Performing care with refugee youth: solidarity, interruption and precarity

Kate Duffy-Syedi

A practice research project submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London

April 2024

ORCID: 0000-0003-0771-2636

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. The practice developed in this thesis was carried out in collaboration with members and participants from Phosphoros Theatre, in projects designed and led by me. Contributions from these individuals are explicitly referenced in the text and accompanying documentation.

Signed: Kate Duffy-Syedi

Date: 25 April 2024

Dedication

To

Orzala Saffron
Brightness of fire

&

To

Syed
Too young to leave your family
But you did

*

you have to understand
no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land

Warsan Shire, *Home*

Thank you…

Primarily to my supervisors. To Amanda Stuart Fisher, for her unending support with this project from its pre-stages to final submission. Her guidance, incisive editing and listening ear has provided me with the confidence to fulfil this project and has made me a better scholar. To David Harradine, for challenging my thinking about collaboration, inspiring my approach to documentation, pre-empting questions and concerns about whether my writing was academic enough, and believing in my ability to get this done. Thank you so much.

To the London Arts and Humanities Partnership for the scholarship that enabled me to carry out this research, particularly in the unexpected circumstances of a global pandemic.

To Phosphoros for embracing collaboration and helping make this project possible. To my Co-Artistic Directors Dawn Harrison and Juliet Styles for cheerleading me throughout, as well as Pav Christodoulou, Becca Prentice and Esther Dix for all our conversations inside and outside the research. To the Phosphoros OGs: Teddy Aregawe, Goitom Fesshaye and Emirjon Hoxhaj (and Syed!), and those who ended up being central to my research, including Muhammad, Zeus, An-Nur, Anna, Fini and Klevi, as well as Abel, Ismael and Ibrahim.

To all the young people who contributed to this project and trusted me with their stories, ideas and thoughts. With solidarity, hope and deep respect.

To Central's research office for critical feedback, encouragement, and patience, in particular Tony Fisher, Tom Six, Kate Elswit and Kate Pitt. To my fellow PhD pals past and present who have aided me with a mixture of ideas, critical conversation, glasses of wine and solidarity, in particular Clio Unger, Rachel Vogler, Rebecca Hayes Laughton, Paul Edwards. To those who started (or ended) their PhD journey around the same time as I began and grappled with ideas alongside me, including: Bojana Janković and Jaelyn Endris, Anna Woolf, Laura Kressly, Simon Dodi, Joe Parslow and Ella Parry-Davies. To Kamila Czul for helping me get to the end.

To Helen Taylor and Olivia Sherringham from Stories and Supper for critical friendship and inspiring my thinking around slow violence and how creative practice can respond.

To Afghan Association Paiwand. I would not be who I am professionally, academically, artistically or personally had I not stepped foot into their Hendon office as a bright eyed nineteen-year-old. Thank you Farid Mall, as well as Dr Farooq, Tyler Fox, Tamara Smith, Almira Hussain, Georgie Algburi, and the thousands of young refugees I spent time with (whether for hours, weeks or years) who inspired me to undertake this research in big and small ways. To Waheed Wafa for teaching me loads and giving me so much more.

To my family in Afghanistan who have taught me about hope, patience, peace, and acceptance. Our hearts are connected. دل به دل راه دارد. To Marzia and Ibrahim in particular.

To my parents Dawn and Liam who have supported me throughout and enabled me to juggle finishing the thesis with a new-born baby who turned into a toddler. Our little village!

To my husband Syed for thoughtfully and curiously taking part in this project as an actor, facilitator and collaborator. For helping me understand what is beyond my grasp, being my sounding board and all-round team player in life and love. جیگرم. Lastly, to my magnificent daughter Orzala, who has been a source of motivation, inspiration, hindrance, and interruption in the completion of this project. May your own life story never feel invisible, and always leave you feeling proud to be the daughter of a refugee.

Performing care with refugee youth: solidarity, interruption and precarity

Abstract

This thesis aims to challenge representations of unaccompanied minor refugees in media and state asylum processes by showing how they choose to represent themselves instead, when given the opportunity to do so. In fact, self-representation is precisely what the asylum system and public debates on migration systematically deny to refugees. To counter this pervasive silencing, the thesis employs devised performance projects with refugee youth which develop new modes of collective and self-authorship, created with Phosphoros Theatre, a company I co-founded. The first part of the thesis elaborates the methodological basis underpinning the practice, examining the position of refugee *actors* in performance making, and how their roles as storyteller, witness, collaborator and audience member might be better understood. Through examining the process of making four new performance projects, over Chapters 3-5, the research reveals how performance practice can make explicit and indeed heighten tacit acts of solidarity and self-sustaining modes of care and interdependence already present within refugee youth communities. In combining ideas around participatory performance with discourses of care, the thesis fosters new insight into performance's capacity to form collective resistances to the dehumanising processes of the asylum system. This analysis supports the thesis' argument that through participatory and collaborative practices, performance can not only renegotiate the pervading cultural imaginary and its misrepresentation of refugee youth, but establish more empowering processes of performing life narratives which foreground friendship, care, and solidarity. In sum: while the thesis focuses on advancing new understanding and knowledge of participatory practice in theatre and performance, it places theatre in critical dialogue with care ethics and migration studies. Thus, the research generates new thinking about agency and co-authorship when creating performance with those who have experienced displacement and how this reconfigures our understanding of the ethics and politics of creative practice when working with refugee communities.

Contents

Contents 6
Introduction..8
Troubling representations of the 'unaccompanied minor': performing refugee youth and the potential for resistance 8
Unaccompanied minors in context 14
Engaging with 'friendship as method' 22
The map of the project 31
Chapter One 36
Refugee narratives as spectacle: problems, possibilities and care as a radical intervention 36
Care as a research framework 38
Slow violence and the narratives of the border 43
Unaccompanied minors in a crisis of representation 51
Theatre and performance's response to the "refugee crisis" 56
Phosphoros Theatre and the performance of lived experience 79
Research questions arising from the margins of performance, care and migration 83
Chapter Two 87
Performance of selfhood: developing a research methodology rooted in care that reimagines unaccompanied minor identity as the basis for alternative solidarities 87
The 'stuff around the edges' of making theatre with refugees 88
Building blocks of an ethical practice 93
Methodological possibilities of care 101
Politics of visibility in the context of slow violence 112
Encountering hope within creative practice 116
Chapter Three 124
Interruptions on/offstage: interconnected care and co-responsibility in artistic processes with refugee performers 124
Introduction to 'All the beds I have slept in' 124
Caring for strangers and identifying legacy 132
Listening differently to stories about survival 143
Staging emerging solidarity between refugee youth 151
Rethinking failure, vulnerability and agency in performance 157

Chapter Four 166

Self-making, new intimacies and aesthetics of solidarity in digital storytelling by and for refugee youth 166

Parallel narratives of conducting practice research in the context of uncertainty 166

Introduction to 'Stories for Sleeping' 173

Restoring dignity and care of the self.....184

The stranger as audience 195

Listening and the aesthetics of solidarity 200

Aesthetics of solidarity as an emergent practice (and a coda).....205

Chapter Five.....212

The performer and the performed: staging interdependence and friendship 212

'Connected Hearts' : encountering each other through performance.....216

'A bed for the night' : complicating spectatorship and the construction of the separated child refugee.....226

Unlearning secure knowledge and pausing my research spiral.....236

Concluding the research: moving forward and looking back.....238

Bibliography.....243

Practice documentation: online collection of practice documentation accessible via this link:
https://www.canva.com/design/DAGAOeJtviQ/Cs9_czoifPOSnMQxU8y0Cw/view?utm_content=DAGAOeJtviQ&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=editor

This practice research project has obtained ethical approval from Conservatories UK.

Introduction

Troubling representations of the ‘unaccompanied minor’: performing refugee youth and the potential for resistance

Throughout this thesis I invite the reader to engage with my accompanying collection of documentation, encapsulated in an interactive online slide deck. This can be accessed using this link: https://www.canva.com/design/DAGAOeJtviQ/Cs9_czoifPOSnMQxU8y0Cw/view?utm_content=DAGAOeJtviQ&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=editor. At the end of this Introduction I explain how to engage with this resource. I will direct you to specific pages to draw your attention to the four practical projects I developed, so please make sure the documentation is accessible as you read the thesis.

This practice research challenges representations of refugee youth in media and state asylum contexts by using theatre making processes to show how they choose to represent themselves. It offers an original reading of theatre and migration, examining how participatory performance interventions can develop an ethics of practice that reveals and further enables self-sustaining forms of solidarity, care and friendship, which can resist the misrepresentations refugee youth encounter when living in the UK. Developing new approaches to the performance of life narratives, this research disrupts and problematises the binaries of the researcher and the research and considers how arts practices can disrupt hegemonic conceptions of refugees. In doing so, I suggest that performances of the self become an important means of restoring agency to refugee youth. These modes of self-authored performance have the potential for resistance as they trouble discourses of suspicion,

distrust and victimhood that have been associated with asylum seekers in general, and unaccompanied minor youth specifically.

The project builds on my ongoing relationship with Phosphoros Theatre[1], a London based theatre company and charity I co-founded in 2015 which creates performance work with refugees aged 16-25. Through a series of four practice research projects with refugee participants as well as artists who worked alongside me as actors, collaborators and workshop assistants, I have developed forms of self-authorship to generate new representations of refugee youth. These representations foreground acts of care and reveal the possibilities for resistance and solidarity within these communities.

Throughout this thesis, I examine how these new forms of participatory performance can be used to better represent refugee youth. Specifically, how modes of co-creation disrupt the binaries of the narrator and narrated and the performer and the performed which tend to structure many modes of socially engaged theatre about the refugee experience. In this introductory chapter to establish the context of this research I examine the problems confronting unaccompanied minors when seeking asylum in the UK. I contextualise and problematise key terms that will appear throughout my research and introduce my methodology as one structured around an ethics of friendship and care, before outlining the trajectory of my project and its articulation both in thesis form and accompanying online documentation of practice. An engagement with ethics of care forms the basis of my research throughout, and I draw on Joan Tronto's definition of care as 'both a practice and a disposition' (1993, p.104), and follow her influence in moving care from the periphery to the centre of my unfolding project.

[1] Hereafter 'Phosphoros'

While the primary focus of this research is to develop new modes of self-authored performance, the project also has an interdisciplinary angle and responds to gaps in migration studies and across the humanities. Drawing on theatre and performance, I suggest, opens up new ways of responding to these omissions, repositioning unaccompanied minors as active storytellers of their own experiences. The research also develops findings that will ultimately extend other forms of practice-based and participatory research with refugees across disciplines and rethinks the agency of refugee youth within these processes. However, the aim of this project is not to find new knowledge that can merely be transferred to social sciences, but instead to discover new artistic practices that become possible when refugees are not confined to secure categories and positioned as “research subjects”, but are instead able to narrate, explore and reimagine their stories themselves. Furthermore, while theatre and performance scholarship has engaged at length with refugee narratives, the experiences of unaccompanied minors have received minimal attention and this has become a key element of my inquiry. The position I have as an artist-researcher actively involved in the field of refugee-engaged theatre through my work with Phosphoros provides me with a unique perspective in this regard, and I conduct this research in ways that are responsible, informed and in collaboration with emerging refugee artists, and youth participants.

The repeated construction of unaccompanied minors as ‘in need’ within research in social sciences accounts for the direction that much contemporary research tends to take, but this has critical implications both for how unaccompanied minors are written into discourse, and how they are understood by host communities as vulnerable victims requiring saving. Rejecting a narrow analytic dominant in social sciences, in which unaccompanied minors’ viewpoints are seldom incorporated, this

research inquiry looks toward a dialogic practice. By this I mean a practice-based engagement with refugee identity that is founded upon mutual learning, appreciation and understanding. As a consequence, through the rejection of commonly held deficit positions and the process of reimagining how refugee youth can represent themselves, this research generates original insight into theatre-making processes with refugees. In doing so, I am arguing for an approach to refugee performance in which caregiving informs the creative process but is also examined within the material and stories explored. Hence, I distinguish between theories of care that emerge in my participatory devising processes, and the modes of performance that are developed through attending to the aesthetic potential of care within the stories told.

