompts, even while attempting to address gender biases. Women's voices were more likely heard in groups as opposed to individually. As was my intention, I observed without commenting or attempting to alter the practices of other facilitators during the sessions. In my analysis, I have tried to integrate an honest discussion of the tensions involved in negotiating agency for participants while respecting their choices. Any future study will need to factor in the ways in which female refugee voices might be better heard and understood in institutionalised settings. This can be fostered through longer-term participant observation and through collaborative research teams that include female co-investigators, as well as better funded provision of childcare. Researchers must acknowledge the challenges to building relations of trust with participants, a concern that I will incorporate into my recommendations for toolkits to help participatory practice when I report back to the centres.

Inevitably, I have confined this study to the institutions where I conducted my research, within the constraints set by their gatekeeping. This obviously limited the extent to which the complex histories of the participants might be heard, independently of the centres. When translation was available, it was through external services whose translators did not necessarily share the ethnic or racial background of those they were translating. Again, I have tried to factor this into my methodology—to use forms of granular textual analysis only when reliable translation is available.

It is clear that more 'universal' mediations were privileged, and this was inevitably a product of my relationships with individual participants, who no doubt factored my nationality, race, and gender, into their communicative choices. It is likely that cultural meaning was often lost in these interactions—resulting in an omission of useful data. I have tried to account for this by factoring in the ways in which participants' performativity might echo, if not draw upon causally, extant discourses. While these limitations influence the kinds of creative mediation possible in institutional settings—and the homogenisation of performativity through their production—opportunities to contest voice are more likely to occur in settings beyond institutions and would involve more embedded participatory and participant observation inquiry.

I maintain the hope that by offering an honest interrogation of a small number of the hundreds of creative mediation projects offering promises of voice to refugees in the UK, the limitations of such promises may be revealed. They are not entirely hollow, but may well be defined along particular dimensions, with voice and recognition emerging ephemerally, and in complex ways that defy naïve celebrations of emancipatory participation in media production. The limits of participation, coupled with the regulation of voice, often reproduce hierarchies that determine whose voice (and what kind of voice) is heard. In light of this, a consideration of the promise of voice in all its complexity, while rejecting simplified definitions, requires further scholarly attention. Such an effort is likely to lead to deeper understanding of the many nuanced interactions of voice observed.

In Conclusion

In this thesis, we have seen how a creative mediation project could afford a participant particular benefits along particular axes of voice, within particular discursive orders, and that this occurred across a range of fluid possibilities within creative media. All forms of content employed—including digital storytelling, fiction, oral history, group storytelling, drawing—exhibited similar discursive regulation and patterns, including binary expressions of the benevolence of the UK and hostility in participants' countries of origin. While these were creative and emancipatory acts in the moment, they became rapidly complicated as participants fell back into the dominant discourses they had been repeatedly asked to use in representing themselves, such as victimhood and/or entrepreneurship of the self.

While many participants often made unique rights claims through their engagement with creative mediation—a right to British citizenship on humanitarian grounds, for instance, or the right to freedom of movement—they also regularly rearticulated dominant discourses that situate refugees as entrepreneurial subjects or as victims. Thus, there is a discursive tension between a refugee's right to asylum as performed and the discursive violence enacted by such representations in creative settings, which mirror the performativity seen elsewhere in the asylum process (Rivetti, 2013; Häkli, 2017). Performativity in this context is seen in political claims made by asylum seekers which 'are performed through reiterated "scripts of refugeeness" [and hence] do not reverse the "grammar of domination" they went through' (Rivetti, 2013, p.306).

These restricted forms of voice deprive refugees of opportunities to speak publicly as complex subjects with distinct biographies and trajectories that relate to but are not fully contained within their experience of uprooting and resettlement. Such limitations of voice feed into broader forms of misrecognition and symbolic oversimplification of refugees' situation.

