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Refugees and theatre: an exploration of the basis of self-representation

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores representations by, about, and for refugees, through the medium of theatrical representation. Research centred around six months of interviews and participant observation during voluntary work, as introduced and detailed in Chapters 1 and 3. Deeper discussion and analysis is across Chapters 4 to 7. Chapter 4 examines negative aspects of the refugee theatre industry, and draws on interview data to explore power relations in the industry. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 draw mainly on participant observation to examine ways in which refugee theatre groups successfully navigate disparate power relations, and reshape problematic representations within the refugee theatre industry. Chapter 5 focuses on the reaction to certain narratives, through use of two theatrical styles. Chapter 6 discusses how refugees' engagement with theatre relates to their sense of agency, in performances and social activities surrounding them. Finally, Chapter 7 focuses on the political potential of theatre to effect change in society.

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PREFACE

'Dismantling ingrained modern and colonial structures of thought and modes of being must occur at the creative and cultural level of imagination'

(Hannas et al. 2015:8).

In 2015, I watched a performance by CAN Theatre entitled *Rule 35*. It was then that the seed of the idea for this dissertation was planted. The harrowing subject matter was important: the performance was about the impact of detention on asylum-seeking women's emotional and physical wellbeing. Two aspects of this performance resonated with me. Firstly, the performance was produced and performed by women who had personally experienced ill-treatment in the asylum system. Secondly, despite characters in places being depicted as victims, they were also surprisingly loud, assertive, and energetic.

The performance presented an accessible and strikingly localised exploration of asylum injustices. I left the theatre with a strong sense of engagement with the voices of the displaced, who live all around me in London, albeit through a performative medium. I was bothered by the fact that I had not hitherto experienced such exposure. The political context to which I had grown accustomed appeared to either shut out refugee voices in public discussion, or misrepresent and malign them to the tune of political leaders and commercial media. From this, questions were raised about how the 'refugee experience' is articulated, problematised, and reframed in the theatre, the processes behind these performances, and the meanings for those involved. Specifically, I was interested in theatre which links political struggle and artistic expression, involving radical or overlooked artists who make bold statements through performance.

The opportunity to engage with and explore refugee voices arose as a volunteering opportunity in the Calais refugee camp, the 'Jungle'. Here I was introduced to theatre groups which operated in the Jungle, such as GoodChance Theatre. This opened the door to refugee

theatre organisations I could volunteer with in London, which accordingly shaped the topic of this research. This pursuit involved me becoming deeply involved with refugee theatre organisations. The intention of this project was to explore representations by, about, and for refugees, through the medium of theatrical representation. Most importantly, it aimed to explore the personal meanings such representation held for those involved in the refugee theatre industry. I hope this research does justice to those who trusted me enough to share their ideas, experiences, and stories, and for the amazing people doing exceptional things for and alongside refugees in the UK.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The etymology of the word refugee¹ comes from the Latin *fugere*, meaning ‘to flee’ (Hoad 1996:395). The international politico-legal construction of the ‘refugee’ is suggested to have emerged during World War Two as ‘a specific social category and legal problem of global dimensions’ (Malkki 1995:498). The number who have been displaced by conflict is now said to be at the highest level ever recorded (BBC 2016).

The refugee situation has elicited mixed responses and heated debate in the print media, social media, public forums, and Parliamentary dialogue. Increased attention on the refugee situation is repeatedly conveyed through the discourse of ‘crisis’, which can get swallowed into wider debates around, and people’s sentiments toward, immigration, as these categories of people get blurred in the popular imagination (Kaye 1998). For example, the recent political shifts of Brexit and Donald Trump’s election are argued to have been influenced by voters’ concerns about the so-called refugee ‘crisis’. From these tensions, key questions were raised for me about what spaces there were for refugee peoples to speak for and represent themselves. Over the noise of ‘the refugee experience’ which Eastmond (2007:253) identifies as the notion that ‘refugeeness’ is a uniform condition, and the tendency to ‘think of refugees as an undifferentiated, essentialized, and universal category’. This interested me in an artistic manner, leading to focus on creative spaces which enable refugee voice.

We have seen the rise of positive initiatives and organisations geared toward arriving asylum seekers; since the early 1990s there has been significant growth in the arts in Britain ‘among community groups made up of refugees and asylum seekers’ (Jeffers 2011:137). This dissertation focuses specifically on the refugee theatre industry, which has been suggested to have had many beneficial impacts on those refugees involved (Kidd et al 2008). It has been

¹ ‘Refugee’ is a problematic and heavily loaded term. However, this will be the term used throughout this dissertation for practicality: This dissertation topic specifically talks about theatre in relation to this political label.

suggested that the growing ‘hype’ around the refugee crisis has increased the popularity of refugee-related theatre, with the ‘documentary play’² being the most common genre to arise.

This dissertation³ seeks to explore the representations made by, about, and for refugees within the refugee theatre industry, and any tensions and power relations around these representations. There will also be examination of the significance of ‘wrap-around’⁴ theatre activities. Research was carried out over a six-month period, between June and November 2016, and the data collected using participant observation and interviews⁵. In all, 15 refugee-related organisations took part in the study. Much involvement with these groups centred around my being a volunteer, for which I spent most time involved in activities around final production. The research focuses on refugee theatre organisations in London, which is described as having the ‘highest concentration of cultural organisations’ (Kidd et al 2008:20), and many new refugee arrivals, making London a unique and valuable location to explore refugee theatre.

My analysis applies a postcolonial lens, through which I aim to ‘interrogate inequalities, power and privilege’, to the extent that it exists within the refugee theatre industry (Jazeel 2012:4). For example, an important question to ask is *who* exactly has control over representations of refugees. The nature of this study topic is particularly loaded given the urgent context of the refugee situation. However, as Nicholson (2014:29) asserts, ‘theatre has a long history of articulating social dissent [...] to protest, to stimulate debate and provoke questions, thus enabling people to become emotionally engaged with political issues’. Refugee theatre is a space specifically designated for the articulation of refugee self-representation, indicating the research potential of such a site, but is also one which is largely overlooked in the literature. Thus, efforts are both a methodological experiment and an

² A style which aims to realistically depict and dramatically articulate research and analysis of migrant testimony, with the potential to illuminate negative aspects of the asylum system.

³ Full research questions after section 2.5 in Literature review

⁴ These include activities which engage the audience with a topic raised by a performance before and after it is performed, for example in post-show ‘Q&As’.

⁵ There is more information on the research methodology in Chapter 3 and Appendix 1.

empirical enquiry, in search of better understanding of the refugee situation for the people involved.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Refugees and representation

There is broad interdisciplinary literature on different aspects of refugees and representation, which will be explored in this chapter. Many scholars (e.g. Fincham 2012; Koser and Lutz 1998; Orford 2008) have researched the representation of refugees in non-refugee sources, within media and humanitarian spheres. Scholars have identified common discursive registers, both in media representations, such as photography of the Rwanda crisis (Malkki 1996), and humanitarian discourses, such as Oxfam publications (Rajaram 2002). These include bodily physical evidence of violence, accounts of human tragedy, and heroic narrative. Within these discursive realms, there are argued to be standardised ways of presenting 'refugee problems', within which refugees are often depicted as hapless victims (Rajaram 2002:251,249), needing caring outsiders' help (Rieff 2002). It is said to be 'refugee experts' who dictate the representing; these bureaucratised processes of managing the refugee can be understood as an attempt to advocate for the need of the refugee, and to 'generate pity' for representative victims (Malkki 1996:390)(Rajaram 2002:252).

The effect of the above representational tropes is argued to be the systematic, if unintended, silencing of a person (Malkki 1996)(Rajaram 2002). Rajaram (2002) goes further, to argue that within the Oxfam project there were strict bureaucratic methodologies for listening to refugees, indicating that there were only predefined, prescriptive spaces within which refugees could speak. The scope of refugee voices is thus restricted.

To understand media depictions of the 'refugee problem', Rajaram (2002) associates it with Western theory, arguing that it originates in state-centric perspectives on identity and politics. This depends in turn on territorialised notions of home, culture, and identity (Rajaram 2002). Media slurs which connect refugees with 'parasites' (Gibson 2003:380) can collide with a

society where order is argued by Douglas (1966) to be conceived through a modality of purity, thus refugee discourses connote refugees to be ‘matter out of place’.

The discursive registers identified by various scholars signal the disempowerment of the refugee through certain representational practices in the media (Koser and Lutz 1998) and humanitarian sphere. Effectively, certain identities are excluded. A particular voice of the displaced has been filtered out, with given people not conceptualised as refugees because they do not look like ‘real refugees’; the identity of the ‘ideal’ refugee is fixed (Malkki 2002:284,384). Similar conclusions have been drawn from the work of Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2010), who researched how particular ‘Sahrawi’ refugee representations are constructed by NGOs and non-Sahrawi in refugee camps. It is predominantly Western projections of the ‘progressive’ and ‘worthy’ refugee which are pushed forward, placing pressure on refugees to ‘perform’ accordingly (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010:534,540). Indeed, Jeffers (2011:108) argues refugees are restricted to actions of ‘bureaucratic performance’, a mode of speaking which aims to create public credibility for their own situation. Drawing on her research in courtroom settings, Jeffers posits that the bureaucratic performances found here can extend to everyday life. This research opens the performative dimension of the ‘conventional refugee’, and how this may extend into the public sphere, as refugees attempt to present themselves as an ‘authentic’ and ‘genuine’ refugee (Jeffers 2011:17). However, there is a lack of distinct research on the social processes around refugee community theatre, which could offer key insights into whether refugees do indeed relate to the idea of bureaucratic performance, and whether they do feel the need to ‘act’ authentically, both on stage and in life.

The literature indicates that the spaces available for refugees to speak in politically and institutionally consequential ways are limited. Standardised representations of refugees miss out refugees’ own representations of self, interpreted by Levinas as an act of violence: the ‘said’ which insists on encountering the other as something to be known and controllable (Levinas cited by Burvill 2008). Moreover, common representational forms, such as written text, are suggested by Conquergood (2002) to be bounded by conditions of hegemony, and non-textual forms of open expression have been argued to be associated with risks of

rejection or persecution, which Jackson (2006) argues can recourse to social withdrawal. This notion links to earlier concepts of *who* exactly has control over representations of refugees, and the importance of raising these questions due to a connection made between human rights (Bhabha 2003) and '*who*' has the right to narrate (Nicholson 2014).

The notion of 'the refugee experience' as a uniform condition, and the tendency to devise essentialised categories of people (Malkki 1995), are asserted powerfully through this discursive body of literature.