Additionally, I incorporate concepts of solidarity, contributing to current discussions within applied theatre scholarship around solidarity as an embodied practice with radical potential. Réka Polonyi and Kirsten Sadeghi-Yekta discuss the complexities of solidarity in their 2024 editorial of *Research in Drama Education* journal, warning that there are no easy answers to the questions around its limitations, exclusions, and application. They ask: ‘in a world of rising polarisation and political forms of tribalism and culture wars, can solidarity be anything more than a marketing tool of popular lingo?’ (p.416). Similarly, public support for refugees often encounters overuse of ‘in solidarity’ to describe sympathetic actions that maintain hierarchical structures of power firmly in place.

My own understanding of solidarity has intensified and changed shape as this research has progressed, and at its core my approach to embedding this concept in practice relies on deep and critical listening of refugees; taking responsibility for enacting an informed approach (not limited to engaging with trauma-informed

practice); continuously negotiating dynamics of power; voice, visibility and knowledge production; and using my own institutional privilege in strategic ways. Within this approach to solidarity is also a consideration of the sorts of change performance practice can make, and an appreciation of the impact of micro-level, local and personal change that can be ongoing and incremental rather than focusing solely on large-scale, measurable transformation. As I work to deepen my understanding of solidarity and performance, I also encounter its methodological limitations, particularly in how I discuss practice research and the slippage between collaborating with refugees and speaking about them.

My relationship to my research is personal, political, professional, long term and ongoing. I first learnt the term 'unaccompanied minor' at age sixteen, when I met Haben[2], a young man from Eritrea, through my involvement with Reading Youth Theatre in Berkshire, UK. The director of the youth theatre, Dawn Harrison[3], and theatre maker Rosanna Jahangard[4] were writing a play about unaccompanied minor refugees going missing from care homes, and Haben had been approached to share his story to aid their research and development. Haben told me his story too, of escaping forced military conscription as a fourteen-year-old then surviving illegal imprisonment and an arduous journey to the UK, ending up in the back of a lorry driving through Berkshire. His testimony was compelling and I found myself intensely moved by it. Like me, he was sixteen, but from my vantage point as a white, British, teenage girl growing up with choice and relative freedom the distance between our two life experiences was hard to comprehend. Moreover, I found myself asking: why hadn't I known about the struggle of refugee youth until now? Why weren't more

[2] Not his real name
[3] Dawn is a writer who I later co-founded Phosphoros with, and is also my mother
[4] Rosanna later became a founding Artistic Director of Phosphoros, and worked with the company between 2015-2017

people talking about them? This encounter, in 2009, set me on a trajectory of engaging with applied and socially engaged theatre, with refugee justice as an unwavering focus point.

Several years later I started working in the refugee sector in London managing youth and housing projects and had to frequently navigate complex circumstances triggered by the material conditions of the UK's hostile environment, and respond quickly to emergencies as the precarity of overlapping crises of mental health, destitution and border enforcement constantly loomed. Through my frontline work and ongoing arts practice with Phosphoros I began to find new and performance-based ways of engaging with the debates around refugee rights and representation, though had only begun to interrogate the complexity of speaking on behalf of those without institutional power. Alongside my professional practice is a personal dimension to how I engage with the broader topic of forced migration, owing to my relationship with my husband Syed who came to the UK as an unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan. We met several years after he arrived in the UK when we were both working in North West London, and he ended up becoming a founder member of Phosphoros, and has subsequently contributed to all four projects within this PhD research as an actor and assistant facilitator. In sum, all of these experiences shaped how I designed this research, particularly in navigating my collaboration with artists and participants who had come to the UK as unaccompanied minors. Being so close to the work and themes I discuss in my research means I am at once able to see certain elements of the practice in ways that other artists or researchers may not. With this unique positioning also entails risk that I may find myself unable to see aspects of the work, including its problematics, due to my proximity. To mitigate against this ethical tension, I intentionally created opportunities for open debate within the practice and sought to share decision making in order to distance myself from the

role of an authoritative director. As I will discuss in Chapter Three, this methodological approach was at times challenged.

On page 2 of my documentation, I introduce Phosphoros and the collaborators who feature frequently within this thesis.

Unaccompanied minors in context

One of the complexities underpinning my practice research has been the framing of the experience of unaccompanied minor refugees in the British media and state asylum system. When I refer to unaccompanied minors I mean child refugees who seek asylum without parents or guardians to flee situations including forced conscription, trafficking, conflict, exploitation and threat due to their beliefs or social group. Lone migration requires a level of resilience beyond what children possess, necessitating the ability to survive extreme and traumatic circumstances such as (illegal) imprisonment, kidnapping, bonded labour, physical and sexual violence, trafficking, starvation and drowning. Yet, on arrival to the 'safe' country, any adultification required to pass through these experiences in relative safety must be replaced with a performance of child identity to avoid being treated as an adult asylum claimant. This dual embodiment of toughness and vulnerability puts unaccompanied minors - the majority of whom are boys - in a liminal position as 'flexible discourse users' (Frosh 2001 in Berggren 2014, p.245) that 'challenge the very notion of childhood' (Chin 2003). The precariousness experienced by unaccompanied minors resonates with feminist ethicist Maurice Hamington's definition of precarity as 'a state of insecurity that can be so profound as to place one's life and future under siege' (2021, p.282). I have been fascinated by how unaccompanied minors have been conceptualised and represented in public and political discourse at the extremes, and these complex and problematic identity

politics have often been explored in the work developed by Phosphoros. Our first production *Dear Home Office* took place before my PhD project began and in many ways laid the groundwork for the problems I attend to through this research. The following extract of direct address from this piece demonstrates ambivalence from the actors (all of whom were current or former unaccompanied minors) towards the child adult binary as they reflect on processes of age assessment[5] resulting from missing documentation:

> ABDUL: I told them I was born in the summer. But I have no papers. There was a war, nobody wrote it down.
>
> GOITOM: My birthday is 1st December 1998. I told it to everybody. And they kept saying I was 17 already…and I was like no, I am 16. And you know what I'd done? Given the date in American. Like 9/11…I'd said 12/1. So they thought it was the 12th January. And it was written on my ID card like that – so I had to tell everyone, that's not my REAL age…I am a whole year younger. Stupid…huh? It took my Social Worker ages to sort out.
>
> AWET: Sometimes it's good to look old, like when I want to buy something; but when I am learning English, then I feel like I'm a five year old boy.
>
> (Phosphoros Theatre, 2016)

Amidst Home Office interviews, asylum claims, meetings with social services and other statutory bodies, unaccompanied minors have little to no power over self-representation, instead having their lived experience translated, interpreted and moulded into proformas and comprehensible frameworks utilising reductionist terminology of the state. Hence, the emergence of Phosphoros' work signalled a

[5] Age assessments are used by the Home Office and/or the Local Authority to determine an asylum claimants age in lieu of documentation, when there is significant reason to doubt an individual's claimed age. The margin of error can be five years or more, and there is no single reliable method or medical test to ascertain an exact age. The process can be invasive and distressing, and the outcome will determine all aspects of an individual's right to support, from housing to finances, education and care from the state (see Coram 2017).

disruption, and, as in the dialogue above, provided a platform for diverse, complicated and specific experiences to be amplified. This mode of visibility started to respond to notions of subjectivity and silencing, such as these questions posed by performance theorist Kelly Oliver in her theorisation on witnessing: 'What of the subjectivity of this so-called other? What of the subject position of those othered by these discourses of subjectivity? [...] Surely, they don't just think of themselves as mute, still to come, invisible or non-existent?' (2001, p.6). Looking back, the ideas emerging in this show formed the basis of my thesis that establishes new understandings of how participatory theatre can enact forms of resistance to objectifying rhetoric that characterises how unaccompanied minors are represented elsewhere and instead explores what happens when refugee youth determine how they wish to represent themselves.

One of the key issues this research implicitly addresses is the sense of moral panic that has become attached to the mere existence of unaccompanied minors, which bears imprints of discourse based on cultural and racial stereotypes of dangerous masculinity and sexuality[6]. Critically, I would argue that reading unaccompanied minors through a gender lens is crucial to understand how they are conceptualised in the so-called public imaginary. As I have developed this research I have extended my creative practice to include an engagement with young women (partly in response to the events following the COVID-19 pandemic), yet the majority of my collaborators and contributors have remained young men. This is reflective of the gender distribution in unaccompanied minors in Britain; for the duration of my project, according to UK statistics from the Refugee Council, around 90% of unaccompanied

[6] Marcus Herz (2019) provides a detailed analysis of how moral panic and conceptualisations of threat emerge in discourse relating to unaccompanied minors

minors were boys (Refugee Council 2021)[7]. The experience of the unaccompanied minor young man is seen as incompatible with normative expectations of teenage boys, which triggers a crisis of representation that fuels moral panic. This moral panic functions through homogeneity, as any diversity in their lived experience becomes obscured, and they are seen collectively as a threat (Herz 2019, p.16). Nonetheless, as children, the demand for protection can take on more urgency. These components of unaccompanied minor identity that seem to present conflict represent an ambiguous duality where age as a protective category intersects with gender as a risky category, which then places unaccompanied minors in very difficult territory when seeking sanctuary in the UK.

Without having their embodied lived experience listened to or recognised, unaccompanied minors come to be represented by others in ‘sticky’ ways, to borrow Sara Ahmed’s term (2004). In right-wing discourse they are positioned as the universal migrant ‘bogeyman’: morally deviant, terrorists, serious criminals or abusers of the immigration system (Griffiths 2015). Conversely, scholars such as Judge (2010) and Pupavac (2008) have analysed the frequent response in humanitarian settings to these problematic constructions, describing charity workers deliberately countering these processes of demonisation by repeatedly asserting their childhood status as a method of protective care. The critique of this counter approach is that adolescents who are entering adulthood within state services of so-called care have their political agency limited in an attempt to demonstrate their vulnerability. Others argue that Western notions of childhood are not well suited as an analytical category in this context, since views that construe children as innocent and incompetent are not well matched to situations in which a child claims to be

[7] Refugee Council and UNHCR do not currently report on numbers of trans and non binary unaccompanied minors and their experiences are outside the scope of this research.

politically aware is therefore persecuted (Hedlund 2017). These approaches to hospitality, I suggest, can ultimately result in misguided forms of paternalism and further reinforcing victimhood.

Language of migration as a potential starting point for resistance

I have introduced the 'stickiness' of processes of representation in the context of unaccompanied minors, and this leads me to discuss the broader conundrum I have when navigating the language of displacement. In this section, I uncover some of the semantic problems that arise in my research. On one hand, I want to critique the state processes of categorisation that fix refugees, particularly youth, into secure identities; processes often used to simultaneously victimise, villainise or further marginalise the communities this project engages with. However, I am cautious not to obscure meaning and end up diluting the politics at play in the research through using overly abstract terms, while also wanting to acknowledge the reclaiming of certain terms by people with lived experience. Mieke Bal describes 'travelling concepts' between disciplines, observing how 'travel renders concepts flexible' (2002, p.25), necessitating their frequent analysis to understand how they are being used to theorise the object. 'Diffusion', she argues, 'is the result of an unwarranted and casual 'application' of concepts' (p.33). When writing this thesis I engage with the messiness of interdisciplinary language and favour flexible terms over words imbued with an institutional hierarchy and borders that fixes a divide between researcher and researched. Locating the border as an organising tool reveals how it operates to exclude refugees from certain areas of public life, forming everyday, unremarkable and subtle borders which I explore in Chapter One in relation to the concept of slow violence as the state-sanctioned project of tactical impoverishment.

Situating “refugee” and “asylum seeker” within their legal frameworks is a helpful way of contextualising how these categories function in daily life. In simple terms, ‘asylum is the claim you make, and if that claim is accepted by the country you claimed asylum from, you become a refugee and receive international protection’ (Right to Remain toolkit). For this claim to be accepted, an individual must fit into the definition of a “refugee” as set out by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol, being: ‘someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion’ (UNHCR). Broadly speaking, people granted refugee status in the UK are given five years of protection with relative freedoms. They can work without restriction, apply for bank accounts, benefits, social housing, access healthcare and be classed as ‘Home’ students when paying university tuition fees. They can apply for travel documentation and travel with some ease, though not to their country of origin. Asylum seekers still waiting for legal recognition as refugees (or having faced refusal or under appeal)[8] are restricted in all aspects of life; they are housed by the state in often unsafe, unsanitary conditions, under most circumstances they cannot work, they usually do not have recourse to public funds, cannot travel and often have their money tightly controlled through the use of pre-paid cards. In other words, they are subjected to everyday bordering processes of restricted movement and surveillance that become a form of incarceration. Unaccompanied minors, the focus of my inquiry, represent around 10% of asylum claims in the UK. In recent years, most of these young people were granted refugee status, though in 2013 ‘UASC’ leave (for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) was introduced, when the reason for granting leave was age rather than the arguments laid out in their asylum claim, thus

[8] The average wait time for an initial decision on an asylum claim is one to three years (Refugee Council 2021)

operating as a refusal with a time-bound protection period attached. It is important to make clear here that since my research was conducted the Illegal Migration Act was given royal assent (in 2023), threatening the protection of individuals in all of these categories, essentially making it illegal to seek asylum.