While acknowledging where opportunities for voice fall short, it is important to stress that creative mediation projects might be able to afford refugees instances of performative agency and hope through the texts participants produce. This possibility should not be underestimated—especially its capacity to empower participants' self-confidence and self-esteem. However, overall, the context for such texts is structurally regulated, which means that more expansive contestation—critique of the British state, for instance—is very difficult to express for people who are directly dependent on the same state that limits their voice and access to rights. When refugees did reject the opportunity to participate, their rejection often opened up possibilities for them to produce and rearticulate discourses autonomously, and to challenge the power dynamics between the researcher, the institution, and themselves (albeit in ways that were less likely to benefit from social recognition and community-building).

One explanation for this phenomenon is that a participant's identity is in effect so misrecognised by the asylum process that they felt obliged to reiterate a constructed identity of gratefulness or victimhood even

when it wasn't required. As described in the literature on the idea of the '(un)grateful refugee' (Nayeri, 2019), creative mediation projects, while ideally delivered in good faith and in a participatory way, might lead refugees to perform identities in ways that they anticipate will please their interlocutor, thereby muddying the waters around such practice. This is especially pertinent to the rise in visual ethnographic methods used by qualitative researchers working with refugee groups in recent years (Lenette & Boddy, 2013). Creative participatory practice, as opposed to more formally limited kinds of storytelling such as digital practices, does allow participants the chance to consider their own performativity reflexively and in radical forms that reject narrative simplicity within the text itself, while allowing them to build imaginaries of hope in complex, self-aware ways that warrant further scrutiny.

Although I made systematic efforts to share power in decision-making relating to process—through collaboration with centre staff over the format of my sessions in both sites, as well as enabling participants to exercise the power to veto workshop decisions, including their participation in the first place—most of the participatory work was constrained by rigid forms of discourse and expression. This made it clear that when participatory projects are undertaken with people going through the asylum process, it is important that the restrictions and limitations of their situation are recognised, as well as the possibility that their creative expressions may further entrench the discursive regimens to which they are already subject. In terms of Arnstein's (1969) 'ladder of participation,' there were moments which could be considered 'delegated power,' 'citizen control,' and 'partnership,' despite the huge and multifarious restrictions faced by participants elsewhere.

Though the process-related elements of the project were highly imbalanced in terms of power, there were 'participatory pockets' of identification around the media, where individuals narrated the self in differential ways. These, again, were subject to a range of possibilities (Carpentier, 2016, p. 83) which related to the balance of power between myself, the centres, and participants. There was also clearly a temporal dimension to negotiations regarding form, content, and process of the project, which reflected the accumulation of trust that manifested later in fieldwork. At all points, there was a clear gradient of material and symbolic power between these actors. I had primary control of the range of possibilities, although there was choice within that range, which was in turn negotiated with the institutions.

Gender, class, social, and cultural background influenced the way participants chose or were able to engage with the project. Existing arts activities frequently shored up normative versions of artistic skill and cultural capital, and often reinforced the facilitating practitioners' skills at the expense of the raft of skills present in the room and among other participants. Levels and types of engagement reflected but also advanced differential self-esteem and engagement through acts of solidarity, to which some participants were committed while others remained suspicious. The participants', my own, and other actors' positions, roles, and identities all interrelated within decision-making moments in the process, and reflected many contingent factors, including but not limited to the diversity of individual strengths and limitations, health (including

mental health), family circumstances, class, personality type, religion, familiarity with technology, digital literacy, and the strength of working relationships with centre staff.

It would be unfair to close this study without emphasising once more the instances of resistance by participants against those who wield power over them: instances that include anger, mistrust, and indignation, but also creative interventions that provide esteem and love, or indeed self-awareness, to refugees in environments where they are typically seen but not heard. It is these creative 'breaks' that we should think of when we think of refugee voice in these contexts. While we cannot promise that creative interventions deliver a voice for participants *carte blanche*, voices do emerge: these might be in moments of negotiation, or argument, or resistance, including silence or reflexivity, in and around the text itself. Media is not always the safest way of gaining voice, or recognition, and this might help us extend our definition of the complex, contradictory, and collaborative ways that voice emerges in creative practices, both within narrative, but also beyond it, in formally disruptive, unfinished, messy, affective, and non-linear ways. Eventually, we might think differently about voice itself.