2.2 Problematic representations of refugees within the theatre context

Many scholars write critically about theatre made for, with, and about refugees (e.g. Lev-Aladgem 2004; McEwen 2007). Funding, and control over it, for community theatre projects often come from funding bodies external to the group in question (Nicholson 2014). Nicholson (2014) argues that funders who drive agendas often do so without detailed research, leading to the promotion of 'simplistic' messages (Kerr 2009:101) and the commodification of the refugee experience (Nicholson 2014). Due to interests of funding bodies, theatrical pieces may need to adhere to 'left-liberal discourses of community development and empowerment' (Rose cited by Pile 1997:191).

Relations between theatre organisations and refugee participants has been problematized, albeit non-extensively, by some scholars. Although theatre about refugees by non-refugee advocacy organisations can be construed as a supportive action, Nicholson's work on applied theatre is apposite to the discussion of power in this relationship. Drawing on 'gift theory' from the work of Mauss (1954), Derrida (1992), and Bordieu (1997), Nicholson suggests that 'gifts' have positive connotation. However, they can often be hierarchal: those able to 'gift' are more powerful, and, as Mauss (1954) argues, gifts are always self-interested due to implicit debt and a social obligation to reciprocate. This concept could be applied to theatre organisations, which define their role as 'giving' refugees a voice and space in which to share

their stories, situating themselves in a hierarchal relationship with the refugee, and ‘keeping the other in their place’ (Smith 2014:183).

2.2.2 The dilemmas associated with telling personal refugee narrative on stage

There is often an emphasis on personal narrative in refugee performances (Jeffers 2011:18). Jeffers researched the ‘re-staging [of] stories of refuge within a fictional frame’ in applied theatre, and argued that ‘the reliance on personal testimony is often part of an effort to empower refugees by the sharing of subaltern experiences with a wider audience’ (Jeffers cited by Balfour 2013:18). However, the use of personal narrative raises ethical dilemmas. Personal narrative is understood to be an important and complex resource for a refugee, a form of currency, with each telling promising a ‘move along the continuum from the refugee to resident’ (Dennis 2007:286). Dennis (2007) therefore describes the telling of refugee narrative on stage as ‘unethical’, due to its promise of a progression which cannot be realised. This is important for this dissertation; many subject theatre organisations advocate for the rights of refugees through use of refugee testimony.

2.2.3 Reductionist refugee representations in theatre: trauma and the ‘hero’ narrative

Two core themes arise in the literature, regarding dilemmas in the representation of refugees in theatre: refugees can be re-victimised in the systematic marketisation of trauma, and theatre pieces can present and overly praise ‘idealised’ representations of the refugee (Pupavac 2008). This unhelpful oscillation and franchising of the ‘refugee story’ can lead to a singular and essential refugee identity, obscuring the individual and denying them agency to craft their own subjectivity (Dennis 2007).

Jeffers (2011) highlights frequent attempts for cultural products made about refugees to create sympathy on the part of the audience, which she associates with an implicit need for trauma to fulfil the criteria of a bureaucratic performance. For example, Jeffers (2011:129) argues that refugee festivals ‘excite anxieties of how the event might be read [...] compelling organisers to’ curate a ‘certain kind of refugee performance, conditioned by the need for images of persecution and flight’. This sort of representation can also be observed in ‘documentary’ theatre (Sieg 2016), such as that which is often made by ‘human rights’ theatre groups. This narrative choice is said to reject a more complex narrative, and misses out ‘narratives of resistance and resourcefulness’ of the refugee (Jeffers 2011:46). Salverson (1999) warns against simple naturalistic repetitions of trauma, or literal translations of stories of ‘injury’, because these are reductive and potentially re-violating.

On the other end of the spectrum, performances can downplay complexities and give refugees a ‘saintly glow’, similarly to Malkki’s (1996) ‘heroic’ narrative. This trope can be found in the comparative study of three performances carried out by Jeffers (2011): she explains that theatre groups ‘tend to stress what refugees have to offer, or what they can give as part of a ‘myth-busting’ discourse’ (Jeffers 2011:92). Although well-meaning, the emphasis on refugees’ contribution to the nation can, as Honig (2001:199) writes, feed into ‘xenophobic anxiety that they might really be takers from it’. Similar to the focus on trauma in performance, the effort to represent refugees as endearing and heroic is also seen to politically neuter refugees to the point of victimhood (Jeffers 2011).

2.3 The positive potential of artwork

Some scholars have sought to recognise the positive potential of theatre and narrative outside and around the immediate performance context (e.g. Conquergood 1988; Thompson 2009; Lewis 2012). This section will examine this literature, maintaining a broad definition of the theatrical.

2.3.1 Social functions of refugee theatre

Scholars suggest there to be social functions of refugee theatre, outside of the theatrical context. For example, Balfour and Woodrow (2013) suggest community theatre for the vulnerable can function as a bridge to society, restoring attachments and social connections to others. Anthropological understandings from Jackson (2006:18) convincingly argue that narration is key to personal empowerment and a ‘coping strategy’ in situations where ‘autonomy is undermined [and] recognition withheld’. Indeed, Smith highlights the function of arts as a context of ‘creative agency’, whereby the supportive structures of projects can impact on participants’ abilities to make choices and changes in their life outside of the project. Predominantly, studies conducted into the social impacts of theatre are done in a context whereby artwork has the specific purpose of having a therapeutic function for those who have experienced trauma, this is valuable and important research. However, there is little exploration of social impacts beyond a therapeutic focus. As such, further ethnographic detail is needed to expand on these ideas.

2.3.2 The importance of audience–performer relations

Theatre can be understood as a medium of exchange between an audience and a performer (Conquergood 1988). There have been debates about the significance of the audience in performances (e.g. Mcnaughten 2010; Winston 2007; Woodland and Lachowicz 2013). For example, work exploring the educative potential of performances (Gallagher and Booth 2015). Arguments of those scholars who point towards the importance of the audience–performer dynamics can be deconstructed. The seminal author for this discussion is Augustine Boal, whose 1960 ‘Theatre Of The Oppressed’ argues that audience–performer relations were predicated on a notion of spectatorship being equated with passivity. Boal

aimed to revolutionise the nature of audience participation, and transform the spectator into a 'spect-actor' (Boal cited by Stokes 2015:175). Nicholson (2014) expands Boal's work through her concept of the 'active-democratic citizen', whereby theatrical encounters can be important for encouraging an audience to take on more democratically participative citizen roles, raising the 'level of debate beyond pity and into a more ethical arena' (Jeffers 2011:14). This 'interventionist' potential is said to be achieved by putting the audience in the shoes of others, leading to 'spect-actor's self-knowledge'. This is suggested by Brecht Theatre Movement to challenge the audiences' political assumptions about people's identities and life experiences (Willet 1947), and create empathy and understanding for others (Nicholson 2014). Scholars raise questions, however, about whether an overly empathetic response can merely reinforce social roles (Shuman 2005), because the party able to dwell on the other is more powerful, while the 'strange subject is therefore identified as a body out of place' (Ahmed 2000:23). The outlined potential of the audience is valuable, but 'under-explored in much writing about participatory refugee theatre that has emerged in recent years' (Jeffers 2011:229). From the position of a volunteer carrying out participant observation, this dissertation conducts an expanded examination of the potential of audience-performer relations in refugee theatre.

2.4 Challenging expectations and alternative ways of being in the world: agency and artwork

Connections have been made between the arts and social activism. Some modes of representation are said to be able to resist neo-colonial forces of subjection and containment (Aldama 2001; Saldívar et al 2015). Artistic practices have been conceptualised as a platform from which positive images of asylum seekers can be promoted, where their right to 'be there', on a micro/local level, stands in for the justification to 'be there', on the 'macro/national level' (Jeffers 2011:119). This section opens up discussion of the ways in which disempowered groups have been able to take voice and space.

2.4.1 Agency and artwork: taking voice

Pre-defined expectations of who a refugee is supposed to be, and how they are to behave, can be creatively opened-up and challenged (Lewis 2012; Harte 2006). For example, the refugee identity is a subjectivity often thought to be difficult to contain within narrow structural analysis of politics. However, Nyers (2003) explores ways in which refugees can mobilise political identities, which may be associated with resistance. The ‘refugee activist’ is a refugee who challenges ‘their treatment at the hands of authorities, and simultaneously challenges cultural assumptions of refugeeness, which are namely silence, passivity’ (Jeffers 2011:83), and being ‘apolitical’ (Nyers 2003:1074). Under this definition, any deviance from restrictive identity can be interpreted as political dissent. Exploring anti-deportation campaigns in Canada, Nyers argues campaign tactics allowed for the subversion of the reductive framework of ‘authoritative citizen’ and ‘passive refugee’ by their vigorous and highly visible campaigns taken into the bureaucratised space of the immigration office. Through the disruption of ideas of citizenship and territorialised nationalism and identities, the group provoked fundamental political questions about politics: ‘Who speaks? Who belongs? Who counts?’ (Nyers 2003:1072,1073).

2.4.2 Agency and artwork: taking space

Pinder (2008:733) claims there are linkages between contemporary arts and space-related activism, whereby artists have begun to no longer merely present political issues, but ‘infiltrate and intervene in urban situations tactically for critical ends’. This is exemplified in research by Rugg (2001), who examines artwork in highly regulated public spaces, such as cities. She explores art installations which artistically contest increasing societal inequalities in London, and, as she argues, temporarily overlay spatial rules and codes with alternative

spatial practices, thus (re)politicising public space. This dissertation seeks to further examine the important relations between space and political artwork. Little research has been done on *refugee* art in public spaces. As explored earlier, literature points to ways in which refugees are generally conceived in wider discourse as not having access to public spaces. Thus, examining refugee artwork may potentially provide counter-narratives to spatial rules.

2.5 Conclusion

Representations of refugees have been explored extensively in the media and humanitarian sphere. However, conclusions from Section 2.1 cannot be applied unproblematically to representations in the theatrical sphere, as representations here are made for entirely different purposes. They are separate contexts, with unique interplays of power relations. Moreover, a core argument originating in the critical literature points toward the limited capacity and space for refugees to represent themselves. This dissertation thus aims to extend current understandings by investigating refugee voice within theatrical space, a unique space in which resources are given to refugee groups to facilitate expression.