It is worth pausing on the contemporary history of forced migration here. The enshrinement of the 1951 Refugee Convention (with its 1967 protocol) instigated a shift in how forced migrant identity became essentialised through administrative and bureaucratic processes. Anthropologist Liisa Malkki made influential contributions to the field of migration studies that drew attention to how the 'postwar refugee emerged as a knowable, nameable figure and as an object of social-scientific knowledge' (1995, p.498). Malkki's theorising is highly relevant to performance studies as it reveals the lasting and potentially damaging effects of constructing refugees as knowable, meaning the 'very mobile, unstable social phenomena' of forced migration becomes fixed as essential, as refugees become realised through representation (Malkki 1995, p.511), and become fetishised, romanticised and depoliticised through language, policy and public discourse. Ahmed's use of 'sticky words' to describe the repetition of affective language ('flood', 'swamped') is also helpful in understanding how terms become securely associated in migration rhetoric. According to Ahmed, 'words generate effects: they create impressions of others as those who have invaded the space of the nation, threatening its existence' (2004, p.122). In addition to language reproduced within state apparatus, political discourse and right-wing media rhetoric which elicits a vocabulary of dehumanisation, legal terms of “refugee” and “asylum seeker” can also become problematic.

Even the language used in discourses of support is framed around emotive and subjective terminology, though as a means of countering the hostile rhetoric of the state rather than upholding it. This can be seen in the commonly used term “new neighbour” and the City of Sanctuary network’s use of “sanctuary seeker”. In the past, (non-refugee) peers in the refugee and/or theatre sectors have questioned my determination to use terms such as: “refugee and asylum seeker”, wondering whether the inclusion of asylum seeker creates a false binary, or fuels notions of otherness. To return to Bal’s travelling concepts, as these conceptualisations of displacement move between disciplines and time periods ‘their meaning, reach and operational value differ’ (2002, p.24). I adopt a stance that uses “asylum seeker” to distinguish and validate the lived experience of people waiting within the asylum system who face significantly different rights to those with “papers” (in other words the right to remain). Further, using these terms with specificity avoids associating personal success (such as educational achievement or artistic endeavours) with an asylum system that is just. In this thesis, therefore, I use “refugees and asylum seekers” when speaking generally, and I may refer to individual asylum status if it is relevant to my analysis.

I also use a variety of terms to describe the individuals or groups who engage in arts projects engaging with displacement. Sometimes I echo the terminology of the company or theorist cited, adhering to and respecting the tone they have set. When referring to my own practice I use the word ‘participant’ with caution (though I do use it sometimes), and avoid “subject” or “research subject”, opting instead for terms that reflect the active, specific, artistic, professional range of roles I have established as part of my practice: contributor, advisor, collaborator, actor, performer, colleague, assistant facilitator, storyteller. I have considered confidentiality and possible ethical tensions at play in writing about the lives of

others, and so when writing about young people I have changed names and not included identifiable details. When writing about actors from Phosphoros I have used their names (with permission), and refer to creative work documented in the public domain. I am aware that as the researcher I retain responsibility for articulating these semantic nuances, and that my positionality influences how I engage with the terms mentioned. Within the practice I developed throughout this research project I have observed my colleagues, contributors and workshop participants move away from legal terminology and use descriptors such as 'people like us', which relays shared experience. Outlining these practical issues around how I talk about this research is part of an overarching concern for care. By navigating a dialect of bureaucracy I enable different subject positions to remain and flourish within the practice, and this generates a methodological form of resistance in the research process. As such, this project required me to think further about how practice research methodology negotiates parameters of research and selfhood, the collision between the personal and political, and how socially engaged performance intervenes within such binaries.

Engaging with 'friendship as method'

This thesis reveals multiple parallel narratives of people who move in and out of focus of my project, and the changes experienced personally and collectively through its duration. Instead of reinforcing borders around the researcher and the researched, I opt to frame my inquiry through the lens of friendship. Underpinning the development of the research was the relationship between Phosphoros' activity and priorities and the direction my inquiry needed to take, which was at once problematic and fruitful. This presented a methodological challenge as I balanced my criticality as a researcher with the relational, in my multi-faceted position as "the

researcher" *and* Kate the artist, colleague, friend[9]. In searching for an alternative model to help respond to these challenges, I identified 'friendship as method', coined by feminist ethicist Lisa Tillmann-Healy (2003; 2015), which uses the privilege of the researcher to liberatory ends, keeping ethics at its forefront. Friendship, she argues, offers the researcher a way of thinking through radical reciprocity and exchange, whereby 'we never ask more than participants that we are willing to give' (2015, p.735). She positions this approach as moving from studying "them" to studying *us* (p.735). Tillmann-Healy's proposal for friendship as method has been influenced by feminist and queer research methodologies which challenge processes of marginalisation and othering in pursuit of liberation. Instead of focusing solely on traditional forms of data gathering, borrowing from the concept of friendship as method, I have also foregrounded personal, collective and, at times, intimate moments from the research and argue for their importance in contributing to new knowledge. According to Tillmann-Healy, this approach makes possible issues to emerge 'organically, in the ebb and flow of everyday life: leisurely walks, household projects, activist campaigns, separations, reconciliations, losses, recoveries. The unfolding path of the relationships becomes the path of the project' (p.735). I have woven these alternative forms of knowledge production into my thesis through thick description, snippets of conversation and stylistic choices in how I have documented my practice, attending to what I describe as the *stuff around the edges* of my research inquiry. Through these methodological choices, I aim to convey how the shape and feel of the project has been rooted in friendship.

There are, of course, potential ethical pitfalls in adopting a stance of friendship

[9] This list does, of course, extend to 'partner' when considering my frequent collaboration with Syed. However, to maintain clarity within my argument, I have focussed my analysis on Syed's relationships with other collaborators rather than myself, for example with Tewodros in Chapter Three and Muhammad in Chapter Five.

within a research method. It is not my intention to obscure power differentials and, as I discuss in this thesis, this sometimes presents the researcher with conflicting feelings of obligation or loyalty. Hence, I suggest there is a rebelliousness to employing friendship as method. One way I have pushed this concept of 'friendship' further is by placing it alongside an attentiveness to care and care as a research practice, recognising, as Amanda Stuart Fisher outlines, that care has many interconnected dimensions: the practical and emotional; the ethical and political; and the aesthetic, which she describes as 'determining how artistry and the feeling evoked by an engagement with the arts frames inter-human relationships in solicitous ways' (2020, p.6). Situating care and friendship in these ways, I will argue, enhances the possibilities for my project to stage resistance to its wider political backdrop.

Moreover, the aesthetic quality of care has become a foundational component of my thinking, influenced by theorists who have examined its potential, and mobilising these ideas to develop my own research. James Thompson, from an applied theatre perspective, draws on Rancière's framework of the 'distribution of the sensible' to develop his understanding of the aesthetics, which determines politics to 'revolve around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak' (Rancière 2004 Thompson 2020, p.219). In this sense, therefore, aesthetic practices intervene, and are 'always part of the processes by which capacities for seeing, doing, making and speaking are organised', and play a role in how politics are reinforced or challenged (p. 219). The aesthetic potential of care lends itself to be discussed in line with performance philosophy that argues performance thinks (see Cull 2014, Fisher 2015). Feminist philosopher Maurice Hamington observes a tension in how care's aesthetic quality struggles to be defined, suggesting 'it may be that performance captures care in ways words cannot' (2020, p.31). Whilst it may prove difficult to define, attentiveness to the aesthetic quality

of care plays an important role throughout my research and is emphasised through the process of collaboration, relationality, and dialogue that establishes the creative practice as itself an expression of care.

A perspective on care aesthetics that is perhaps more nuanced when applied to the context of refugee performance is philosopher Yuriko Saito's approach. She describes the relationship between care ethics and care aesthetics as reciprocal, with both emphasising 'the importance of experiencing the other, whether a person or an object, on its own terms through unselfing and decentring while activating the imagination' (Saito 2022, p.113). Aesthetics of care, she argues, 'focuses on the first-person practice of cultivating the virtuous mode of relating to the other in our aesthetic experience through care' (p.20). Saito's theorisation draws on the traditional Japanese repair practice *kintsugi* (gold joinery) or *kintsukuroi* (repair by gold), whereby cracked tea porcelain would be filled with gold and nowadays lacquer covered with gold flakes. This practice, Saito explains, 'regards various forms of so-called damage as having their own integrity for what they are and providing an opportunity for exercising imagination and creativity'. In other words '*kintsugi* celebrates, rather than denigrates, the so-called damage or imperfection' (2022, p.60-61). The cumulative and ongoing process of mending and restoring enacts a careful and active engagement with the object, 'rendering it not only an object of aesthetic appreciation but also an object graced with longevity' (p.62).

Whilst Saito acknowledges pitfalls of visible repair, such as the potential for exploitative fetishizing and commercialising of survival (p.63), I consider this non-Eurocentric, decolonial mode of conceptualising care to be highly relevant when considering displacement. In her conceptualisation there is always a continuum with the brokenness of the past and the imperfection of the present, which draws

parallels to the strategies of survival in Britain's continually broken asylum system, and the notion of moving forward in the process of resettlement whilst continuing to look back at lives lived pre-migration. The reciprocal mode of repair Saito discusses here brings me to draw attention to how I have imported concepts of friendship into my thinking.

In my research, an enmeshment of care and friendship becomes transgressive and is used to create the conditions for which people categorised as *alone, unaccompanied* or *separated* are instead accompanied, in-company, in-friendship. This counters how the representation of unaccompanied minors by others is shaped by isolation. When the categorisation of 'unaccompanied' is repeatedly perpetuated by the systems these young people engage with, identities become 'locked into a static category' and the specific identity of being alone (Herz and Lalander 2017, p.1073). Migration scholar Paul Scheibelhofer describes the phenomena of 'boundary making' within refugee support projects, warning that 'the practice of helping often goes along with the highlighting of differences between helper and helped' (2017, p.195). In fact, argues feminist philosopher Vrinda Dalmiya, 'help/aid structured by neoliberal practices perpetuate neocolonial precarities that necessitate aid' (2021, p.71). Understanding how these concepts map onto research processes with refugees and reappear in relation to "researcher" and "researched" subject positions has enabled me to develop a more equitable process, arriving at a dialogic model.

This strategy rejects an assumption of unaccompanied minors' social isolation and instead has enabled me to approach refugee-engaged practice through a register of care rather than uncritically adopting a deficit model. Accordingly, my project has taken refugee-engaged practice research in new directions. I am reminded of James Thompson's proposal for an aesthetic of care, which draws in from the margins

the ‘supporting infrastructures’ that make performance possible, positioning them not as a ‘hidden mechanism of creative endeavour but a valued component of the aesthetics (2020, p.45). I suggest that within my research, these mechanisms appear as radical forms of friendship that are sustaining, protective and restorative. Tillmann-Healy describes the political dimension of navigating friendship within research, arguing for its potential for social justice, whereby “just friends” can become *just* friends, or interpersonal allies (2015, p.731). I am developing a practice that seeks to foreground care and develop an account of the radical potential of care, extending Tillmann-Healy’s conceptualisation of friendship by shifting focus from myself as the researcher and fostering more reciprocal and collective relationships within creative practice.