Appendix
Consent forms and information sheets

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

Sample Consent Form

Thank you for letting me talk to you for my research about your work.

As I explained when I was at XXXX, I am a researcher looking into different people's voices, especially those people who attend this centre. If you want further information about my project, please speak to XXX, who has further details.

You can contact me at any time about my research on r.j.sharp@lse.ac.uk or +44 7974 367079.

By signing this form and ticking the appropriate boxes, you consent to allow me to use notes and photographs taken at XXX in my research (analysis and findings). **All of your contribution is completely anonymous and you are able to withdraw from the project at any time—in which case all material that can identify you will be removed at your request.**

If I intend to use your material in any public-facing work (e.g., presentation or exhibition) I will contact you individually for your consent.

I have had the research explained to me and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐ (please tick)
I understand that my responses will be kept confidential and anonymous and that my personal data will not be retained.	☐ (please tick)
I agree to participate in the individual interviews and workshops. I have the right to participate in the workshops and not the research.	☐ (please tick)
I understand that the individual interviews will be anonymised unless I prefer otherwise, and that my material will be taken down in notes and used. I understand that my real name will be anonymised and any identifying features will not be used in this research.	☐ (please tick)

Name (will be anonymised)_____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

Participatory Mediation and Voice

Sample Information Sheet

My name is Rob Sharp. I am a doctoral researcher at the Department of Media and Communications of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

What is this research about?

I'm looking at how participatory creative projects give asylum seekers and refugees the opportunity for voice through creative expression. In other words, my research seeks to understand creative forms of communication outside the mainstream media, and put that communication into its proper context.

I'm particularly interested in the decisions made by participants during the process; how participants engage with one another; whether participants feel listened to; and whether they see their participation as a form of participation in society.

If possible, I also hope to explore communities that form around these projects beyond the institutions themselves. I'm looking to offer feedback on my findings to the organisations I work with, in any way that is helpful to them.

What would the researcher do?

For this study, I would sit in on and/or participate in creative workshops on terms of the organisations' choosing, and write fieldnotes at the end of each session in my own time. In addition, I would seek to interview participants at various times during the process: at the beginning, during the middle, and end. I would also like to organise my own creative projects.

What would the institution/charity receive in return?

I'm happy to share my draft analysis and data with participants in order for them to offer feedback before submission of the thesis; to participate in workshops; and to produce a separate evaluation report for the organisation in a format of their choice. I'm happy to add labour, within my skillset, in any other way that might be useful, including copywriting and teaching.

Authorisation and consent

Verbal and/or written consent would be obtained from all participants. This outlines the rights of participants not to be recorded in the research. In any case, all names and identifying features of participants will be anonymised.

Getting in touch

If you have any questions about this research, please don't hesitate to contact me at any time on my LSE email, r.j.sharp@lse.ac.uk, (which I check daily), or you can call me/text message on +44 7974 367079.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sample Interview Guide for Participants

Before Workshop

Why would you like to produce this work?

How would you like to develop work?

Why will it be important to produce this?

What would like people who view this work to think about?

During Workshop

How would you like to develop the work?

How does doing work like this make you feel within this centre and society?

Why was it important for you to produce this work?

How did you feel you could develop the idea in different directions to the opportunities available?

How do you want people to feel when they see it and what do you want them to think about?

After Workshop

How would you describe the work you did?

How did producing the work make you feel?

How did you feel and think about how people responded to the work?

What is your response to the work of other people?

How did this work make you feel more involved in this centre, and in the community?

How did it help you relate to people beyond the centre?