While there is a growing body of research on refugee issues, and literature which spans a wide geographical area, the study of arts-related work involving refugees and asylum seekers in the UK remains minimal (Khan, Kidd, Zakir 2008). In terms of work into refugee theatre, an important field site yet to be theorised is work by non-refugee theatre groups, such as ‘human rights’ theatre groups⁶, and refugee advocate groups like those explored in this dissertation. The limited literature which has engaged with refugee theatre posits that the main benefit of this is its therapeutic quality (e.g. Kurahashi 2004; Schininà 2004; Taylor 2006). Meanwhile, critical literature makes little advance beyond arguing that discursive tropes oscillate between the ‘heroic’ and ‘victim’ narrative, which mirror the discursive registers found in the media

⁶ Theatre groups which use theatre to advocate for refugees. These either work alongside refugees, or carry out detailed research with refugees which inform the work being produced.

and humanitarian discourse surrounding refugees. More specifically, Alison Jeffers, the most prolific writer in this field, contends that ‘the act of bureaucratic performance has inflected and infected all performances made by and about refugees’ (Jeffers 2011:152,153). For these reasons, the discursive creation of ‘the refugee experience’ (Malkki 1995) also appears to extend to a sort of ‘refugee theatre experience’ in the literature. However, much literature on this field is from the vantage point of an audience member and on specific performances (e.g. Jeffers 2008; 2011; 2013). Moreover, there is little focus on the social relations around the theatre context. Ethnographic research and interviews can pave the way to offering a more nuanced understanding of the impact of the victim and hero narrative for those involved, and expand the understandings of how this may be perceived by refugees involved.

This review has highlighted how much valuable work already exists on refugees and social activism, and on arts and social activism. However, work which combines aspects of both is missing. That which does examine the potential of refugees’ voice has typically done so through a therapeutic lens; the more nuanced study is restricted to the field site of a refugee camp, or within community arts projects. Exploring refugee theatre can reveal the potential of the theatre to provide refugees with alternatives to voicelessness and placelessness, which could offer a counter-narrative to arguments made by scholars who argue that refugees can feel excluded from public space.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After summarising the key arguments in the literature, the research objectives I chose are:

- 1- How, why, and to what effect, are refugees self-represented and passively represented in the following:
 - refugee and migrant theatre groups;
 - performances which use refugee narratives; and
 - human rights theatre groups.
- 2- What are the power relationships and tensions between the way refugees represent themselves and the ways they are represented, and treated, by non-refugee theatre organisations?
- 3- What is the significance of audience-performer encounters within and beyond the immediate theatre context?
- 4- How does refugees' own engagement with theatrical initiatives relate to their sense of agency, identity, and belonging, in:
 - theatrical techniques; and
 - processes around theatre

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the initial research strategy, and the measures taken to modify this in response to unexpected problems which arose.

3.1 Data collection

This dissertation seeks to explore representations made by, about, and for refugees within the theatre industry, and the processes and meanings of these representations in ‘wrap-around’ theatre activities. As explained in *Chapter 1: Introduction*, research was carried out over a six-month period, and the data collected using participant observation and interviews⁷. In all, 17 interviews were carried out, involving non-refugee artistic directors, refugee participants, and refugee actors. Interviewees were all London-based, and were involved in one-off refugee theatre projects or were members of refugee organisations (Table 1).

Table 1: refugee organisations and refugee theatre organisations

Name of organisation	Leadership	Purpose and aims of organisation	Research methods (interviewee: refugee/non-refugee)	Productions and projects viewed for this study
The Paper Project UK	Refugee-led	Create arts projects exploring experiences of	Interviews: Lisa (N-R) Hussein (R)	Safina Al Hayat

⁷ Further information about interviewees can be found in the ‘Appendix 1’ section in the appendix.

		young migrants and refugees	Karam (R) Tamara (R) Farid (R) Mahid (R) Participant observation	We Are Not Birds
Ice and Fire	Non-refugee-led	Explore human rights stories through performance	Interview: Victoria (N-R) Participant observation	Asylum Monologues Lost and Found Island Nation
Actors for Human Rights	Non-refugee-led	Draw public attention to human rights concerns through professional actor performances	Participant observation	Asylum Monologues
Room to heal	Non-refugee-led	Provide a healing community for victims of torture. Some projects involve performance	Participant observation	A Day in the Life
Refugee Youth	Refugee-led	Use creative arts to explore issues surrounding young refugees	Interview: Raheem (R) Participant observation	Eid Party Project
Freedom from Torture	Non-refugee-led	Help survivors of torture rediscover their voice and rebuild their lives	Participant observation	Lost and Found

Redzone Theatre	Refugee-led	Produce political theatre about refugees	Interview: Ali (R)	September 11
Pan Intercultural Arts	Non-refugee-led	Create workshops for unaccompanied refugees and asylum seekers	Interview: Andrew (N-R)	
Goodchance Theatre	Mixed leadership	Create theatre spaces for refugee expression in the Calais refugee camp and in the UK	Audience member	
Belarus Free Theatre	Refugee-led	Refugee-led artistic movement, projects examine the impact of political persecution	Interview: Joe (N-R)	
Soundmix	Non-refugee-led	Music-making sessions for young refugees and asylum seekers	Interview: Kate (N-R)	
Phosphorus Theatre	Mixed leadership	Use refugee narratives to create 'documentary plays', a style which aims to realistically depict and dramatically articulate research and analysis of migrant testimony, with the potential to illuminate negative aspects of the asylum system.	Audience member	Dear Home Office
Freelance director	Non-refugee-led		Interview: Stephen (N-R)	The Claim
Odd Eyes Theatre	Non-refugee-led		Interview: Rosa (N-R)	Unconditional Leave
Freelance director	Non-refugee-led		Interview: Sam (N-R)	N/A (upcoming)
Cultivators	Non-refugee-led		Audience member	Arrivals Bureau (interactive performance)

Freelance director	Non-refugee-led		Interview: Angela (R)	N/A (upcoming)
Upstart	Non-refugee-led		Interview: Nicolas M. (N-R)	Phone Home

3.2 Access

Despite sending many emails to theatre directors and groups regarding this research project, my gateway to all organisations centred around the two core theatre group contacts initially made through my volunteering: The Paper Project, a refugee-led theatre organisation, and Ice and Fire, a non-refugee human rights theatre group. Therefore, my original plan to carry out ‘opportunity sampling’ morphed into ‘snowball sampling’. This worked, because it was the networking around these two core groups that led to valuable encounters with other organisations. It was easier to approach new people by sparking up conversation about mutual friends; it provided common ground, trust, and familiarity. Involvement with these groups centred on my being a volunteer, a researcher, or simply an audience member. Through volunteering I helped during final performances, but also had access to activities around final production. Volunteering meetings typically occurred once a week with the core groups I volunteered for. Other social meetings, such as group members’ birthday parties, were sporadic.

3.3 Research methods

My two research methods are qualitative. They were chosen due to the inductive and exploratory nature of my research questions, which need methods with which I can ‘construct

both meaning and theories' for the understanding of refugee theatre, and address gaps in the literature (Grbich 2013:71).

3.4 Participant observation

Participant observation was useful for this study, as it acknowledges the importance and validity of going beyond representation to study the experiences and lives as they naturally occur 'from the point of view of those involved', therefore giving phenomenological understanding (Denscombe 2007:206). I kept an evolving database of notes in a research journal, which provided context for my interpretations and descriptive anecdotes. Participant observation was carried out before, and continued after, my interviews. The benefits of this were twofold. Firstly, behaviours observed during participant observation could be followed up during my semi-structured interviews, enabling me to gain understanding and generate theories of the motivations behind the observed behaviours. For example, I observed Karam giving strange answers to interviewers and journalists. Later, during our interview, I discovered that this was to purposefully annoy them so they would refrain from asking invasive questions. Secondly, my continued volunteering throughout the first term of third year enabled me to add more context and clarity to previous discussions, with further follow up questions. The close interpersonal relationships created by such long interaction were invaluable; I became accustomed to nuances of 'local speech and custom' within the industry, and was also able to 'gain trust and familiarity' within the refugee theatre community (Jacobsen and Landau 2003:191).

3.5 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews seemed appropriate for the exploratory nature of this study. Firstly, this structure gives the interviewees opportunity to 'develop ideas and speak more

widely on the issues raised by the interviewer' (Denscombe 2007:174). This style allows for elaboration and diversions where appropriate, and allowed interviewees to discuss things they considered important and relevant, such as how they feel they are treated and viewed within the refugee theatre industry. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview allowed for a more balanced conversational dialogue, rather than the standard question-and-answer format. The former style has been argued to provide significant benefits in terms of trust and conversational flow (Armstrong 1993). On the other hand, this conversational style often led to large portions of the interview being off-topic, as can be expected when a close relationship is developed with someone. This meant some interviews would continue far longer than anticipated, and made interview transcription long and sometimes frustrating. As stated earlier, the order of methods proved useful; prior ethnography allowed me to gain understanding of the ways in which my interviewees thought, and 'the discourses they used in different contexts and the assumptions they worked with' (Byrne 2006:39). This insight allowed me to tailor specific interview schedules for each individual based on their experiences in refugee theatre. For example, when interviewing refugee participants who did not have full proficiency in spoken English, I made sure to carefully explain terms they may have been unfamiliar with.

3.6 Positionality

Elements of 'self', such as personal experiences and background, can shape research (Kobayashi 2009), and qualitative epistemology posits there to be no unbiased research. In consideration of this, I attempted to be reflexive and also suspend personal opinions which ultimately derive from my socio-cultural context. This involved my being aware of personal multidimensional identity, and the various positions I occupied as volunteer, researcher, and audience member. There were benefits to my multiple positionality. They worked well in the absence of certainty, which was useful for this research as it required me to shift between different settings: professional, social, formal, and informal. Each position gave me a different vantage point, offering unique insight. This is suited to the study of performance:

Pratt and Kirby (2003) argue that emphasis should not be placed solely on the performative event itself, but on practices and processes in the multiple spaces around theatre which inform performance.

For most of the research I was a volunteer, except during interviews. This positioning allowed me to transcend the problematic researcher-subject relationship, and its associated power relations. I was not an ‘authoritative’ figure, which, considering their past, refugees may have had bad experiences with. I was positioned as an equal, and generally treated as such; I was introduced to others as part of the organisation, and added to group chats. This allowed me to immerse myself fully within the group. However, the benefits of deep immersion need to be balanced against the methodological problems this can bring, such as my presence influencing subjects’ behaviour, or over-identification with the group leading to bias results. Therefore, I made sure to maintain a careful, reflexive approach (Jacobsen and Landau 2003). This leads to a discussion of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’: per positivist geography, an ‘outsider’ perspective offers accurate and objective findings, whereas an ‘insider’ can overidentify with group members, leading to biased findings (Chavez 2008). However, being an ‘insider’ can lead to a calm ‘atmosphere, conducive to open conversation and a willingness to disclose’ (Hodkinson 2005:139). Being a deeply immersed but non-refugee, non-theatrically-involved volunteer allowed for an interplay between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ status. However, as highlighted earlier, my position as a young female volunteer proved problematic due to my similar age to many male subjects; for example, one interviewee mistook an interview for a date⁸. This reflects issues with communicating my position as a ‘researcher’, as well as a volunteer, when required. Furthermore, aspects of my identity, such as gender and cultural understandings, intersected problematically with my subjects: I inadvertently offended Farid by buying him a coffee during interview, something he explained was offensive to a male in his society.