One such form of allyship I enact through this project is through the narrative choices I make in the retelling of this research project, sometimes withholding parts of stories that veer too far into individuals’ personal experiences of forced migration and the asylum seeking process, and elsewhere recognising and reflecting on the privilege I had as a researcher of being afforded such vast, detailed and open windows into the lived experience of others. With this in mind, I have constructed a narrative which I present in this thesis which I feel articulates my research authentically (without omitting challenges and tensions) in ways that would make those whose stories are embedded within it feel proud and represented should they ever read it, and not share my work at the expense of others’ integrity and agency. By this I mean I take care when referencing individual’s pre-migration history, or experience of the asylum system, and make little mention of family or personal welfare, for the purposes of safeguarding privacy. This approach to navigating research in which I am entangled influences why I situate it as imbuing an aesthetics of care that repeatedly seeks to enact solidarity. In other words, it does more than

simply record; it enacts care by ensuring the voices, stories and encounters brought to life in the practice are not lost to time, which I hope honours both the immediacy of the process as well as the reflective and critical demands of scholarly engagement.

In paying attention to both the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of care within refugee engaged performance, I suggest the practice starts to dislocate the tropes of vulnerability and victimhood so often attached to refugees. Instead, predetermined roles of who provides care and hospitality are troubled, along with the systemic silencing implicated within state immigration processes. As I have indicated, care and its aesthetic dimensions can be difficult to define, and its ambiguous quality enables an expansive engagement with how it can be understood in theory and practice. Its possibilities also signal potential limitations, however, which are of pertinence given my research already exists within a context of structural inequality. When James Thompson considers community-based arts work within a framework of care, he describes a desire to 'challenge the very categories that suggest the 'professional' cannot be sustained ethically without a commitment to the potential for it to blur dynamically with the personal (Thompson 2015, p.432). This principle has influenced my own approach to a care-led practice, which aims to forefront relationally and being with each other, thereby rejecting a model of research that detaches the researcher from the subject.

This approach carries potential pitfalls which require some attention. Firstly, there is a risk that in exposing the aesthetic dimensions of care I am romanticising care as being beyond stress, intensive emotional labour, burden and even exploitation. By engaging with the methodological possibilities of care and extending this to friendship and solidarity it is not my intention to sidestep an interrogation of

hierarchies of power and rehearsal room dynamics, or uncritically imply a model of flat-structure co-research rather than a directed process. Nonetheless, if part of my intention as a researcher is to destabilise the fixed identities unaccompanied minors occupy, my own standpoint needs troubling too. Michelle Fine's notion of 'working the hyphen' (1994) has useful application here, whereby strategies of critiquing authorship, positionality and translation are used to challenge domination. Fine invites researchers to 'probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations'. She argues that engaging in social struggles *with* those who have been subjugated, we 'work the hyphen', and create 'occasions for researchers and informants to discuss what is, and is not, 'happening between,' within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence' (1994, p. 72).

Nevertheless, focusing on the act of caring may obscure the agency and experience of the person being cared for, thereby rendering them a passive recipient of care in the wider narrative of the caregivers' moral responsibility. Whilst these are valid analytical concerns, my interest lies with care practices that involve co-creation as givers and receivers (and those in between). In the context of this research, I tend to focus on gestures of care present within participatory and collaborative arts contexts. However, at times I do reflect on instances where the consequences of care had higher stakes around safety and wellbeing (such as Tewodros and the strangers, which I discuss in Chapter Three), which I attempt to retell care-fully, despite not having the perspective of the receivers of care. In this sense, I hope, I implicate myself at the hyphen, to borrow Fine's term, and emphasise the relational dimensions of the research.

Lastly, a significant risk posed by a framework of care, I suggest, is the potential for the focus on an aesthetics of care to inadvertently depoliticise the performance work by reading it through a lens of ethical, moral and emotional concern, rather than as a site for social justice. Throughout my research, the consequences and embodied realities of the UK's hostile environment appear throughout, however my argument for why I have opted to take a less overtly antagonistic approach is twofold. First, when refugee youth are living with antagonism in their daily lives on micro and macro levels they don't necessarily want to engage with this as a theme in creative work. However, the project contributes to the political landscape with a small p in its capacity to challenge and question care, visibility, and collectivity. Secondly, shifting focus from refugees' basic humanity to *individuals* it foregrounds unaccompanied minors' voices, and this itself is a political response to the widespread silencing they have experienced.

Taking this into account, as I discuss throughout this thesis, my engagement with care as a cornerstone of my methodology is contingent on being responsive to the needs of those involved in the project. The experiences of unaccompanied minors in the UK are characterised by shattered temporalities, and I reflect this in my research through the motif of *interruption*. I articulate a research approach that is shaped to responsively change in light of the circumstances of the individuals I collaborate with, as well as the world around us. This takes influence from Melissa Trimingham's hermeneutic spiral model (2002), as a methodology that takes account of the creative process whilst also continuously addressing research questions. My methodological stance was stretched intensively when the global COVID-19 pandemic posed an unexpected threat to my continuing research. The interruptive nature of my inquiry limits its linearity, and I position this as generating critical instances that became turning points, fractures or moments of disruption that turn into clarity.

The map of the project

My research is articulated through an ongoing dialogue between practice and theories of migration, socially engaged performance and concepts of care, revealing new understandings of the relationship between the performer and the performed, and the agency of refugees within contemporary theatre-making practices engaging with displacement. The ideas in this thesis are developed in an ongoing dialogue with the practice, which is documented in an interactive online slide deck. In Chapter One I undertake a review of literature and practice as I examine the different ways performance studies has engaged with refugee narratives, focussing on work that stages lived experience and identifying the gaps and missteps within these various approaches, in particular when concerned with the stories of unaccompanied minors. Through categorising examples of practice into key thematic areas, I identify the questions this research aims to address, acknowledging gaps in existing research. Next, in Chapter Two, I discuss the development of a research methodology, which informed the four practical projects examined in this thesis. The practice embedded within my approach is associated with a set of ethical, material and social considerations, which I outline, and introduce key principles driving the research ethic. Identifying moments of interruption as critical to my approach serves as a reminder of the responsivity this project necessitates. I also navigate and deepen my understanding of my positionality as a non-refugee researcher working within this field. These initial chapters stage the problem my inquiry seeks to address: the crisis of representation facing unaccompanied minors in the UK. They also contextualise the socio-political moment the research takes place in terms of broader border politics, as well as the key discourses I will engage in, particularly care ethics and performance of life narratives.

In the second half of this thesis, I develop my argument through the examination of the four practice research projects I designed and delivered in response to my research inquiry. Chapter Three deals with the unfolding of my first project, *All the beds I have slept in*, a work in progress created in collaboration with four actors from Phosphoros who explored their experiences of care and caring in their forced migration journeys to becoming adults. Through analysing moments from the development and performance of this piece, I argue how interconnected care and co-responsibility open up new possibilities for staging refugee youth narratives. It is within this project that care moves from being a theme in the research to taking on aesthetic dimensions. In Chapter Four I develop my argument to reveal how the experience of creating and experiencing performances of the self can reconceptualise temporalities of hope and nourish practices of collective care. I do this through analysing my second project, *Stories for Sleeping*, an online participatory project for refugee youth to create sleep stories for their peers to listen to, which was initiated following discoveries in my first practical project. Developed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, I used the concept of interruption to develop new creative interventions for refugee youth, broadening the scope of my research to include more young people, including girls and women. In Chapter Five I move towards conclusions, drawing on an examination of two further (smaller) projects which extended my practice and enabled me to interrogate my emergent findings in different ways. My third project, a film called *Connected Hearts*, forms a counterpart to *Stories for Sleeping*, and found new ways to animate the project's thematics more intimately. The fourth and final project was the creation of two monologues, commissioned as part of the Royal Opera House's *A bed for the night* project, an event in partnership with Good Chance Theatre's *The Walk*. The monologues, performed by two actors from Phosphoros, were directed at Little Amal, a huge puppet representing a nine-year-old unaccompanied Syrian refugee girl,

and are interesting due to the collision between personal narrative and the spectacle of asylum narratives. The politics around this final practical component provides an apt segue into my conclusions about who gets to speak about unaccompanied minors, in what way and how, opening up new ways of thinking about collectivity, interdependence and care. In the final section of the conclusion, I summarise what new knowledge the whole project has generated in terms of how the performance of life narratives opens up new ways of thinking about collective and self-sustaining care which, as a consequence, radically rethinks the agency of the refugee within theatre-making practices engaging with lived experience. As the thesis draws to a close I exit my 'research spiral' temporarily to outline what more is left to do, whilst looking ahead to unknown territory as the political landscape for refugees in the UK continues to change.

A note on documentation

I invite the reader to engage with the four practical projects I have outlined above through an engagement with the accompanying collection of documentation, encapsulated in an interactive online slide deck. This can be accessed using this link: https://www.canva.com/design/DAGAOeJtviQ/Cs9_czoifPOSnMQxU8y0Cw/view?utm_content=DAGAOeJtviQ&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=editor.

This online resource includes snapshots of my work in process, through photographs, fragments of conversation, questions, thoughts, and reflections. In chronological order, within the document, *All the beds I have slept in* is captured in a twenty-nine-minute recording and twelve-page script; *Stories for Sleeping* is summarised through ten example audio recordings ranging from one to seven minutes; *Connected Hearts*

is a twenty-seven-minute film; and recordings of two solo performances in A *Bed for the Night* (six and eight-and-a-half-minutes) are accompanied by short scripts. I have signposted back and forth between the thesis and the documentation, indicating where my engagement develops further through written articulation, and where the practice uniquely illuminates my inquiry. On the top right-hand corner of each page is a number between 3-5, serving as a 'chapter key', to remind the reader which chapter each project connects to. Where possible I have included website links and QR codes in case of technical difficulty with the embedded videos, though all material should be accessible within the online link provided. Whilst you are welcome to interact with the documentation however you like, I have signposted within this written thesis suggested moments of engagement, which mostly occur from Chapter Three onwards.

As well as staging theoretical engagement with the unfolding of my creative practice I interweave stories that in some way became turning points in the development of the research, critical instances and productive interruptions to my thinking and ultimately to the trajectory of the project as a whole. My ongoing wrestle with method and theory draws influence from other practice-based researchers, in particular Patti Lather and Chris Smithies and their approach to 'hard to read' research with women who were HIV+. They describe a process of 'getting out of the way and getting in the way', with the intention that their multi-vocal melding of life writing, theoretical engagement, poetry and reflection can be read in 'two directions' (see Lather 1997; 2000). Borrowing from researchers such as these helps me consider how I document the research, to ensure the voices of my refugee colleagues remain integral, so as not to 'drown the poem of the other with the sound of our own voices, as the ones who know, the 'experts' about how people make sense of their lives and what searching for meaning means' (Lather and Smithies 1997,

p.xvi). Ultimately, through my research I strive to elevate and amplify the voices and experiences of unaccompanied minor refugees, facilitating a platform for their narratives to be explored and understood with compassion and respect while underscoring the importance of theatre and performance's capacity for radical and collective care in the context of crisis.

Chapter One

Refugee narratives as spectacle: problems, possibilities and care as a radical intervention

> *The human eye cannot see in total darkness. It will take them several hours to fully adjust in pitch black, but only if there is a small amount of light. Perhaps from the moon, shining bright and distant. Or the stars, trillions of miles away. We don't need much light - the smallest amount will do. It's amazing how little light we need in order to see.*
>
> *I've always been scared of the dark. Back in Sudan me and my family would sleep outside because it was so hot. Whenever the electricity would go off we'd be in darkness and I couldn't wait for the sun to rise. When I think about my past, it is often dark, but the stars never left me.*
>
> *I didn't choose to become a refugee. Nor did those who came before me, nor did you, and nor will the people who come after us. We must never be ashamed of who we are. Whatever is happening in your country is not your fault. Even when you feel so small, remember all the footsteps you are following. Some people are born rich, protected and on safe land. We might need to search for longer to find light, but it is always there, even if your eyes make you think differently.*
>
> *I wonder if you'll ever meet me. Maybe one day, in 5 years or more. You'll go to get your eyes tested and I'll be standing there in my white uniform, my certificate of achievement on the wall. I made it.*
>
> *I'll put the glasses over your eyes and show you the letters on the wall. You will read them out: H… O… P… E… Hope. Even in the darkest times, there is light.*
>
> 'Light' by An-Nur.