List of Regular Participants producing Creative Media*

Name	Country of Origin	Gender	Creative Media
Amin	Saudi Arabia	M	Fragmentary storytelling
Awira	Syrian Kurdistan	F	Group Storytelling
Babacar	Syrian Kurdistan	F	Drawing and Collage
Basir	Iran	M	Storyboard
Basir	Iran	M	Video
Hashem	Iran	M	Letter
Irshad	Chad	M	Video collage
Issac	Eritrea	M	Prayer
Jamshid	Iran	M	Video
Jamshid	Iran	M	Technical account
Kamran	Iran	M	Storyboard
Maryam	Syrian Kurdistan	F	Group Storytelling
Masoud	Iran	M	Video
Sarya	Syrian Kurdistan	F	Group Storytelling
Victor	DRC	M	Storyboard and Audio
Viyan	DRC	F	Drawing and Collage
Yezda	Syrian Kurdistan	F	Group Storytelling

*Regular I take to mean participants who participated in more than one session. This only reflects creative workshops initiated and run by the author.

Timeline of Principal Creative Workshops Featuring in Participant Observation

Date	**Participants***	**Medium**	**Language**	**Facilitator****	**Site**
11/6/19	Basir +	Marbling	English	Centre B staff	T
12/6/19	Kamran +	Jewellery	English	Local arts practitioner	T
12/6/19	Kamran +	Weaving	English	Local arts practitioner	T
14/6/19	Issac, Basir, Victor +	Map-making	English	Local arts practitioner***	T
14/6/19	Sarya, Yezda +	Pottery	English	Local arts practitioner	T
25/7/19	Jamshid, plus others	Music	Multiple	Local arts institution	C
26/7/19	Amin, Jamshid	Writing	English	RS	C
29/7/19	Jamshid	Storyboard	English	RS	C
20/7/19	Jamshid, Amin, Kamran	Storyboard	English	RS	C
25/7/19	Kamran, plus others	Music	Multiple	Local arts practitioner	C
1/8/19	Amin, Jamshid +	Writing, AV	English	RS	C
2/8/19	Jamshid, Hashem +	Writing, AV	English, Arabic	RS	C
5/8/19	Kamran, Azim, Jamshid +	AV	English, Farsi	RS	C
7/8/19	Jamshid +	Storyboard, AV	English	RS	C
8/8/19	Amin, Hashem +	Writing	English	RS	C
9/9/19	Amin, Hashem +	Writing, AV	English	RS	C
12/8/19	Kamran +	AV	English, Farsi	RS	C
13/8/19	Amin, Jamshid +	Writing	English	RS	C
15/8/19	Irshad, Azim, Khaled +	AV	English	RS	C
20/8/19	Bijan +	Gardening	English, Farsi	Centre B staff	T
21/8/19	Basir, Bijan +	Storyboarding	English	RS	T
21/8/19	Basir, Bijan, Victor +	AV, collage	English, Kurdish	RS	T
23/8/19	Basir, Bijan +	AV	Multiple	RS	T
23/8/19	Babacar, Viyan +	Collage	Multiple	RS	T
27/8/19	Victor, Basir	AV	English	RS	T
27/8/19	Babacar, Viyan +	Drawing, collage	Multiple	RS/Local arts practitioner	T
28/8/19	Maryam, Yezda +	Collage, drawing	Multiple	RS	T
30/9/19	Sarya, Yezda +	Writing, collage	English	RS	T
2/9/19	Yezda, Maryam, Awira	Group story	Kurdish	RS/Local arts practitioner	T
2/9/19	Masoud, Basir	AV	English	RS	T
4/9/19	Yezda, Maryam, Awira +	Drawing, collage	English, Kurdish	RS	T
4/9/19	Yezda, Maryam, Awira	Group story	Kurdish	RS/Local arts practitioner	T
6/9/19	Basir, Bijan	AV, drawing	English	RS, David	T
9/9/19	Basir	AV	English	RS, David	T
20/9/19	Amin	Writing	English	RS	L

27/9/19	Victor, Bijan +	Various	English	RS	T
7/10/19	Amin	Writing	English	RS	L
21/10/19	Jamshid	Storyboard	English	RS	C
27/10/19	Audiences	Storyboard	English	RS	T

*These are participants who stayed for the majority of the workshop; given that these were drop-in workshops lasting between one and three hours, participants have been named where possible.