⁸ More information on this situation in the Auto critique.

3.7 Ethics

Working with marginalised and vulnerable people requires a considerate research approach. There were measures to ensure my study was ethically sound: consent forms were given out prior to interview (see Appendix), pseudonyms⁹ were used for each person to avoid violations of privacy, and full permission was granted before photos were included.

Steps were also taken to avoid exploitation and harm to subjects. Indeed, this subject matter was chosen because those engaged with theatre groups have self-selected this position, thus indicating they are comfortable talking about theatre. When I shifted from volunteer to researcher, studies of the groups' behaviour were purely observational, making my notetaking non-invasive. Furthermore, in-depth semi-structured interviews, with carefully worded questions, allowed sensitivity. One detail during interviews was to not refer to participants as refugees, unless a question was specifically on this topic, making an effort to avoid the 'discursive conventions that conspire to reinforce colonising and stigmatising processes' (Jackson 2006:78). Many group conversations centred around narratives of war and loss, as potential material for upcoming performances. Although these conversations were had openly in my presence, I did not pry into sensitive areas during interviews, instead letting interviewees comfortably decide in which way they wanted to respond to my questions.

By being a long-term volunteer for many groups, I could partially reciprocate the time given up by subjects in interview, and was not simply a researcher who 'flies in', then leaves. For example, I assisted with costume and set making. Moreover, I made small gestures such as always travelling directly to interviewees so that they didn't have to go out of their way, and

⁹ Pseudonyms were not used for organisation names however, as these theatre organisations readily appear in public and online, and thus a pseudonym was not necessary and nor was requested. Moreover, I made sure to not be too specific about the exact roles of the individuals interviewed.

would feel more comfortable meeting in a café of their choice. However, this meant travel times of up to three hours, as many refugee participants interviewed lived in Croydon.

3.8 Data analysis

17 interviews were completed. This small sample size means I am not able to make accurate, generalising inferences about the entire refugee theatre industry. However, it is not relevant nor practical for my research to have a representative sample, because I am not trying to make representative claims. Interviews were recorded, with permission. This enabled later transcription, and I was able to engage in conversation in the moment, enabling me to write notes about interviewees' non-verbal language and behaviour. This provided useful context when transcribing, and is the basis for much of the theory discussed in Chapter 4.

Use of triangulation allowed me to collate and analyse my data together 'from a variety of perspectives, as a means of comparison and contrast' (Denscombe 2007:153). The collation of data from ongoing contact through volunteering, interviews, and ethnography helped to form a richer set of resources to be analysed.

Transcripts were coded by hand and then sorted under relevant headings, to produce a collection of material on significant themes (Flowerdew and Martin 2005). Notes on participant observation were also grouped into themes. The use of both etic and emic codes allowed me to concentrate on codes which I believed to be analytically important, but also allowed unforeseen ideas to arise, such as the use of humour in interviews (Chapter 6). Analysis of themes uses the 'grounded theory' process, which is appropriate for 'generating theory research using observations of reality to construct both meanings and theories' (Grbich 2013:71). This suits my inductive study, as I analysed my data in order to develop understandings of refugee theatre for those involved, thereby letting data speak for itself.

Participant observations and interviews provided a rich dataset on which to base the theories in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4: ‘APPLES AND TICKETS’: SELECTIVE REPRESENTATIONS AND POWER RELATIONS IN THE REFUGEE THEATRE INDUSTRY

As outlined in Chapter 1, all interviewees suggested there is a growing ‘hype’ around the refugee crisis, which has led to increased popularity of refugee-related theatre. I will apply a postcolonial lens to examine power relations within the refugee theatre industry, with particular consideration of *who* has control over refugee narrative. I will argue that the growing theatre ‘hype’ around the refugee crisis is interlaced with power relations, to the disadvantage of refugee actors.

The critical literature about documentary theatre warns against ‘opposing to official discourses’ (e.g. the media) from ‘alternative, yet similarly monolithic and authoritative truth claims’ (Sieg 2016). Despite long-standing members of the industry noting that the increased popularity of documentary plays can raise the profile of important work, and while many artistic directors and artists become involved in projects with good intentions, this is not always enough to prevent more harm than support being generated for the refugees involved. This will be discussed in relation to three key themes: selective representation, the production of a ‘victim’ and ‘hero’ narrative, and the enhancement of an ‘us and them’ binary.

There are certain groups, such as ‘Freedom from Torture’, who are continually approached for their life narratives by theatre directors wanting to produce refugee performances. The problem of repeatedly making groups tell their stories was highlighted in the literature by Dennis (2007:286), who argues the refugee story is a ‘complex resource’ needed to ‘move along the continuum from refugee to resident’. Its value is misplaced on stage. This exchange was often spoken about as something to be expected, and there are assumptions that refugees are generally “*willing*” to give out their story (Victoria interview). Figure 1 gives examples of typical conversations had when groups are scouted.

Lisa:

- “They [approaching theatre groups/theatre projects] want ‘the victim’, they don’t want somebody who is okay. [They say] “Are you a refugee?”. “No, I’m a migrant”. “Oh...is one of your people an asylum seeker who we can speak to?””
- “There is a big desire to represent the victim stories, they want the sad traumatic stories.”
- “If their family have died, they want that kind of trauma story.”
- “I get quite a lot of casting calls that have quite reductive descriptions: “Do you have a Sudanese actor which is quite thin and who has a sad look in his eyes?””
- “A lot of women get asked “Would you wear a hijab?”, and it’s like: “Okay...am I going to be beaten up? Am I going to be a child-bride?””

Karam:

- [Speaking of being asked to share his experience] (NB to self, this quote needs some context) “People want it now, because I am a refugee everyone wants it now, if not, no one would CARE!”
- “They hear from Lisa I am from Iraq and want me.”
-

Mahid:

- “‘Refugees’ has become a trend now, and everyone is trying to work because everyone is talking about it – but not everyone is actually supporting, it’s just like another sale basically.”
- “[People come in and say] “Oh we came here because we wanted to hear stories about refugees”.”

Figure 1

Figure 1 indicates selective commissioning. Many interviewees argued particular ‘types’ of refugee story and voice are desired, suggesting that this new theatre trend is selective. Although a selective narrative choice is fully understandable within a theatrical context, the ‘documentary style’ in which most of the performances are presented makes this selectivity problematic. An obvious limitation of such selectiveness is the obscuration of real-life issues faced by refugees involved in theatre, and furthermore of refugees in general. More subtly, prefixing theatre and performance with ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum’ tends to predicate a totalising of or fixed set of subjectivities (Dennis 2008:212). This is compounded by what Dennis (2008:212) describes as the ‘uncritical trusting of the seemingly logical, sequential order of narrative’, which can ‘lead to organising the refugee subject into a single, essential, or general identity position, thus obscuring the individual’. Selective commissioning ought to be understood with regard to the aims of human rights theatre groups, who were argued by many to be seeking out refugee people to legitimise and authenticate their own production on the topic of refugees. Indeed, Nicolas, a freelance director, said “*you have to have the authentic voice there somewhere*”. Mahid criticised how refugees were in fact often only loosely “*included*”, generally by “*just getting a couple of refugees to comment about it*”.

As well as selective commissioning, I found there to be selective representations of refugees in certain scenes/projects; it was the ‘victim’ narrative which was strongly put forward in the majority of performances about refugees. In ‘Island Nation’, refugees were often voiceless and nameless, seen on stage as ‘refugees’ and illustrative materials, but almost never as individuals or artists. Similarities can be drawn between the ‘ideal’ refugee constructed in humanitarian discourse (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010), and the ‘ideal’ refugee stories arising in refugee theatre. This relates to the work by Rajaram (2002:256,251), who argues that when refugees are detached from local historical contexts, there remains a ‘generalising depoliticised depiction of refugees as hapless victims’. This ‘victimised’ refugee is often contrasted on stage with the unsympathetic state bureaucracy, an antagonistic relationship present in ‘Asylum Monologues’, for example, which focused on Home Office and detention centre scenarios. These depictions reinforce reductive ‘us and them’ binaries, and victim narrative. The depiction of the status quo as unjust, and of refugees as without agency, provided non-refugee activists invited on-stage with heroic roles as rescuer, spokesperson,

and whistle-blower. These are majority non-refugee white professional actors who are presented as the people's agents, representing superior moral standards, by reading out others' stories.

Furthermore, as Lisa argued in interview, the selection of "*sad traumatic stories*" to be told are often at the expense of narratives which represent "*refugees and migrants as strong people who are resilient and have something to offer which is positive*". Jeffers (2013) contends that this glossing over aims to strengthen the purely 'victim' narrative. Lisa suggested that groups "*want the traumatic stories*" because this is ultimately what "*sells*". This interpretation highlights the potentially exploitative dimensions of selective refugee commissioning. Human rights theatre groups, and other groups which make the projects in question, imply that they do so to educate the audience about the conditions of refugees. They also, Lisa suggests, try to "*make people feel sorry for people*". Thus, presentations can be understood as a project 'for advocacy' and to 'generate pity', similarly to what Rajaram (2002) identifies as a common goal of humanitarian projects. This demonstrates that, although these styles of representation originate in good intentions, they can have unforeseen impacts, in many cases leading to reductive, re-victimising refugee representations.

4.1 Theatre and Power

The previous section raised subtle interplays of power between refugee actors and theatre directors. This section more deeply examines power relations in the refugee theatre industry.

There appears to be an assumption that refugees cannot be professional actors. Interviewees identified overly negative readings of good quality refugee-theatrical work, as well as overly positive readings of poor quality refugee-theatrical work. For example, many of the refugees interviewed felt they were treated and spoken to by others effectively as if they were incapable of having control over decisions in theatre group activities, and argued they are not

taken seriously as professionals in comparison to non-refugee counterparts in the industry. Karam, for example, is a professional actor who argues his artwork is responded to in outright patronising ways, arguing that “*when you’re a refugee*” people say “*oh, you’re so good!*”, or “*oh my god, what is your story?*”. In similar vein, artwork produced by participatory (non-professional) refugees, which is technically unsophisticated and not to typical professional standards, can be overly praised. This is not dissimilar to Malkkis’ (1996) identification of the ‘heroic narrative’, one of the three discursive tropes found in both the media and humanitarian discourse, said to give refugees a ‘saintly glow’ (Jeffers 2011:44). In interview, Andrew suggested that an exhibition which presented artwork produced by refugees in the jungle was “‘*bigging up*’ *these refugees, like these people are heroes*”, making him question “*why do we always denigrate them or put them on a pedestal?*”. To some observers, the exhibition could appear somewhat patronising, potentially revealing assumptions about *who* is believed to be capable of good artwork.