I developed this piece of writing with a Sudanese young woman called An-Nur[10] when she was twenty-one during the Spring of 2021, as part of my practice research project *Stories for Sleeping* (which I discuss in Chapter Four). It was during the COVID-19 pandemic in the middle of a lockdown, so we would talk on the phone, on video calls and over WhatsApp messaging, discussing ideas together ahead of her

[10] This is a pseudonym she chose

typing out drafts on her mobile phone before sending them to me to add suggestions. She would record the piece as voice messages, finessing it until she was happy with it, and then we discussed the type of music that I would overlay on top. Alongside these collaborative, creative exchanges I helped An-Nur navigate the complicated maze of university admissions for undergraduate applicants without conventional education histories. Seeking advice from a refugee charity and researching online enabled me to support her to receive a 'contextual offer'[11] from a university in the North of England to study Optometry, which she began that September. These apparent interruptions into my performance-based research with refugees initially felt like something of a diversion from the central trajectory of my project, however as I go on to discuss in chapters 3-5, these moments of friendship and advocacy were actually very important to the development of my the development of my collaborative research methodology. As such, my positionality in relation to the individuals I worked with required I move, as Tillmann-Healy argues, 'from the centre to periphery and back again' (2003, p.734). Making visible both An-Nur's creative work and the relational space it required for its nurturing and development is an intentional way to open this chapter, which examines the existing landscape in which my project sits and how questions of mutually sustained care became vital to its development. Through surveying literature and practice from the field, in this chapter I establish the ethical-political context of my research. By drawing on scholarship in performance and theatre and placing this in dialogue with discourses in migration studies and care ethics, I identify some of the key problems and questions that determine the ethics of representation of refugees and what grounds the development of an ethics of practice that seeks to intervene with this. As An-Nur's writing above suggests, the interconnections between a subjective sense of self and

[11] A contextual offer is when a university considers an individual's barriers to accessing higher education, and adjusts their grade requirements or gives extra consideration when making offer decisions (see UCAS 2020).

the weighty label of ‘refugee’ is a tension that reveals the complex political and ethical entanglements of biopolitical control and refugee identity in the 21st Century. These tensions are central to my interrogation of forced migration narratives within theatre and performance. I am interested in how refugees can be represented in nuanced ways that move beyond overly simplistic depictions of suffering, described by Liisa Malkki as a ‘spectacle of a “raw” and “bare” humanity’ (1996, p.387), and what ways these practices can disrupt the everyday bordering processes that pervade public life. By mobilising care ethics, in particular recognising the possibility of interdependent relationships of care between refugee youth communities, I rethink some of the secure forms of knowledge that create reductive representations of refugees. Through this theoretical approach, I argue, my inquiry interrupts the pervasive bordering practices that forge ‘slow violence’ (Nixon 2011) against displaced communities. Further, I borrow from care ethicist Virginia Held and argue that I position care as both a value *and* a practice with political and social value (see Held 2006, p.38). In locating care as a radical framework through which the persistent temporariness of the asylum system can be disrupted, I develop new ways of thinking about how we design and make performance with refugee youth. The interdisciplinary dialogue I develop between theatre and performance and migration and refugee studies productively lays bare the social, economic and ethical terrain of this type of practice, which forms the backdrop to my inquiry.

Care as a research framework

At the heart of my research is an engagement with ethics of care, which brings an emphasis on the importance of interpersonal relationships, and how ethical issues can be understood through the contexts and needs of the individual rather than in isolation. My engagement with care ethics spans feminist theory, theatre and performance, and migration studies, influenced by extant scholarship that locates care at the

centre of human interaction. Emerging out of feminist ethics, care as a theoretical standpoint began to gain traction in the mid-1980s as a way of reconceptualising moral boundaries that upheld power differentials and secured women as excluded from decision-making, whilst being contained to the domestic realm. A key care ethicist whose theoretical ideas are highly relevant to performance and care is Joan Tronto, who argued that moral boundaries uphold gender, class and racialised structures of power and proposed care as a central point of analysis, rather than a 'marginal part of existence' (1993, p.111). Tronto identified four interconnected tenets of a care ethic that could have the potential for societal change, 'if we move care from its current peripheral location to a place near the centre of human life' (p.101). Tronto describes these four phases as caring about; taking care of; care giving; and care receiving (p.106). She defines care as a practice, rather than a disposition or emotion (p.119), and this standpoint informs much of my thinking, departing from humanitarian and neocolonial discourse around forced migration that imbues state protection and institutional care with inequalities of power and limited opportunity for individual agency, revealing that care is not always positive. Oppressive, colonial forms of care are described by Fiona Robinson, who argues that care as benevolence, charity or attention to vulnerable victims 'could serve to reinforce existing patterns of domination and dependency' (2011, p.165).

According to Tronto, the integrity of the care ethic rests on deep contextual understanding. She argues that 'care as a practice involves more than simply good intentions. It requires a deep and thoughtful knowledge of the situation, and of all the actors' situations, needs and competencies' (p.136). Further, a commitment to care as a practice is expansive rather than selective; the elements of care are interconnected and not to be separated. Tronto and Fisher (1990) propose care be viewed as 'a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain,

continue, and repair our "world" so that we can live in it as well as possible' (p.34), and this notion of care as a mode of repair is mobilised throughout my practice as refugee youth reassemble their shattered narratives. Recent discussions in care ethics have also turned to the concept of precarity, which is a central condition within my research context. I draw on these insights to deepen my understanding of the specific challenges faced by refugee youth as I outline my approach to engaging with these lived experiences through performance. The complex intersubjectivity of empathic care urges us to look beyond vulnerability and confront the reality of precarity. Vrinda Dalmiya's exploration of these ideas underscores the importance of framing these concepts in ways that acknowledge their geopolitical context. She states that 'the idea of precarity, unlike vulnerability, signals exclusionary political orders and ideologies that render some more vulnerable than others' (2021, p.68). With this in mind, caregiving in the context of refugee youth cannot be conceptualised without understanding the structural conditions which have precipitated social inequality. In the context of my research, as ideology around forced migration becomes increasingly securitised, polarised and politicised, and circumstances become more and more precarious, care ethics offers an original intervention into these debates in the field of theatre and performance.

In Care Ethics and the Refugee Crisis (2020), Marcia Morgan presents several arguments that reframe care of suffering refugee others, and her work provides a useful underpinning for my own thinking. Morgan advocates for a more active, contestatory form of care that moves beyond the forms of passive sympathy that I reference similar critique of (including Boltanski and Chouliaraki for example). She highlights the essential role of emotion in fostering genuine care and political agency toward refugees, and critiques binary moral narratives of "good vs evil" refugees. Morgan's theoretical work on aesthetic care is highly relevant to my own critical

engagement. She claims that ‘aesthetic representation and experience express human suffering in a nonlinguistic or non-discursive manner, but in a way that potentiates a capacity for communication as contestation against the wrong state of affairs’ (p.50). In this sense, she argues, since the ‘muteness’ of the aesthetic poses a ‘direct challenge to normative modes of communication, aesthetic representation remains silently enclosed within its own domain’, and therefore retains a powerful ability to communicate meaning (p.50).

Morgan’s definition of aesthetic care hinges on the act of the aesthetic witness, which she describes as ‘a form of representation that leads to the potential and yet contingent transformation of the observer’. Here, she argues, ‘aesthetic care develops an affective relationship between individuals and distant others who have no connection to the individuals “circle of concern”’ (p.7). The potential of aesthetic care to contest the ways refugees are written into discourse has particularly useful application to the forms of theatre and performance I explore throughout my research and is therefore a productive concept to draw upon. Expanding on Morgan’s theorisation, in my practice research I later conceptualise care aesthetics not only in terms of non-refugees witnessing refugees, but how the care aesthetics present in the tenderness between refugee performers speaks to refugee peers. In this sense, my collaborators become both witnesses of *and* agents of care.

Critical to my argument, and what puts aesthetics of care under pressure, is the concept of care as a contested issue for unaccompanied minor refugees, because of their personal (and ongoing) experiences of the indignity care can present when encountered through institutional apparatus. This occurs most notably through the “care system”, which provides unaccompanied minors with ‘corporate parents’ via the care of Local Authority Children’s Services. Focussing attention on vulnerability

and adopting a lens of deficit, these state care processes reinforce the passivity, infantilisation and lack of agency refugee youth have over their own lives. As Tronto notes, the conceptualisation of 'neediness' lacks autonomy, power and capability, thus 'one way in which we socially construct those who need care is to think of them as pitiful because they require help' (1993, p.120), which, correlatively, we all do at one point or another. It is not without irony that the commonly used acronym "LAC", referring to 'Looked After Child' is often pronounced how it is spelt: 'lack', which I suggest serves as a perpetual reminder of the deficit position of care in relation to unaccompanied minors, and echoes a language of dehumanisation. Within my project then, I rethink care and how it is encountered by refugee youth. Care is positioned in this research both as a politics and value that guides both my theoretical thinking and my practical decision making when facilitating participatory practice. It is these multidimensional engagements with care that I have developed in dialogue with extant scholarship , that enable this project to make an original and timely contribution to our understanding of the relationship between performance and migration.

Some of the key problematics underpinning debates in forced migration refer to questions of responsibility, hospitality, humanitarianism and justice. However, as I explore in this chapter, the incendiary nature of shifting socio-political circumstances and the changing and politically charged dynamic of biopolitics bends focus from moral responsibility to the protection of national borders and xenophobic rhetoric, and as such, this discourse omits the imperative to care for the wellbeing of refugees. In the introduction to the edited collection *Refugee Imaginaries,* Emma Cox, Sam Durrant, David Farrier, Lyndsey Stonebridge and Agnes Woolley theorise how the figure of the refugee operates at both a real and imagined level, changing depending on particular social spheres. These concepts have useful application to

arts practice and discourse as it reveals how the oppositional images of the humanitarian victim and the threatening "bogus" asylum seeker 'radically limit the space for a refugee imaginary that is based on the experiences of actual people' (Cox et al 2020 , p.6). The binary produced here of the refugee as distinctly threaten*ed* or threaten*ing* (Gray and Franck 2019, p.8) also fuels much public debate about the hospitality provided for displaced people and plays a significant role in the logic and politics behind border enforcement, thus the long-lasting impacts of these identity constructions (both real and imagined) are clear. Further, the ramifications of this binary span widely; since the figure of the refugee becomes present in politics through largely shared imaginaries, prejudicial factors such as skin colour, religion, gender and class often shape debates even if they are not mentioned. The impact of this is that deservingness is contingent on discourses of acceptability, or, in coarse terms: whether someone is a "good" or "bad" refugee. This became visible in the coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022 and the resulting warm welcome from the UK as tens of thousands of Britons signed up to host refugees fleeing, whereas studies indicate the British public has less willingness to help and more moral conflict around refugees from Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia (see Morini and Hudson 2022).

Slow violence and the narratives of the border

In my documentation and analysis of my practice, I seek out concepts that resist the somewhat romanticised discourse that often becomes associated with refugee experience, where concepts of exile and the traumatised subject become a means of drawing out universal claims of suffering. A pertinent example of this is the depiction of mass suffering in media representation of 'boat people' where large groups of refugees aboard lifeboats are represented as a homogenous mass rather than individuals. Conversely, I have engaged with interlocutors that foreground the lived experience of refugees and the real needs displaced people have. In this sense, my

approach to articulating my practice is itself framed to be both careful and full of care. To articulate the lasting impact of border enforcement on the communities with which my research engages, I adopt the term 'slow violence'. This is a concept developed by migration scholars and used to describe the ways sovereign powers ensure the 'barest physical survival' of asylum seekers, but nothing else, where the displaced subject is, in other words, 'kept alive but in a state of injury, for the sake of the life and flourishing of the British public' (Saunders and Al-Om 2022, p.7). Slow violence in this articulation then, is to be understood as something indirect, discrete, persistent, and hard to capture in headlines; a structural form of oppression rather than the outcome of one specific action. Recently adopted by migration theorists to describe the complex impact of border practices, and now imported by me into performance studies, the concept of 'slow violence' was coined by literary scholar and environmentalist Rob Nixon to discuss the climate crisis; defining a form of violence 'that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all' (2011, p.2). In the UK, slow violence in relation to refugees becomes manifest through legislation such as the 'hostile environment p olicy', introduced in 2012 by then Home Secretary Theresa May, which sought to increase scrutiny, restrictions and control over the macro and micro freedoms of asylum seekers, refugees and migrant communities more widely.