**RS is the thesis author.

***These are artist facilitators already conducting workshops with the centres on a voluntary basis as part of the centres' arts provision.

+ includes unnamed participants who did not consent to participate in research.

AV indicates audio and/or video.

Azim and Khaled consented to inclusion in the research but not the creative mediation workshops.

Where 'Multiple' is indicated under languages, these were conducted in Farsi, French and Arabic alongside English.

David is a local arts practitioner who assisted project workshops in some instances in Tyneside.

Sites are either Tyneside (T) or Cardiff (C). Two workshops were conducted with Amin in London (L).

Extract from Fieldnotes
8th August 2019 (morning)

I get to the centre around 10am to speak to the employee from the Red Cross who is based on site three days a week. We are due to speak first, and then I will meet Jamshid.

I go up to his office, we have a cup of tea, and he tells me he is mainly dealing with people who are being reunited with their families once they have gone through the asylum process. “This process will take four months at least,” he says. He discusses is broad terms some of the challenges he faces in his day-to-day work. “I’ve heard of situations where people can't get status for their daughters if they turn 18 during the process,” he adds. “I’ve had situations where people have given birth during process and the child isn't recognised”. I ask him if he minds being recorded for the interview, and he says he prefers not to be recorded. It's clear that he is wary of some of my questions and is defensive about the centre’s work. He talks about how people change after their get their asylum status, and he says people go from talking about their home country to talking about how they want to work and contribute to the economy. He mentions Fisal, a participant who is a former asylum seeker who is doing work around the centre, varnishing tables.

He tells me about various initiatives the centre has trying to get participants out into communities, to meet different people, though this response is unbidden; I do not question the participants’ right to be in the UK, but it is clear that he wants to make this case.

When he talks about the participants interaction with the local community in Cardiff, he gets irritated. “It’s not just that, there are positive things happening. Refugees have gone to the Houses of Parliament as part of the City of Sanctuary programme and met politicians, and I’ve gone with them to Westminster,” he says. He seems obviously keen on there not being a negative narrative of any descriptions around refugees, though my questions are open. I ask whether he thinks people feel defined by their refugeeness. “It does take its toll,” he says, “if people are mucked around about their status, they get angry and it has a negative affect on their mental health”. He discusses a particular case where an Afghan couple can’t get asylum for their two daughters, and now they are in Pakistan.

“You do hear a lot of stories,” he says. He begins talk about people’s right to work. He says people say they don't want to be in this situation, it's not that they are coming for economic opportunities, but once they are here they want to work and contribute. They don't want to make out that they are just claiming to be asylum seekers to get in and get better jobs. However, that right to have a better life is the right of everyone, he says. He repeatedly says that the data around who is arriving from which country doesn’t necessarily match the media narrative.

He says lots of people don't have lawyers, he helps them get lawyers. He describes how the government stopped Legal Aid for people to put through asylum applications for families, through the Family Asylum Claim Process, now people have to apply themselves and it is very confusing for them (his emotional exhaustion is clear at this point; it is clear that he feels rushed, because of the needs of the participants). As we end our discussion he tells me: “When you apply for your family to come over you have to provide lots of proof that the relationship is still live, you have to provide text messages, and licences to prove that the relationship is still active…refugees are incredibly resilient people, much more than you and me, they have taken incredible risks to get to the situation they are in now”.

I venture down to the office of the centre. It becomes clear that the staff there don’t want volunteers to be using the office, partly because of security concerns: the staff in there often change, come and go, and I have been asked twice whether I should be there to work. I notice that there’s a whiteboard with all of the staff members’ hours. There’s a note on this that the board should be used "in addition to, not instead of verbal communication".

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