In conjunction with this, other members of ‘The Paper Project’ claimed that, when sponsors approached them for assistance with a theatre project, they only offer food and travel expenses, ‘apples and tickets’, in return for actors’ work. This is perceived as abnormal practice in the arts industry. Quotes in Figure 2 exemplify ways in which the refugee actors feel they are treated.

Farid:

- “The people not take it serious don’t respect – we are a big company as well – and people were not taking us seriously [...] So many company they say “Oh come on guys we want you to do something, we will pay you your travel”, I say “Excuse me, we can get ourselves our travel” [...] I am a professional actor.”

Tamara:

- “It does come to a stage where people [art organisation journalists] want to go deeply into the topic, and you don’t want to talk about that, you don’t want to

tell someone [...] I remember this writer – she wanted to write a book [...] she invited me to her house [...] wanted to do some questions [...] they were like very personal questions. Like, I had just met this person [...] I don't really want you [the woman] to write my story for everyone to read [...] I think she said she would pay expenses – food and transport and that.”

Mahid:

- “We started to get a lot of email from people asking us - come and see their plays or help them with some sort of research, but they would never say ‘we need your guidance’, or ‘we have a budget for your consultancy’, and ‘we want to work with you in a way we can cooperate’. No. There was always, you know, ‘it would be nice if you guys came along’, ‘we are able to pay for your food, expenses and your travel’, so that’s what I mean by ‘apples and tickets’ because they just want to pay us with food and travel expenses to come to the job *for* them when they do actually have a budget [...] That was something we found a bit offending [offensive] for us. Because they don’t see us that way [as professionals] [...] I’m talking about big organisations.”

Karam:

- “I went to an art networking event by Counterpoint Art, and there were all the groups there like wanting to hear about refugees and The Paper Project and they are all getting funded! And I am just like? [*pulls annoyed face*] *you’re* getting funded, you’re doing projects with us, and once the project is finished ‘bye bye’, ‘see you later’. But whereas us, *we* are the ones doing the work! [...] They say do this, do that, people come in and say ‘oh, *great*’, ‘we love The Paper Project’, they just want us to do it for free!”
- “They aren’t pay me for it! Money is important! They send you a big list of demands and stuff.”

Lisa:

- “There’s a bit of an explosion in arts relating to migration, particularly because of the refugee crisis [...] most of those projects are not led by migrants [...] and there is a huge amount of leadership from people who are already established, and quite entitled and have the means to make money out of art to raise money to pay themselves, and I think that’s quite problematic – where is the leadership from migrants who have lived experience of migration? I meet artists all the time, making a play about this or that – and they’ve done research, and they are all people who already know how to work the system, and are quite established.”
- “There is a real lack of leadership opportunities – for artists who aren’t privileged.”

Figure 2

Figure 2 indicates that it is those with the most money and power within the industry who do not collaborate and empower those vulnerable people they seek to help. The quotations also express the emotions of members of The Paper Project, who feel as though they are put below other members in the industry, and that other parties benefit at the expense of the less powerful. Indeed, Tamara’s anecdote even suggests some potentially exploitative behaviour. As Mahid aptly puts it: *“it’s the professional artists who get the money, but they consult with groups like Paper Project to get ideas”*. Thus, power over refugee representation and the content of theatrical pieces typically does not lie with refugees. This suggests that refugees exist in an irreducibly mediated and mediatised space, even when they are actually present. This relates to Rajaram’s research into humanitarian projects, in that these projects potentially restrict ‘refugee identity: giving a particular space for refugees to speak’, limiting the scope of refugee voices (Rajaram 2002:259). There can be no accurate claims made about exactly why refugee actors in this dissertation appear to be unfairly treated in certain circumstances. Indeed, this could easily reflect general big-eat-small power relations in the industry. However, it is perceived by those involved, who feel specifically targeted and exploited, to centre on their political status, which painfully chimes with the wider

exploitation, exclusion, and prejudice they sense in society. Those at the other end of this relationship, such as Stephen, argue that the reason there is widespread use of professional actors playing the part of refugees is because, in the case of Stephens's London-based project, *"it's a very technical piece that does require people with professional training"*. This is a reasonable comment. However, after spending time with professional networks of refugee actors who argue that they, and many like them, are only ever approached for their story, Stephen's comment seems to overlook much of the underlying goal, at least as it is ostensibly framed. A small minority of theatre directors, such as Andrew, were against this technique, arguing that to *"take people's stories and present them with professional actors"* is *"abhorrent"* and *"unethical to the highest degree"*.

This chapter has indicated there are potentially problematic power relations within the refugee theatre industry, and three core representational issues in the projects with, for and about refugees: selective representation, production of 'victim' and 'hero' narratives as identified in the literature, and enhancement of an 'us and them' binary. This is paradoxical to the aim of human rights focused theatre groups, especially those which advocate for the empowerment of refugees. In Chapters 5 and 6, however, there will be discussion on how many refugee theatre groups could in fact work around the system, and articulate voice and space for their own benefit in the face of disempowering circumstances.

CHAPTER 5: RESISTING UNFAIR COLLABORATION AND THE 'VICTIM' NARRATIVE

The next three chapters examine how some refugee theatre groups are able to successfully navigate unjust power relations ingrained within the refugee theatre industry, and reshape problematic representations of refugees discussed in Chapter 4. Without denying that many of the issues highlighted in Chapter 4, and highlighted in the literature in Sections 2.2, 2.2.2, 2.2.3 are manifest, it is necessary to problematise and challenge many scholars' arguments. The literature indicates that refugees' ability to speak in politically and institutionally consequential ways is limited. In contrast, many of the performances discussed below demonstrate how refugees can seize, re-appropriate, subvert, and reinvent the means of representation in their own terms. The following chapters draw primarily on participant observation data, as they explore subtle dynamics that are harder to perceive and illustrate through quotes.

This chapter examines ways in which group members could successfully navigate through the theatre industry on their own terms, and how the refugee narrative 'can become a site of both negotiation and resilience' (Balfour 2012:215). This will be explored in relation to three resistive theatre styles: refusing the 'victim' narrative; making performances about mundane reality; and shifting attention away from the refugee onto political agencies. I will argue that the manipulation of particular narratives through these styles works against sensationalist assumptions of refugeeeness, in a way which humanises and complexifies refugeeeness, thereby positing an alternative to that monolithic 'refugee experience' which is prevalent in media, humanitarian, and performative tropes.

5.1 Refusing the refugee ‘victim’

Refugee actors can strategically leverage their story in a way which refuses exploitation and resists the ‘victim’ paradox. The Paper Project often outright rejected any project which evoked a simplistic victim or trauma narrative, where they would have to “*sit down there and tell a sad story, and make people cry so I can accomplish their projects*”. Mahid strongly asserted that he did not want to create pity in any form, and, in a performance where he was tied to a chair and ‘psychologically tortured’ by the asylum process (see Figure 3), he proceeds to dance tango with the chair. This dance momentarily elevates Mahid from his victim status, creating a level of uncertainty as to its existence at all.



Figure 3

5.2 Performances about mundane reality

Many performances were about more mundane reality, standing in direct opposition to sensationalised stories of trauma and suffering in the media and popular discourse surrounding refugees and in doing-so humanising refugees. This can be seen most prominently in the work of The Paper Project and Room To Heal, whose performances depict mundane aspects of regular life for a refugee. For example, for The Paper Project, many performances were about everyday accomplishment, and adaption to a new city, not just tales of escaping war. When performances did touch on suffering, Tamara emphasises that the group “*don’t directly reference it, it’s more metaphorical, so it’s much better - it’s not that violent, we aren’t just giving the story*”. This technique can be seen in the performance ‘A Day in the Life’ by Room to Heal, in which a Ugandan woman, who has been trafficked and imprisoned in a room for many years, instead told her narrative by focusing on what she saw from her view out of the window. These efforts expose the ‘truth’ of refugee life once in a host country are not dissimilar to Jeffers’ understanding of ‘myth-busting theatre’, in which shows include ‘things about bogus-parasitical’ refugee stories, and then ‘challenge them by posing a second truthful discourse’ (Jeffers 2011:52).

5.3 Switching the gaze

Some performances shifted the focus, not to the refugee as ‘hero’ or ‘victim’, but to the asylum system as ‘villain’, thus shifting the usually individualising focus on the refugee to a more structural focus on political frameworks and the state. This manifests in direct and indirect ways. Firstly, many of the performances directly spoke to and against negative actions of powerful agencies. In the case of ‘September 11’ by Redzone Theatre, the piece was deliberately positioned against the oppressive actions of the Iraqi and US governments; the backdrop of the performance was a painting of the Statue of Liberty, with the statue’s fire burning the Two Towers (see Figure 4). This was to make a point that “*America made it* [the

terrorist attacks] *themselves*”. More profoundly, members of Belarus Free Theatre aimed to provide a way around “*some of the restrictions on the media*”. Their highly political work led to their being rendered political exiles from their own countries. In a similar vein, many of the performances I viewed, including ‘Dear Home Office’ by Phosphorus Theatre, ‘Asylum Monologues’ by Ice and Fire, ‘The Claim’ by Stephen, and many of the performances by The Paper Project, spoke directly to the UK asylum system. These performances presented some of the corrupt actions from within the Home Office institutions, with Asylum Monologues being taken to be shown in the Home Office in order to “*put pressure on the political system*” (Victoria interview). More subtly, ‘Dear Home Office’ depicted a young boy successfully navigating the asylum system in the face of obstacles, which is argued by Andrew to be in itself a form of resistance to political authorities. Similarly, this resistance was directly acknowledged by a member of the Palestinian Youth Orchestra at the Southbank Centre, who argued that not only was there an ability of art to “*say the unsayable in a language which is impenetrable*”, but their high professional standard is a form of resistance to negative media propaganda in Gaza.