Lucy Mayblin et al use Proctor's concept of the 'postcolonial everyday' (2003) to categorise the unequal welfare of asylum seekers, entailing ongoing trauma, immobilisation, harm or tactical impoverishment by state policies. These categories include many aspects of everyday life, such as shopping, eating, clothing, personal grooming, transport, socialising and desires to work (Mayblin et al 2020, p.113). Far from banal or ordinary, the postcolonial everyday for asylum seekers then becomes a

site of intense harm (p.9). Mayblin et al argue that these processes demonstrate a necropolitical logic, a term introduced by Achille Mbembé (2003) to describe the creation of 'death-worlds' in the context of enslavement, whereby colonial 'sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not' (2003, p.27 in Mayblin et al 2020, p.111). Race, Mbembé argues, is critical in the hierarchical subjectification of the human, bound up in an imaginary enacting 'differential rights to differing categories of people for different purposes within the same space' (2003, p.25). The concept of the postcolonial everyday has been informative to my own research and helps shape an underpinning theme of my practice, which is to draw attention to how the daily indignities of rights injustices within the lived experiences of refugees and asylum seekers reveal a hierarchy of human existence which is pulled in and out of focus as a result of the shifting circumstances of the communities with whom I collaborate. Whilst the intersecting injustices shift from one situation to the next, cumulatively they all contribute to a wider state-funded project of slow violence which is examined through the development of my practice.

The impact of slow violence and everyday forms of border enforcement is, by its nature, pervasive, and thus maps onto artistic representation. I consider how a care-informed approach to performance-making can disrupt this, instead enacting fleeting, momentary and lasting resistances. The starting point of my practice was rooted in a recognition that refugee experience is constitutionally determined by forms of structural silencing encountered through repeated documentation, articulation, interpretation and examination of their lived experience, most commonly through the apparatus of the asylum system. It is through these tools that the figure of the refugee becomes imagined, and in this regard I agree with refugee studies scholar Helen Taylor, who writes that 'all lives are stories waiting to be told,

but the life experiences of refugees are destined to be narrated' (2013, p.37). Theatre scholar Alison Jeffers connects the idea of always being narrated with the concept of the performance of selfhood, developing the term 'bureaucratic performance' to describe the way refugee performativity is inscribed with the structural, administrative and social inequalities embedded in the asylum system (2008; 2012). When reproduced, these bureaucratic performances tend to shape the ways the figure of the refugee becomes imagined in the minds of the public, leading to moral apathy around enhanced control and restricted rights. One of the ways bureaucratic performances are enforced, enacting a form of slow violence, is via the institutional control of the international border, and associated bordering practices. The narratological quality of the socially constructed border has been influential in the development of my practice. It is a concept that has attracted much interest from performance and across the humanities, as it plays a role in how lives are regarded and who is (and isn't) deserving of rights. Emma Cox identifies the paradoxical nature of the border, pointing out that it has a 'peculiar dual quality of being at once arbitrary and fundamental' (2020, p.143), which is perhaps why its strength as an organising structure is left unquestioned in many people's world views. Thus, I suggest, slow violence blurs into the status quo, and through my inquiry I interrogate how arts practice can intervene as I extend existing scholarly engagement in this area and introduce new thinking around performance's capacity to reveal and enact care.

Traumatic visibilities of displacement

In contemporary scholarship that addresses performances of migration the border has arguably become a site of storytelling and survival. Performance theorist Sophie Nield conceptualises the border as a space of identity, space and visibility, and uses

these ideas to claim its theatricality, which she argues 'implies the production of a space in which 'appearance' of a particular kind becomes possible, indeed, a space which is organised in such a way as to compel certain kinds of appearance' (2008 p138). Similarly, in her book on "Asylum Speakers", literature scholar April Shemak explores the role of testimony in navigating border politics, and its paradoxical nature. Referring specifically to the requirement of asylum seekers to present life narratives to border officials[12], she argues that refugees 'must provide testimony that, although it may tell of atrocity filtered through the ethics of memory, violence, trauma, and death, must likewise adhere to a legal framework' (2010, p214). Thus, I suggest the nuances within refugee narratives cannot be recognised, and the complexity of lived experience (along with hopefulness) remains untellable. Correlatively, the life narratives of displaced people then become over-simplified in order to be acceptable, or, more worryingly, to secure safety. Yet arguably it is also acts of speaking and sharing lived experience that can disrupt the tendency for the representation of refugees to collapse into mere biopolitics, where technocratic state apparatus reduces people to objects, numbers and depersonalised metaphors of excess (such as swarms of ants) and destruction (such as floods or tides of water).

A key socially significant example of how these types of narratives can be pervasive in the media's treatment of refugees is the figure of Alan Kurdi, and the way his tragic death was mediatised, which I will now briefly examine, starting with an extract from Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer*, memorialising Kurdi's memory through a father's prayer-like letter written to his young son Marwan on the eve of their forced migration journey from Homs, Syria:

> Pray God steers the vessel true, when the shores
> slip out of eyeshot and we are a flyspeck
> in the heaving waters, pitching and tilting, easily

[12] In the UK this is the Home Office, though Shemak speaks from an American perspective

swallowed.
Because you,
you are precious cargo, Marwan, the most precious there ever was
I pray the sea knows this.
Inshallah.

(From *Sea Prayer* by Khaled Hosseini, 2018)

There is little within refugee discourse that captures public attention more than child migration. The social significance of the imagery surrounding the tragic death of Syrian Kurdish two-year-old[13] Alan Kurdi[14] must not be underestimated when examining how the perception of forced migration experienced a monumental shift, with lasting effects. On 2nd September 2015 his body, along with his five-year-old brother Ghalib, was washed up on a beach near Bodrum, Turkey after the small inflatable boat designed for eight had been boarded by sixteen people and then capsized. According to testimony from surviving family members, Kurdi and his family were headed for Kos, Greece, driven by their circumstances to the overcrowded boat without an experienced captain or effective lifejackets[15] (Guardian 2015). As Warsan Shire starkly reminds us in her poem 'Home', 'no one leaves home unless / home is the mouth of a shark' (2015). Hosseini's book cited above is a notable example of one of the many artistic responses to this story. The affective reactions to the images of Alan Kurdi have been discussed extensively across migration studies and the humanities, often paying close attention to the 'discursive qualifiers' of innocence that garnered political and empathetic responses (see Davies 2020).

In this sense, the death of Alan Kurdi in 2015 became emblematic of the contemporary so-called "refugee crisis in Europe", and as such became a long-term

[13] Initial reporting identified Kurdi as three years old, but his Aunt Tima Kurdi confirms he was two years and two months when he died
[14] Sometimes his name is written in media reports as Aylan Kurdi
[15] Coverage of this story is inconclusive about whether the passengers had life jackets at all.

fixture in the public's imagination. Theoretical perspectives on this tragedy are complex, such as Nadine El-Enany's observations of the racialised aesthetic of a child with light skin in contrast to dark-skinned refugees (2016), demonstrating the often perceived hierarchy of deservingness. Her discussion on coded compassion and the racialisation of the refugee "crisis" serves as a vital reminder that 'refugees are here, their bodies washing up on European beaches, because white Europeans were, and continue to be, there' (2016). Care in this context then, is positioned as contingent on ethnicity. Migration theorist Tom Snow cites the reach of the images: 20 million screens in the first 12 hours since the discovery of Kurdi's body (Press Association, 2015). He also observes how the visual politics at play here signalled a change in language in European media, from "migrant" to "refugee" (2020, p.168). The cultural significance of this linguistic shift echoes Edward Said's account of the 'insidious form of binary oppositions' (1978) that shape the cultural sphere, in this case the binary distinction between "genuine refugee" and "bogus asylum seeker"; the latter being the first element in a semantic chain of equivalence that evolves into a threat of criminal, liar and villain (see Poynting et al 2004). The negative consequences of this binary are important to understand, as they are interconnected with how unaccompanied minor narratives are constructed more widely and reveal therefore some of the thematic explored within my practice.

In Morgan's work on aesthetic care she analyses images including the one I describe here of Kurdi, and poses the question of 'why do certain images move witnesses and distant observers to care, and is their care worth anything?' (2020, p.54). If the aesthetic constitutes no ethico-political action, as she argues, the aestheticisation of the image 'shows the lack of care, the abjection of the self as spectator and of the abjection of "civilisation"' (p.72). In other words, we can understand the act of witnessing suffering as leading to feelings of detachment rather than motivating

change, which emphasises the problematic relationship between spectatorship and ambivalence. I too was aware of the limitations of an aesthetics of care, and how the aesthetics of suffering, exemplified in the image of Kurdi, has the potential to captivate audiences yet objectify the refugee other. As I elaborate on later in this thesis, my shifting focus to refugee as caregiver worked to reconceptualise the passive image of the suffering refugee body and challenge its association with postcolonial 'white saviour' narratives.

In a similar vein to Morgan's discussion, film-maker and academic Sue Clayton reflects on the problem of the singular narrative: 'One appealing child is considered to be moving' she argues, 'but 90,000 of them - the number for instance to have claimed asylum in Europe in 2015 (Eurostat 2017) - are not' (Clayton 2019, p.117). She continues to observe that the image of the suffering child 'helps to maintain a sense of 'us and them', because tinged with our pity is a sense of gratitude and guilt that 'we' are not 'them', and that we can discharge our emotions by making a response typical for this context - after feeling moved, perhaps make a charitable donation' (p.117). Thus, I observe here that, as is often the case in relation to refugees, care and action become reduced to a somewhat meaningless transaction, and pity overshadows a response mobilising action or justice.

In this sense, it is the lasting consequences of these kinds of essentialist refugee representations, and the slow violence of everyday bordering that shapes the lived experience of refugees that form the conceptual backdrop of this research. I argue that care can operate as a framework to open up spaces of resistance in theatre and performance work with refugees, and reconfigure the positioning of refugee youth within processes that narrativise their lived experience. As a consequence, I suggest practice research can illuminate new forms of documenting, constructing, presenting

and listening to asylum narratives, exposing new ways of examining types of experiences seldom shared. There is arguably an incompatibility between the politics of care and bureaucratic systems entrenched in hostility. I position care ethics as a radical intervention within such systems which starts to destabilise the point at which discussions about refugee lived experience begin.

My approach borrows from theorisation on the intersections between performance and care as I shape my own research in these areas. In *Performing Care,* Amanda Stuart Fisher locates the interdependence between the embodied concepts of care and performance, reminding us that 'it is impossible to conceive of caring practice outside the parameters of how it is performed. In this sense, care, like live and theatrical performance, exists only as a live encounter and within a specific juncture of time and space' (2020, p.7). The temporal nature and the contingency of the 'live' encounter in performance reappears as a theme throughout my discussion in the following chapters and has consequences within my argument for how performance practice can rupture the delimitation of refugee narratives as homogenous, universal and depoliticised.

Unaccompanied minors in a crisis of representation

One form of refugee representation that has arguably been the most injurious is that of the unaccompanied minor. Returning to the notion of childhood and youth, the imagery of Alan Kurdi became embodied as arresting yet innocent. Meanwhile, I argue that the subjectivities of unaccompanied minors emerge differently, and it is with these discourses of representation that my interest lies. As I started to discuss in the Introduction to this thesis, the phenomena of separated children (mostly older teenagers, and predominantly young men) forcibly migrating due to reasons including, but not limited to: forced conscription, trafficking, sexuality, political and

religious persecution, civil war and community feuding, are seen to precipitate a coming of age beyond the understandings of Western notions of childhood (see Wernesjö 2011, p.495; Gupta, Clayton and Willis 2019). On arrival in Europe, these young people are routinely characterised as cheating the system through false pretences and threatening the national body through hyper-religiosity, misogyny and cunning.

These experiences have attracted some interest from within migration scholarship, though this category of young people is still seen as underexplored from an academic perspective. Writing from the Swedish context, Marcus Herz outlines the interrelatedness between media perceptions of unaccompanied minor young men as potential threats and their own self-image. He maps out how these identities develop, claiming that ‘despite their different backgrounds, class, religion and age, these young men are seen collectively as a threat’, which subsequently makes them feel accountable and representative of all seen as “like” them (2019, p.16). These structures operate to fix hierarchies of power over representation and add context as to why there is a lack of lived experience perspectives in research, thus reinforcing the notion of unaccompanied minors as unknowable and beyond normative conceptualisations of childhood and adolescence.