Figure 4

5.4 Discussion of these techniques

All of the techniques discussed above are ‘used counter-hegemonically [...] as part of an attempt to render their own account of the lived experience of their particular social groups more convincingly than those versions put forward by representatives of the dominant cultural group’ (Harte 2006:226). The tactics elude both the victimhood and the heroizing narratives, argued to be an ‘inescapable antimony’ in the literature (Balfour 2012:215). In doing so, the performances refuse the voyeuristic gaze directed at refugee subjectivity, which risks ontologising their condition, and are able to go beyond reductive ‘us and them’ binaries, or ‘victim and enemy’ narratives. By situating these performances within wider historical and political contexts and ‘providing a politicised picture of refugeeness’, they evade the victimhood narrative from ethno-specific experiences (Jeffers 2011:53). Furthermore, as Jeffers finds with ‘Banner Theatre’ productions, these theatre styles ‘provide a necessary corrective to the more political neutral humanitarian message of some refugee theatre’ (Jeffers 2011:14). Moreover, the depiction of normality “*against the odds*” can illuminate the paradox between what people expect refugees to be/behave/look like/speak like, and the lived reality of their experiences (Mahid interview). For example, by emphasising how many of the actions taken by refugees are quite small and undramatic, many plays work against the sensationalist potential of words such as ‘illegal’ and ‘refugee’ as they are presented in the media.

Performances discussed here demonstrate tactics which are able to elude generalised assumptions of the ‘refugee experience’. Moreover, there is a sense of direct and indirect agency in this ability. This will be explored further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: REFUGEE THEATRE AND AGENCY: TAKING VOICE, SPACE, AND MAKING NETWORKS

This chapter highlights how subjects of this dissertation were able to take agency, both directly in theatre, and in processes around theatre.

6.1 Strategic use of the refugee label

There were many efforts to shake off the ‘refugee’ label, and many, unsurprisingly, mentioned their strong dislike of the term. Paradoxically, there are means by which group members actively embraced this identity and strategically put forward their ‘refugeeness’ in ways which benefitted them and provided them with a sense of agency. Fassin and Rechtman’s (2009) notion of ‘moral economies of victimhood’ provides a useful way to understand the behaviour identified below; in this situation, people willingly submit to a category assigned to them, but agency is realised through the manipulation of certain narratives. For example, when discussing his experience as ‘refugee’ actor, Karam stated he was “*having a laugh*” and “*I’m a refugee but I’m enjoying it, I’m taking all the opportunities which come with it*”, while Hussein believed he “*survived by telling my [refugee] story.*”

These quotes indicate the way in which refugeeness can be a useful platform of opportunity: if they lacked such status, Karam claims, “*no-one [in the industry] would care*”. Hussein and Karam both imply that their refugee story is a form of currency. However, this goes beyond the obvious functions of their narrative, which was used to claim asylum. It instead needs to be understood as a means by which Hussein and Karam could enter into a niche social world of refugee theatre and its associated opportunities, including financial ones. This angle offers a very different interpretation of similar quotes analysed in Chapter 4, and indicates that,

instead of being disempowered by their political status, some used it for leverage. Moreover, like many groups, almost all Ali's artwork with Redzone Theatre reflects directly on his experiences of being a refugee, and even his theatre piece 'September 11' is advertised using a scan of Ali's refugee documentation. However, despite situating his artwork securely within the niche of 'refugee theatre', in interview Ali would often outright reject this label, arguing that he does not "*need to wait for a passport or paper to prove who's Ali*". This perhaps indicates the confused feelings towards the refugee label, and the tensions that exist when wanting to use the identity strategically.

As well as being an entrance to a unique position in the theatre industry, actors could use their sought-after political status and 'authenticity' to demand better treatment and fairer representation. Each interviewee expressed a strong sense of dignity, and conviction that they should not give anything away for free. Karam would always ask both himself and potential collaborators "*what do I gain from this?*", thereby upping his end of the bargain, as he knew "*because I'm a refugee, everyone wants it now*". He acknowledged he had something people wanted, and in a way needed, for their 'documentary' pieces.

Some groups were able to switch around the usual power relations and hierarchies identified in Chapter 4, and put forward alternative ways in which the theatre should operate. Many of the all-refugee theatre groups could realise agency by being fully in control of their own narrative, how it was told, and for what purpose, thus refusing to wait for their stories to be poached. For example, in Belarus Free Theatre two of the leading artistic directors are themselves refugees, in control of the groups of professional actors. Similarly, Ali, who owns Redzone Theatre, argues that he does or does not give "*the right*" to theatre companies interested in exploring his narrative to do so. This phrasing suggests Ali holds the power over his speech and is entitled to tell it on his own terms, thus reversing the common dynamic whereby theatre directors are thought to 'give' voice and space to refugees to perform in. Instead, members of Redzone and others in this study actively take space and voice, appropriating them for their own means.

6.2 ‘So, why did you come to England?’ ‘Wait, what; this is England?’: The use of satire and humour

As well as outright rejection of unfair collaborations with other theatre companies, some of the theatre groups in this study would use satire and humour, in both direct and indirect ways, to brush off negative reactions and unfair treatment. This technique, as Aldama (2001:58) argues, allows the interviewee to ‘seize the process of translation and cross the border of this encounter, to inscribe their subjectivity in their own terms’. This is most obviously identifiable in the behaviour of Karam and Tamara, who used humour and subversive tactics to play with those trying to poach refugee stories for their own means, or for journalistic ends. For example, in Figure 2 Tamara describes how a writer invited Tamara into her house and proceeded to ask her invasive questions for a project. Instead of giving the woman her story, Tamara “*changed the character*” and “*some bits*” - the “*things I don’t want to tell I just make up*”. Similarly, when Karam was interviewed post-performance by a BBC journalist, who Karam believed asked “*clever*” questions to try and get particular answers about “*why refugees come in*”, Karam responded by using humour and acting skills. For example, he gave ridiculous answers to questions, essentially mocking the interviewer and wasting his time, and then proceeded to refuse to answer any other question seriously, or even at all. During meet-ups, group members would share stories of what they been able to credibly pass off as truth in such scenarios. This was a great source of amusement, and Farid even retorts that when their performances are met with resistance “*it makes me more confident*”. This relates to what Pile (1997:192) described as situations in which language of the powerful is ‘qualified, parodied, critiqued and refused’ in a way which enabled the members to take power in ordinarily disempowering circumstances.

6.3 Using theatre to take back control of a disrupted life

Displacement is argued to require the renegotiation of self in response to new contexts (Eastmond 2007). There are ways in which the theatre can have long-term importance, far beyond the artistic project of making artwork. Many group members indicated that theatre helped them to personally take back control of their lives, and provided a sense of freedom from stresses. For example, when asked why he valued theatre, Farid stated that “*any trouble that you have, it goes away, the whole trouble and stress in your mind. That’s me, that’s why I like drama*”. This reflects the potential coping functions theatre can provide in difficult situations, for coming to terms with life changes.

Participant observation strongly demonstrated how theatre groups provided a safety net, which gave way to social networks by furnishing a sense of community and family for group members. Rosa states her theatre project was more of a social club than of a theatre club, and many group meetings would involve sharing home-cooked food and life advice. Theatre can give younger refugee members a sense of direction and purpose, a feeling that they are part of something greater than themselves. Significantly, these changing relations were also internalised by the actors, developing the way they felt about their relation to public space and people. Many of the interviews expressed that they had “*no confidence at all*” on entering the UK, and used to “*hate public [sic]*” (Farid interview). However, these same interviewees stood powerfully and assertively with microphones during public performances, and could bat away crowd negativity where it arose. Moreover, in interview, many would refer to theatre as a “*safe*” space, where they felt “*free*” (Raheem interview). The greater power to make decisions is argued by Smith (2014:179,178) to be part of an ‘emotional belonging, rooted in security in one’s self rather than simply ‘fitting in’ with the expectations of others’, suggesting a ‘symbiosis between theatre and belonging’. These changes indicate shifting patterns of introspection, with positive perceptions of their relation to and belonging in the public sphere, and the right to be heard and seen.

This section has explored how subjects were able to carve new spaces and meanings within the refugee theatre industry, or subtly navigate through the industry in novel and empowering ways. It has analysed the way theatre has dual social functionalities, providing both a personal benefit for those involved, and a pragmatic capacity to change their situation. The literature posits that a major personal benefit of refugee theatre is its therapeutic potential. Expanding on the notion of therapy and personal benefit, this section has highlighted the agency involved in the process of bettering one's life, for example through manipulation of the otherwise disempowering 'refugee' label, in a way which demands better treatment.

CHAPTER 7: POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF THEATRE: THEATRE OF CHANGE

Ranciere (2013) argues that aesthetics and politics are intimately linked. This section will focus on the political potential of artwork in ‘wrap-around’ theatre activities, dramaturgy that transcends representational performances. Chapter 5 explored how performances can shift the gaze from individual refugee to a more structural focus on political frameworks and the state; this chapter will explore how theatre can shift the gaze to audience members, and the effect it can have.

7.1 Making the audience self-reflexive

Some performances pose provocative and challenging questions to their audience. This strategy can be seen in the majority of performances by The Paper Project, where abusive Facebook posts and comments were printed off, and handed out to audience members to read aloud (see Figure 5). Mahid claims the purpose of this was to raise awareness of how people, “*just by a simple comment, can actually feed into a big attack of racism*”. Victoria suggests this chosen technique was to “*hold the audience to account in the room*”, and thus challenge the audience to reflect on how they may be implicated in the prevalence of refugee oppression. The temporary theatre dome at the Southbank (see Figure 6), where many refugee performances took place (Table 1), was erected in a main thoroughfare entrance to Waterloo Bridge. I observed that people were visibly put out by this theatre dome, caught unawares. As explored in the literature, refugees are commonly expected to be out of sight and unheard; the dome can be interpreted as a disruption to existing spatio-temporal orders, through its position in public space. There is political potential in this: such exposure can lead people to question to *why* it seemed out of place.



Figure 5



Figure 6

7.2 Making audience members relate

Some performances enabled audience members ‘to experience’ the life of a refugee, and directly relate to a performance narrative. This is both beneficial and problematic. These efforts by theatre directors to make performances “*relate*” to the audience in some way is argued to be a way to create empathy and understanding on the part of the audience (Sam interview). For example, Cultivators’ interactive theatre piece ‘Something to Declare’ made audience members sit through a mock asylum interview, in order to be granted access to the main performance. Similarly, in The Paper Project performance ‘We Are Not Birds’, audience members had to physically manoeuvre their way around actors’ bodies on the floor.