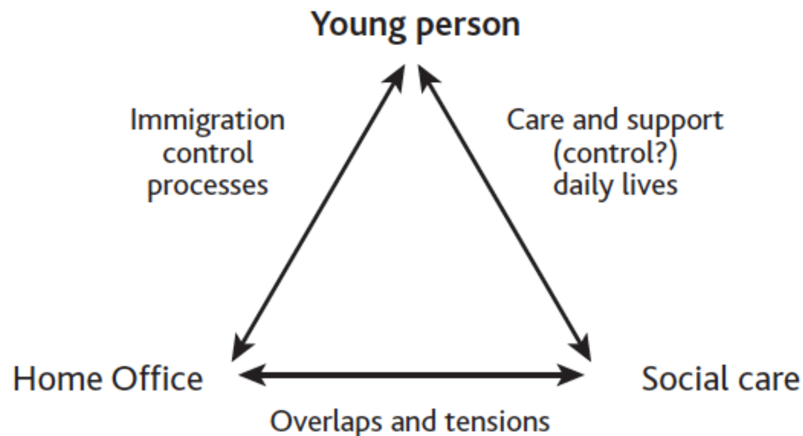
Considering the context I have outlined, I am struck by the ambivalence of how unaccompanied minors are conceived. However, it is arguably this sense of ambivalence that underpins the efforts from humanitarian and aid organisations to reframe these young people through what is often a paternalistic approach, which in so doing renders them younger, safer and more recognisable in the public’s imagination. Thus, locating age as a protective lens counters gender (specifically maleness) as risky. Reading refugee young men through a humanitarian lens is

tactical in combating distrust, I argue, but cloaks the moral panic that surrounds this community and exists as a critical form of meaning-making. Here it is possible to learn about forced migration on a macro level, specifically in terms of how easily the migrant male as a “bogeyman” returns to the surface to dominate public debate. For unaccompanied minors, identity-forming experiences induced by forced migration such as rebecoming, lack of belonging and a re-articulation of home, may be exacerbated by the additional structures that make their resettlement in the UK feel so risky.

There is an interplay between solidarity, care and protection that influences how these young people are represented, not least to counter the tendency to idealise them as a threat, particularly to ‘women’s safety and public order’ (see Scheibelhofer 2019, p.193). I return to Poynting et al’s notion of a ‘semantic chain of equivalence’, which functions to forge links unproblematically between cultural others and deviancy. The influence of power, they argue, ‘works through association, reinscribing complex phenomena in terms of the familiar, and through processes of opposition, reduction and conflation, turning people and events into essentialised, constrainable categories’ (2004, p.62). In so doing, misinformation is reproduced as a common sense argument, and notions of incoming migrants as threats to the national body gain traction, even when they are not rooted in accuracy. For example, the common myth of asylum seekers “taking” jobs from British people is not reflective of the reality in which the majority of asylum seekers are denied the right to work. Conversely, crisis narratives about “lost childhoods” justify ‘salvationist, protectionist and homogenous policies of the state’ (Rosen 2023, p.24) in terms of how unaccompanied minors are cared for. The resulting impact on unaccompanied minors experiencing childhood in crisis is that they must become passive and non-threatening to be controlled. To return to my earlier point, when compounded with

their identities as Looked After Children or Care Leavers, unaccompanied minor refugees are defined using a discourse of deficit; what they lac(k).

Crisis narratives abound in the context of forced migration, and the firm position of “the refugee crisis” in the migration lexicon has been much critiqued. Regarding unaccompanied minors, it is the crisis of *representation* that is a key problem my research addresses. More accurately, a crisis of visibility. Much research has struggled to listen to unaccompanied minors and their experiences, which are located in complex historical, social and political contexts, not least because of the role gatekeepers play in influencing who speaks for whom. Since unaccompanied minors have little institutional power, their representation is bound in labels assigned by others, rather than being able to narrate their own lives. Considering my positionality, I am aware of the intersecting privileges I hold, foremostly whiteness, an English mother tongue and British citizenship. When these subjectivities appear in relation to refugee youth I work with through this research, it is imperative to be aware of my capacity for both gatekeeping and elevating unaccompanied minors’ perspectives and how this connects to their wider relationships with professionalised figures. Social work researcher Louise Drammeh examines the complexity of how these structural relationships operate for unaccompanied minors, paying close attention to power imbalances and overlaps between social care and immigration control in her diagram below:



(Drammeh 2019, p.164)

Though (usually) positioned outside of this triangular relationship, researchers and practitioners in the arts and across the humanities are not immune from its influence and are complicit in upholding or rejecting micro and macro forms of bordering and slow violence. However, as Drammeh argues in the context of social workers, researchers and artists can 'consciously resist that pull and instead stand alongside the young people and help sustain their emergent belongings' (2019, p.164). In practice, this requires recognising one's positionality and the politics of belonging, and, as I seek to explore through this research, alternative representations of the self are possible and as such, dominant narratives can therefore be rejected, rethought and redrawn.

It has become clearer to me why the narratives of unaccompanied minors are often overlooked in theatre and performance, and, when they are, seldom include those with lived experience as active participants beyond consultation or information gathering. This, I suggest, tends to occur because tension is presented when refugee

life stories appear difficult to read and understand, as the work undertaken by the binary construction of threaten*ed* / threaten*ing* makes it seem counterintuitive to oppose one form of representation by reinforcing another. While my research has been informed by recent research in migration studies it is the gap in theatre and performance that this project addresses, building on more than a decade of my engagement in this area. To examine what this gap in theatre and performance looks like I want to move on now to consider some recent examples of performance practice, ranging from subsidised theatre productions to participatory arts projects and community-based initiatives, and the key insights I take forward.

Theatre and performance's response to the "refugee crisis"

An examination of recent responses of theatre and performance to forced migration reveals the extent to which refugee representation is disruptive, engaged with the communities it represents, and how often it involves missteps in terms of who speaks for whom and to what end. In the UK, there are several arts festivals dedicated to international refugee-themed / produced work, such as Journeys International Festival in Leicester, Portsmouth and Manchester (since 2013), Migration Matters Festival in Sheffield (since 2017), 2018's REACT Festival in Bristol and the London Migration Film Festival (since 2017). Much of the UK's refugee-engaged performance output connects at some point with national 'Refugee Week' events, first programmed in 1998 and overseen by migrant arts organisation Counterpoints Arts. There are also multiple participatory drama projects happening nationally, including 'Minding the Gap' at Kiln Theatre, 'Fortune Project' with PAN Intercultural Arts, 'Stand & Be Counted' theatre company, Maison Foo, PSYCHEdelight, Compass Collective, KRAN Fam at the Gulbenkian in Kent, Protein Dance's 'Real Life Real Dance' project and Leeds Playhouse's 'Freedom Project'. The emergence in the mid-2000s of the 'City of Sanctuary' network in Britain awards 'Theatre Company of

Sanctuary' status to organisations (including Phosphoros) committed to notions of welcome. As Steve Wilmer points out, artists are intervening 'to offer insights and new perspectives' as political means fail to address the increasing need for asylum (2018, p.2).

However, whilst refugee visibility within British arts and culture is increasingly common, critique is required to look at what this involvement entails. Refugee narratives have featured in many acclaimed productions over the last 20 years in the UK, including Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Credible Witness* (2001), Kay Adshead's *The Bogus Woman* (2000), Henry Naylor's *Borders* (2018), David Greig's reimagining of Aeschylus' *The Suppliant Women* (2017), Benjamin Zephaniah and Lemn Sissay's *Refugee Boy* (2013), Sonja Linden's *Crocodile Seeking Refuge* (2004) and *I have before me a remarkable document given to me by a young lady from Rwanda* (2004), and Thick Skin's *How Not To Drown* (2019), as a non-exhaustive list. Several of these productions have been notable in their reach or reception, or for pushing boundaries in terms of content or dramaturgy. *Nine Lives*, for example, by Zodwa Nyoni (2016), is a one-man show exploring the pervasive and systemically violent treatment LGBTQ asylum seekers experience when forced to prove their queer identities, an underexplored theme in much refugee performance. *The Claim* by Tim Cowbury (2017) uses absurdism to highlight the inconsistent, arbitrary and puzzling nature of the asylum system, and credits involvement from a vast number of refugee and asylum seeker organisations as influencing its development. Structured around an asylum interview, two interviewers, A and B, struggle to keep track of the trajectory of Serge's testimony, overlooking key details, paraphrasing nuances and deliberately misinterpreting his account. As the play progresses, the lighting becomes more and more theatricalised, pointing to the performative nature of the asylum interview. Cowbury is playful in his manipulation of language throughout the script, using

English throughout but using audience address to indicate switching languages and loss of translation; the script's notes direct that 'time and space can be seen as both closed (continuous) and open (broken) across scenes' (Cowbury 2017). Ultimately, a tussle over a story that meanders around Charlie and the Chocolate Factory results in 'gum' being replaced with 'gun'; a critical moment in Serge's asylum claim. In positioning the asylum interview as the framework for narrative, *The Claim* contributes to a lineage of practice with similar themes, bringing the private realm of legal proceedings to light, though does so through relying on narratives developed by creatives without lived experience.

Theatre has served as a powerful and empowering organ, writes Wilmer, describing it as 'a forum to uphold the equality of refugees as human beings, justifying the claim for their 'right to have rights'' (2023, p.76). However, whilst productions engaging with forced migration have had an impact in terms of awareness raising and platforming unfamiliar stories, I argue some of these works contribute to a wider reinforcement of refugees lacking narrative authority. To invite audiences to bear witness to abject stories of displacement, structural and bodily violence, oppression and border enforcement requires an engagement with the ethical implications of whose voices and bodies are present in the space, and whose are absent. Theatre made about refugees without people with lived experience at the centre of the artistic process raises questions about the authorship of the representations. I suggest this is particularly pertinent when the socio-political reality being explored onstage remains a live issue and is subjected to ongoing injustice. Due to the limited involvement of refugees within the formulation of the dramaturgy of contemporary theatre exploring forced migration, the performances, I suggest, potentially enact forms of silencing or ventriloquism which are not dissimilar to the practices of 'speaking for' prevalent in the media and the asylum system itself. Without visible

and articulated refugee involvement there are potentially undisclosed imbalances of power occurring in the creation of artistic work. If the creative team do not have lived experience, to what extent has the project been formed in dialogue with those with personal expertise, bearing in mind the slippery nature of terms like 'advisor' and 'consultant'? Furthermore, I would ask, who are these performances for? How are refugee communities included as audience members? How are their barriers to access dismantled; financial or otherwise? Are the barriers to access not understood or realised, or were refugees not part of the target audience? If not, then why, and what assumptions have been made about who refugee performance is for? If this information is not provided, is it accurate to assume consideration has not been made? To what extent is the precarity of forced migration experiences being exploited for 'good' theatre? In considering questions like these I start to unravel the complexities of how the field of refugee performance operates and highlight underexplored ethical tensions in existing practice.

To address these questions more closely I lay out three categories of analysis to examine common tropes and missteps within recent work, as well as identify practice which has influenced my thinking. The first of these categories is what I would describe as performance engaging with immersive dramaturgies, and this enables me to highlight some of the key problems I have identified so far. I look at productions in which sites of displacement appear, adopting the concept of spectatorship to unravel how refugee narratives are reproduced and engaged with. Through this, I illustrate how performance with immersive qualities plays with proximity, equivalence and identification functions to generate emotive responses from audiences and consider what questions this might raise about ethical engagement with refugees. Next, I examine performance that subverts expectations of what "refugee theatre" should be, rethinking how refugee identity is explored through performance and

consequently reversing the audience's gaze back on themselves. The third category of performance I examine is what I would define as performance of the self, utilising testimonial modes of performance to reimagine and reconstitute one's own lived experience in ways that are restorative of agency. Considering the second two categories, much of this performance work has been created or co-created by refugee artists, collaborators or participants, which could be described as community or applied theatre, and draws interesting parallels with my unfolding practice, as I identify how I can intervene in this lineage.