Jeffers describes this style as a way to ‘displace us from our customary habitus’, by making audiences ‘experience the physical and emotional discomfort that refugees may experience’ (Jeffers 2011:61). Indeed, some audience members were visibly moved by the performances

they had seen; in interview Lisa spoke of a man who previously was of the opinion refugees should not be let into the country at all, but after witnessing the performance realised that “*by stopping people, he was personally one of the people contributing to people drowning*”. Lisa thus argued there to be epistemological potential in these techniques, relating to those scholars who argue that particular forms of identification have ‘interventionist potential’, and that the relating and then disruption of spectators’ ‘identification with characters on stage’ can be used as a way to ‘challenge...political assumptions’ (Nicholson 2014:75,76). Moreover, this ‘self-reflexive framework’ can undermine any attempt to create a simple ‘heroic role in relation to the asylum seeker’s supposed victimhood, potentially destabilising, or at least partially levelling, the ground on which participants and facilitators meet’ (Jeffers 2008:220,221).

I found much of the wrap-around theatre activity to be equally, if not more, powerful than the performance itself. After some Paper Project performances, audience members were invited to drink tea with the refugee actors around an open fire. This was an intimate experience, which many audience members could not have anticipated. These social activities, Andrew argues, have the potential to change people’s pre-conceived notions of refugees, whether for better or worse, just through a simple human encounter or conversation with a refugee. The conversations I witnessed between actors and members of the public potentially indicate the power of an encounter to suspend our accustomed ways of thinking, and raise ‘[the] level of debate beyond pity and into a moral ethical arena’ (Jeffers 2011:14).

However, I would regard such situations as being potentially problematic. As Shuman (2005) cautions, an overly empathetic response could potentially build up a familiar reductive scaffold that shores up the promise of mutual understanding. In this light, the documentary-style piece common to this analysis can just create a perceptual binary that situates refugees as objects of our comprehension. In this way, as Balfour (2012:222) argues, this ‘secure knowing’ is a situation where ‘morality is not discovered or revealed by representations, but is merely reconfirmed as a general social value’. Indeed, overly empathetic responses are in

fact argued to ‘close the difference between self and other’, thus threatening to eradicate the other through representation (Rowe 2007:146).

The questions posed to the audience can open up questions of responsibility, which, as explored in relation to Boal’s idea of ‘spect-actor’ in the literature review, can encourage audience members to take on more democratically participative citizen roles (Nicholson 2014). This encouragement can also be seen in more direct ways, such as calls for political action which occurred post-performance during ‘Q&A’ sessions. These discussions could successfully balance attempts to demonstrate ‘good citizenship’ against setting too high a bar for it; an empathetic response is alone insufficient, and the encouragement to stand up for one’s beliefs are shown to be a commendable action by everyday groups rather than by extraordinary individuals. I personally found many performances quite distressing: the thought of inaction outside of the theatre was an uncomfortable prospect. Moreover, many performances construct a civic ideal which does not categorically oppose the state, or demand extraordinary acts of opposition, thus making feasible action and political pressure a realistic idea. Some plays, for example, focus on the state bureaucracy as a problem to be confronted with persistence, and a tactical approach to truth-telling. These performances thus go beyond a simple demonisation of the government as hostile and unhelpful, and instead provide a more nuanced account of what people in the public can do to help, and how they themselves are implicated.

This chapter has suggested that a key purpose of the theatre in this project is to potentially challenge or change the views some people have about refugees, and to galvanise audiences into action, placing asylum problems in a network of communication between decision-making powers and political subjects. Indeed, Gilbert and Lo (2007:203) argue that outrage and knowledge need to act with shame to create ‘a prelude to ethical community’. This is largely identifiable in subtle interactions in ‘wrap-around’ theatre activities, such as post-show ‘Q&A’s, and in encounters beyond the immediate theatre setting.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This dissertation has looked at representations by, about and for refugees, through the medium of theatrical representation. In the media, humanitarian, and theatrical spheres, many scholars identify discursive creation of a generalised ‘refugee experience’, with all its associated dilemmas. Discussion in Chapter 4 largely engaged with this discourse, and applied it to the largely unexplored territory of human rights, refugee, and migrant theatre groups. It is posited that there is uneven power held by, and problematic representation of, refugees in the theatre industry.

In contrast, the succeeding three chapters indicated that many refugee actors could find subtle and ingenious ways to navigate through the refugee theatre industry, thus problematising and challenging the narrowness of previous research and conclusions, to suggest a more nuanced and complex reality in refugee theatre. Performances discussed in these chapters, largely by refugee-led organisations, resist the discursive conclusions of humanitarian and media spheres. Neither do they conform to a ‘bureaucratic performance’ of authenticity, argued by Jeffers (2011:152,153), one of the most prominent writers on refugee theatre, to have ‘infected all performances made by and about refugees’. Furthermore, these performances elude ‘victim’ or ‘hero’ narratives. These findings can only be seen through deep ethnographic research into the processes around theatre, such as post-show ‘Q&As’, and encounters beyond the immediate theatre setting.

This has implications for the wider debate around the arts and refugee activism, by making a specific, and heretofore underexplored, connection between refugee theatre and social activism. This study has criticised normative assumptions of ‘refugeeness’, victim narratives, and exploitation, and illuminated the potential of theatre to facilitate more humanising encounters. My findings thus go against the creation of the ‘refugee experience’ as it is

articulated in the humanitarian sphere, and, more significantly, the ‘refugee theatre experience’ as it is articulated in the literature.

These findings have implications. In relation to performances with interventionist potential, many directors noted that, whilst large shifts in public opinion were an overly ambitious task, practitioners wanted to encourage people who were sympathetic to leave with tangible ways to *act* on their political views. Thus, although documentary styles may not offer much in terms of theatricality, those which are carefully put together can be a worthy resource for activists. Moreover, following the notion of Kundnani (2001) that popular imaginations and state forums operate as an interface, small shifts in the popular imagination can culminate in a real impact on political frameworks. Indeed, movement of refugees may be inescapably global, but responsibility can start at the local level. I hope this research has led to a more nuanced and diversified understanding of what the refugee theatre industry can entail for those involved.

AUTO-CRITIQUE

There were many strengths in my chosen methodology; however, many challenges were also presented throughout the process. I made a few hiccups in the beginning explaining my research fully to one person in particular, who, as I mentioned in section 3.6, turned up thinking we were on a date, apparently having not read the consent form fully. This led to this interview not being included in the final data analysis, because it was too poor-quality due to awkwardness. I learned from this. However, poor communication from both parties meant a missed interview. Another potential interviewee was unexpectedly deported to Kosovo after over-staying her visa. Although Skype conversations were had, I felt it was not appropriate to ask for a Skype interview at this stage due to her circumstances. This reflects the nature of carrying out research with refugees and migrants, whose lives, sadly, can take more unexpected and unfortunate turns.

My research shifted through time, based on my ethnographic observations. For example, the audience did not figure much in the initial research plan, but turned out to be a key subject in relation to Chapter 7. With the wisdom of hindsight, I could have included a questionnaire to give to audience members, to grasp their experiences on watching performance. However, observation proved useful and a rich source of data for this chapter anyway. Moreover, because much literature on refugee theatre was based on research from the position of an audience member, the original focus of this dissertation had not fully taken into account the significance of the micro-interactions around theatre, which I quickly realised were especially significant.

Refugee week 2016, which includes many arts activities involving refugee participants and refugee groups, took place between the 20th-26th of June. Although I began my research in June, I was not yet organised enough to take full advantage of this week. In hindsight, I should have used this as a greater opportunity to make contacts, which turned out to be harder than expected, as outlined in Chapter 3, Section 3.2. However, despite this initial

disorganisation on my part, I was able to use snowballing to make enough contacts for my research. The contacts I made through the initial groups I contacted largely shaped how my research played out. The Paper Project had been in the refugee industry a long time, and were keen to communicate how they believed they were treated unfairly by theatre groups wanting to use their narrative. This was an unforeseen dynamic, and led me to shift one of my research questions to incorporate this.

This research has focused on a specific type of arts, and a specific choice of refugee (one involved in the arts). In the future, if this research were to be expanded, I would be curious to examine refugee representation in artistic media other than the theatre, or have a broader theatrical focus: much of the performances explored here are ‘documentary pieces’. Similarly, extending research participation to asylum seekers, who live on the margins of discursive possibility, would be a valuable pursuit.

APPENDIX INDEX

Appendix 1: Interview timetable

Appendix 2: Consent form

Appendix 3: Interview schedule

Appendix 4: Example interview transcript

Appendix 5: Example page of ethnography notebook

Appendix 1: Interview timetable

Interviewee	Personal Profile	Date of interview	Location of interview
Joe	Male Theatre director	14 th July 2016	Over the phone
Lisa	Female Theatre director	5 th November 2016	OvalHouse Theatre
Hussein	Male Actor and student	7 th of October 2016	A café near South Croydon station
Karam	Male Actor	20 th August 2016	A café near South Croydon station
Tamara	Female Actor	3 rd September 2016	A Costa coffee on Oxford street
Farid	Male Actor	21 st August 2016	A café near OvalHouse theatre
Victoria	Female Artistic director	8 th September 2016	Winkley Studios, Hackney
Raheem	Male Participatory actor	24 th August 2016	A café near West Croydon station
Ali	Male Theatre director	22 nd August 2016	Costa Coffee near Camden Road station
Andrew	Male Theatre director	28 th July 2016	Carluccios, Russell Square
Stephen	Male Freelance director	2 nd September 2016	Over the phone
Sam	Male Freelance director	21 st June 2016	Over the phone
Rosa	Female Theatre director	16 th August 2016	Over Skype
Kate	Female Art project coordinator	5 th October 2016	A café near St Pancras station
Mahid	Male Actor and director	2 nd November 2016	A café near the Young Vic theatre

Nicolas	Male Freelance director	15 th August 2016	A café near Hammersmith station
Angela	Female Actor and director	26 th July 2016	Costa Coffee, Mornington Crescent

Appendix 2: Consent form

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in my study, which explores refugees' self-representation in theatre.

If you feel you cannot continue the interview at any point, it is absolutely fine to say so, and any data taken from the interviewee will subsequently be destroyed. Feel free to let me know if you no longer want to take part in the interview.

The themes this interview will cover:

- How, why, and to what effect do refugees represent themselves, and are refugees represented in theatre
- What are the relations and connections between the way refugees represent themselves and are represented by non-refugee theatre organisations
- How does refugees' own engagement with theatrical initiatives relate to their sense of agency and identity: in theatrical practices and in processes around theatre

Preliminary (for me)

- Is this quotable?
- Do I have permission to record?
- No one under the age of 18
- Do I have permission from both the interviewee and the organization?

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

Interview schedules were slightly altered, depending on the interviewee. The example below was the generic schedule used as the base for all independent interview schedules, and so closely resembles each one.

General questions used to guide the interview:

1. Why do you take part in theatre?
2. How does taking part in theatre make you feel?
3. How did you get into theatre?
4. What is the main purpose of your theatre?
5. Do you feel the way you present yourself in theatre goes against how refugees are commonly talked about, by others you know, or maybe in media you have seen?
6. What would you say about the way refugees are commonly presented in the theatre? What, if anything, would you like to change in the ways refugees are presented in the theatre?
7. Do you ever feel like making a stand against negative representations of refugees? Do you feel theatre could ever provide an opportunity to express such a stand?
8. Do you feel that the performances that you are involved in allows you to express/present yourself how you would like to be expressed and presented? What would you like to be different, if anything?
9. Do you think you would encourage other refugees to express themselves, tell their stories, and come to terms with their experiences?
10. What is the most important part of the theatre process to you?
11. What other artistic activities do you take part in?
12. What do you think the relationship is, if any, between theatre and how you feel about your connection to your host country?
13. Are there any messages you hope theatre will convey to the audience?
14. How do you feel when you take part in arts? Do you feel like you a different person?

15. Do you feel like the way you engage with the arts goes against how people may expect you to act and what sort of things you should be getting involved with?
16. Describe how you hope to express and present yourself in the arts?
17. Do you feel like taking part in these performances helps you to construct an identity and certain image of yourself?
18. When you perform do you feel more connected to the audience you are in front of you?
19. Do you feel like an actor can fully express your story life story?
20. Do you feel more confident after taking part in this organization?
21. Has this organization helped you in some way? If so, how?

Non-refugee actor or theatre director interview

1. How important is the audiences in the aims of what you're hoping to achieve as a theatre company?
2. Do you often try and reach out to new audiences?
3. Do you interpret theatre as a space of resistance?
4. From your experience in the industry do you feel there is a big market/interest for theatrical performance involving refugee narrative?
5. What is the importance of this type of theatre to you?
6. Are people ever shocked by the shows?
7. How do you feel when you tell a refugees' narrative on stage?
8. What is the process you go through to produce the script you present on stage?
9. How true to the original script from the refugee is the script you present?
10. When you act, do you feel personally connected to the performance?
11. What is the process involved in making refugee theatre?
12. What messages do the performances give?
13. Do you feel that the people who get involved with theatre have any other new opportunities as a consequence of their involvement?
14. How involved are the refugees in the process of making the theatre?

To finish all interviews

- Warm down and finish
- Do you have any questions?
- Do you have any comments?
- Would you like to see the dissertation?
- Thank you

Appendix 4: Example interview transcript

Me: Do you feel as an actor you can fully express your story and experiences through acting?

Karam: Yeah, I do. Can you repeat the question.

Me: *I repeat question*

Karam: Yeah, it's a better way. It's a better way because when you usually talk about something people shut off, when there is horror, or something really bad has happened to you. Or because of politics, what they watch in the news, or whatever has happened, they (people talking to refugees) always try and find a way to say 'oh no that's not like it', they will try and close up, but through performance they will just watch the whole performance.

Me: So if you talk to someone you may think they will change the topic? But because when they are an audience they are watching you?

Karam: Yeah yeah.

Me: Ah okay that's interesting. Okay so this is the same question I asked Hussein actually, has the paper project helped you in some way- if so, how? For example, in another part of your life?

Karam: It helps with English, when you're coming from a different country- you don't have... like especially if you come from war, you've read my story, you don't have confidence, like self-confidence, and you don't speak the language at all- but through The Paper Project you try and find yourself, so basically through theatre I found myself, and start to build the confidence. But also, you have family and friends that, you make friends there, that really trust you, don't judge you wherever you have come from, they just listen to you.

Me: Ah okay, so it's kind of like a community as well?

Karam: Yeah

Me: Okay, so this is more about the audience that you're performing in front of. When you perform do you feel connected to the audience?

Karam: Yes you do connect, especially when there is people there that you know, but also when the audience is looking at you, looking into your eye. Like when you're speaking to them and you see them emotionally crying, when they cry, you feel more connected to that.

Me: Ah, have you seen people cry during you last performance?

Karam: Yeah, the last performance we did on the 30th of July, there was a lady in the front, she was crying while I was performing. And actually, I was like 'I'm not gonna cry, I'm not gonna cry'. Because I kept looking at her, and there were just tears, and I was like – 'when is it gonna finish'?

Me: Did she come and talk to you after the performance?

Karam: Yeah, she works at Ovalhouse but she met me three times. I was like: joking, exciting, doing this and stuff, joking with her and stuff, but when she sees me performing...this is what happens when someone sees you happy all the time, laughing joking, and when they come in here and hear your story they are like: 'that guy is always positive always joking', 'but this is his story'.

Me: Ah, so you get to tell a different part of your personality they haven't seen?

Karam: yeah

Me: What do you think is the relationship, if any, about theatre and how you feel about your connection to your host country?

Karam: *Repeats question back to me to check*

Me: Yeah, like do you feel more connected, or not?

Karam: Yeah it makes me feel more integrated, and I feel warm. It shows you the real people, it shows you there is always good and bad and two sides. But it also shows you the arts, that the arts are more humane. And it shows you their worth, what they do, so we just feel more wanted as well.

Me: Okay. Okay so this is a question about your identity. Do you feel like taking part in these performances helps you to construct an identity and certain image of yourself? Like do you feel you're one person, and then in theatre you can almost become someone else? Or not?

Karam: I'm more myself in theatre.

Me: Ah okay, why do you think that is?

Karam: Because we express all of our like problems and our personal through theatre, representing it. Whereas when you're on the outside, you are just trying to be someone everyone likes. But with theatre you're just yourself, and especially with the group of people you're working with, it more like family. Actually, it's more like family, because actually in family you always be strong for one another you know. And in theatre you just be yourself.

Me: Ah so you can be more honest perhaps?

Karam: Yeah.

Me: Okay. In your performances are there any messages you hope to convey to the audience through theatre?

Karam: Oh wait before that, ah actually no do it, I will tell you something after. Please say the question again.

Me: Are there any messages you hope to convey to the audience through theatre? Like, say the audience came to a performance, and then they went away afterwards, is there anything that you hoped they would have gotten as a message from that performance?

Karam: Well its basically that, you know a lot of times you read stuff on the news about refugees. It's basically our message that we are normal people, with normal life, we are young people, they say we are bad, and we are just coming here to try to come here to control their country or just come here for money or things about our religion. But we are just normal people. That's what we try, that's our message too. We even get questions of: 'what are you doing in this country?'. You know my friend walking in, and he got: 'why are you doing this?, why are you doing that?' And he was like: 'who told you this?!' Abusive questions. Or you get like 'do you like Osama Bin laden?'

Me: What, people have asked you that?

Karam: Yeah

both drink coffee

Appendix 5: Example page of ethnography notebook

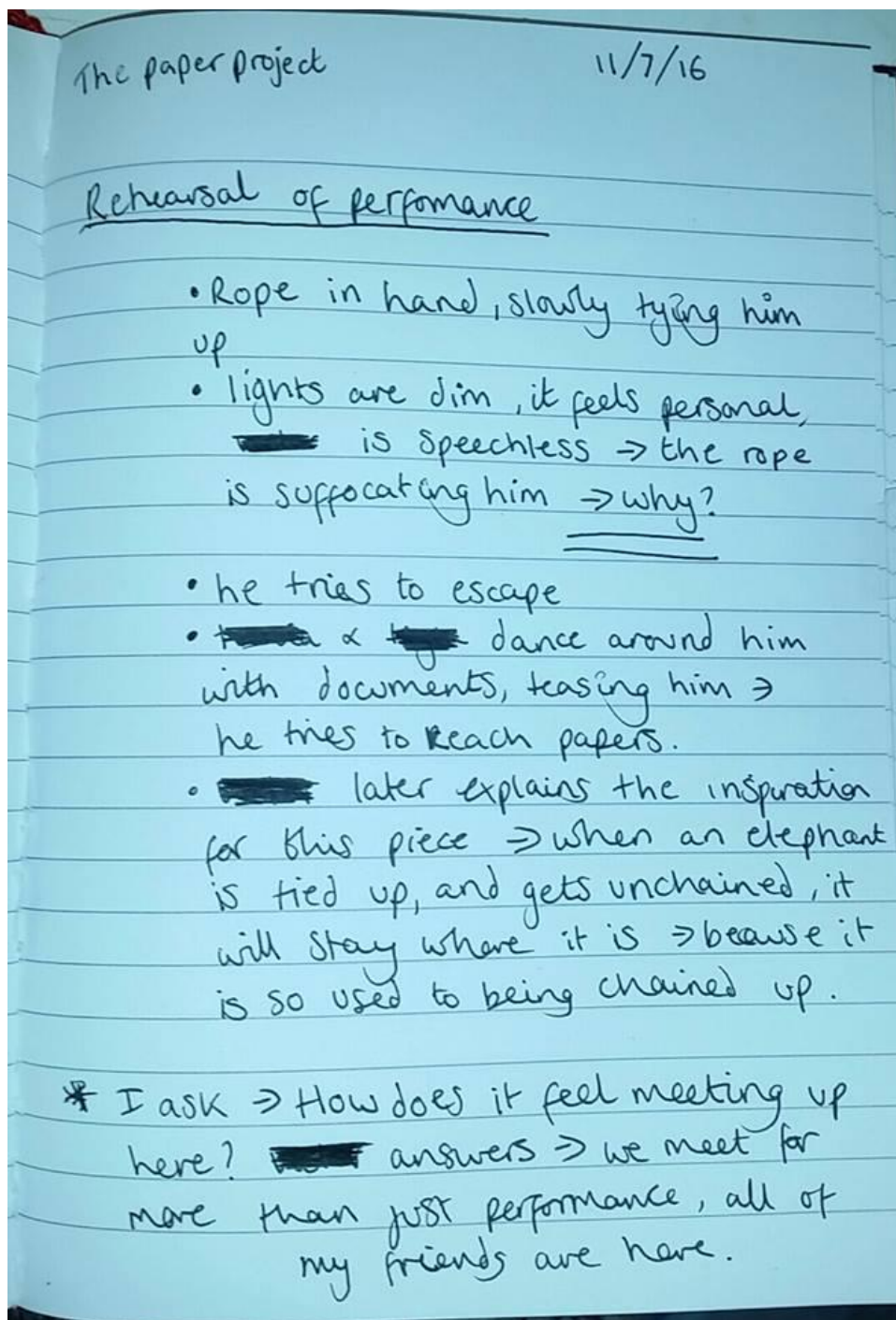


Figure 7

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