Immersiveness in refugee performance

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the response to the media imagery surrounding Alan Kurdi's death was profound and provoked a global spike in awareness of the severity of mass displacement at that particular moment. No longer *over there* (echoing a postcolonial binary of the "West and the Rest"), this so-called humanitarian crisis was unfolding on *our* shores. Widening my analysis beyond this time frame, I observe examples of theatre projects where proximity invites an aesthetics of authenticity and a sense of identification with the plight of refugees. Alison Jeffers discusses the experience of audience members being in the shoes of the refugee, arguing there is possibility for anger (and action), in a context where 'anger or resentment that could be generated when audience members are deliberately made physically and emotionally uncomfortable, is so often transformed into pity and sympathy' (2012, p.63). Emma Cox argues that 'even artistic projects that are refugee-led can, via an audiencing that is preoccupied with helping refugees, reproduce insidious inequalities', and references Iranian writer and activist Behrouz Boochani's claim that 'audience's implicit positive biases are a form of

colonial thinking' (Cox 2023, p.583). Notions of empathy and connection, therefore, bring with them problems.

I would like to offer a critical reading of empathic engagement, and position Lilie Chouliaraki's analysis of spectatorship as a useful counterpoint that focuses attention on the public gaze, problematising the ways refugee experiences are consumed. Though her discussion focuses on humanitarian representation rather than performance, Chouliaraki's critique of the romanticisation of suffering without interrogating intersectional power dynamics is certainly relevant when thinking about artistic work that forges closeness between audience and subject. Chouliaraki's perspective here highlights the potential of perpetuating an encounter that 'over humanises the benefactor, who always lies at the centre of the economic and cultural power of the West, but systematically dehumanises the sufferer, who already lies outside such centres of power and visibility' (2013, p.187). I import some of this thinking as I develop new ideas about the ramifications of performance upholding problematic dynamics when promoting an aesthetic of authenticity.

There are several examples of productions that invite a sense of closeness with refugee struggle through a perception of authenticity. A large-scale example of this trope is *The Jungle,* written by Joe Murphy and Joe Roberston, founders of Good Chance Theatre, in 2017. Telling the story of the unofficial refugee encampment in Calais, France, commonly known as *zhangal*[16] or simply 'the jungle', between 2015-2016 when masses of British and other European volunteers provided help in response to mounting news up until its eventual demolition in October 2016. Distinct from other theatre productions exploring refugee issues which generally occupy fringe and subsidised theatre, *The Jungle* had significant commercial success, appearing on

[16] This means 'Jungle' in Pashto, one of Afghanistan's national languages

London's West End before a Broadway transfer. This show had originally emerged out of Good Chance Theatre's community-based work in the Calais encampment, which has been examined at length in extant scholarship, for example Jeffers and Musiyiwa's analysis of the project's liminality, drawing on Cathy Sloan's concept of spaces of potentiality (see Jeffers and Musiyiwa 2023). I argue, however, that the theatricalisation of *The Jungle* beyond its encampment roots left dominant humanitarian constructions of refugees unchallenged.

The dramaturgical decision to include immersive elements in the show is partly the reason for my critique. The set recreated the real 'Afghan Flag' café that existed in the encampment and facilitated a sense of immediacy between performers and audience. The smell of *chai* and the cushioned seating and benches around long, dusty canteen tables set with polystyrene cups were popular with audiences, but I am concerned this quasi-refugee camp set-up in the context of high-priced tickets and the excess of the West End contributed to crude consumption of refugee experience. A review in The Telegraph stated that 'the sense that it's unfolding in real time is felt on your pulse' (Cavendish 2018). The intimation of 'real time' is what, for me, collapsed space for critical engagement by engulfing the audience in the heavily signposted representation of authenticity. Insofar as the audience felt close to the action, I argue the onus on emotional response (including donation buckets at the end) meant the division between citizens and refugee others was left secure and unchanged, and refugees remained suffering victims in need of pity.

Contrasting in scale, *The Container* by Clare Bailey (2007) took place in a shipping container, big enough for twenty-eight audience members and five actors, depicting the complex relationship between people smugglers and misled passengers, hoping for safety and facing an arduous reality. Performance theorist Suzanne Little's

analysis of this piece helps articulate the ways immersion tactics function to purport equivalency, as she interrogates the risk of asylum experiences being fetishised through the theatrical frame. She argues that the ‘conflation of experience and the idea of apparently gaining *knowledge* of the other (in reality and through representation) is highly problematic in ethical terms’ (Little 2017, p.51). I agree with Little’s critique and suggest the empathetic response of the audience after embodying the experience of being smuggled has the potential to cloud the reality of actual refugees, in favour of a gratifying intimate theatre experience.

A similar piece, *Cargo* (2016), was written by Tess Berry-Hart, who subsequently became a notable activist on refugee issues in the UK. Set in a container ship, three stowaways (and another appearing by surprise later), including a young woman and her younger brother, discuss what they’ve left behind and where they’re going; set in real-time as the boat reaches the port. In the performance I attended at the Arcola theatre in London, the audience sat in darkness lit by torchlight in the studio space. The seating area was covered with bin bags, conjuring up a choking claustrophobia. Whilst the rawness of the design was evocative of the reality of shipping containers thousands of forced migrants board every year, commonly between France and England, the narrative shifted from the timely present-day context to a dystopian future where England had become uninhabitable, forcing people to flee. By extending beyond the visceral experience of stepping into *their* shoes, the play explored a world where *they* were *us,* inviting a problematic recentring of ‘our’ selves where the political reality faded behind a twisty allegory. I am critical of this as I suggest empathy becomes contingent on seeing one’s own self in the face of the other. In other words, the production generated a sense of empathy which became self-serving.

In addition to these types of immersive staging techniques, innovative technology has also been used to facilitate similar encounters which, I argue, may generate an emotional response conditional on refocusing attention back on oneself, rather than listening to refugee experience in all its complexity and ambivalence. One example is the Empathy Museum's collaboration with refugee organisation Choose Love[17], who together hosted *A Mile in My Shoes*, offering a 'human experience where visitors can momentarily step into the shoes of a refugee living in London', and listen to a 'first-hand story of their life' using headphones (Help Refugees 2019). Another immersive experience was the 2016 project *HOME | Aamir,* a verbatim film made in 360˚ and using Virtual Reality, produced by the National Theatre. The film tells the story of twenty-two-year-old Aamir, a Sudanese refugee travelling through Sudan, Libya, the Mediterranean, Italy and France, who narrates. *HOME | Aamir* shows the expansive bleakness of the encampment, only made possible on film, as it 'deepens the viewer's understanding by placing them in the shoes of this lost soul' (National Theatre (2017)). I import Chouliarki's theorisation of spectatorship to my critique here to highlight the ethical tension present when refugees become the vehicle for conversations that take place exclusively by 'us' and about 'us' (2013, p.12); 'us' referring to people without forced migration histories. As Chouliarki argues, refugee representation always has the potential to 'remain impervious to outsiders' (p.13), yet when refugees speak for themselves, they can emerge as knowledgeable and active without mediation, rather than, as is seen in these examples, the fleeting transference of suffering.

A key problematic I am struck by when considering the audience-spectator in refugee performance is what I might describe as appropriating the refugee perspective, whereby the agency and voices of refugees are utilised by well-meaning artists,

[17] Formerly this organisation was called Help Refugees

without the involvement of refugee communities themselves. The way this materialises most clearly to me is in what I observe to be a frequent assumption that audiences to performances *about* refugees do not *include* refugees. This feels limiting in its scope and requires deeper examination. Pieces like the ones I have mentioned are effective in confronting the audience with the harsh reality of journeys to safety, all produced in the context of asylum reportage regularly present in the media. However, they also serve as a reminder of who these performances about refuge tend to be made for: the curious, compassionate and allied, but not those with lived experience. The virtual or theatricalised realities created in pieces like these also strike me as potentially triggering or traumatising for those who survived similar experiences. Whilst reproducing the violence and indignity of displacement and border enforcement can result in deeper audience understanding, awareness raising and advocacy for those who have never experienced it first-hand, I argue it is also problematic to overlook the needs of the underserved refugee audience, particularly when restaging live and unresolved injustices faced by their communities.

Whilst I do not intend to assume people with lived experience of forced migration necessarily *wouldn't* want to immerse themselves in performances of border enforcement and displacement, there are ethical issues to be unpacked when creating and engaging with work like this, including the implications of limiting focus to a singular, recognisable point in the refugee experience: 'the journey'. In other words, by focussing on the traumatic sites of mobility (the lorry, the camp, the container), performances risk overlooking the oppression and carelessness of the state asylum system and the macro and micro-oppressions that occur as a result of the failures of hospitality within the communities in which refugees now live. The paradoxical experience of invisibility *and* overexposure of refugees in the public

sphere raises questions about how to generate ethical forms of representation. I am therefore sceptical about the extent to which performance *about* refugees can comfortably proceed *without* including refugees as makers, performers, writers and, importantly, as audiences.

Subverting audience expectations of refugee performance

I will depart momentarily from the pertinent issue of refugee audiences as I continue my analysis, turning now to refugee performance that is subversive, challenging expectations of what stories may be told, and how. The three pieces I examine are all co-created by refugee artists and resist bureaucratic forms of performance by focusing on themes of friendship, hope, solidarity and protest, and push forward bold forms of performance that stretch what it means to connect with, listen to and feel refugee narratives. As a result, these pieces provide new readings of forced migration in performance which reject mere compassion and provide an alternative to forms of representation which have left Jestrovic to question: 'Why has it become so difficult for the exilic figure to speak beyond the narratives that the one standing at the other side expects to hear?' (2023, p.38) A highly affecting performance which immerses the audience in ways that subvert politics of identification as critiqued earlier in this chapter is *As Far As My Fingertips Take Me*, directed by Tania El Khoury. The ten-minute one-to-one performance was created with Basal Zaraa, a UK-based street artist and musician, born a Palestinian refugee in Syria. Zaraa is positioned behind a wall with a hole through which the lone audience member threads their arm. He then uses black ink to depict images of refugees in flight, symbolic of his sisters' journey from Damascus to Sweden, and reminiscent of many. Accompanying this encounter, reliant on touch, is a soundscape of music, singing and storytelling that bring to life the scene that the audience member will only see once

it is complete, and the encounter is over, and 'those stories can be kept or washed away' (El Khoury 2016).

The profound impact of the performance is described by theatre scholar Marilena Zaroulia as 'exceeding' her, intellectually and emotionally. For her, the piece 'exceed[ed] expectation of what a performance about forced migration may feel like for an audience member who has never been exposed to such experiences' (2018, p.181). Zaroulia cites theatre critic Lyn Gardner's reflections on the experiential lasting effects of the event: 'Every time I roll up my sleeves or wash my hands I am confronted by the images and rerun Zaraa's story in my mind. I can't get away from it' (Gardner 2017 in Zaroulia 2018, p.180). What I found so powerful in this performance is that Zaraa's story remains his; the transference of ink does not attempt to draw the audience member into a state of equivalence. In this way, the piece reconfigures not only the nature of the encounter between refugee artist and audience member, but its longevity.

Perhaps the most affecting part of the performance is the decision-making around washing or preserving the ink, and what will remain in its place, making visible the temporary nature of the audience's encounter with the story and the potentially fleeting nature of the mark they leave. Sara Ahmed's notion of an ethics of touch aligns interestingly with the tender intimacy generated here. Ahmed invites a rethinking of hearing in the context of touch, suggesting that 'to consider that being open to hearing might not be a matter of listening to the other's voice: what moves (between) subjects, and hence what fails to move, might precisely be that which can't be presented in the register of speech, or voicing' (2000, p.156). The audience member submits to the stranger behind the wall, trusting his care and acknowledging their unknowingness of what he is doing. Zaroulia names her response as 'affective

alliance', reflecting on 'a mixture of empathy, solidarity and rage for the injustice of the contemporary world, those tears - sincere and cathartic - captured my helplessness and failure' (2018, p.190). What strikes me in this piece is the ambivalence at play that is subversive in its capacity to listen to the complexity of displacement without reaching a resolution.

Another piece that offers a surprising and multi-dimensional exploration of displacement, along with solidarity and resistance is *Showtime From The Frontline*, a comedy show developed between 2017-18 by British activist comedian Mark Thomas, who, after a longstanding relationship with the Freedom Theatre in Jenin refugee camp in Palestine[18], invited two graduates of their theatre programme to create a show, combining storytelling, stand up and sketches. The two Palestinian performers are Faisal Abu Alhayjaa and Alaa Shehada, both of whom have performance training in clowning, and multi-role as themselves and their peers, as the show is framed around the true story of Thomas, along with stand-up comedy lecturer Sam Beale, devising a stand-up comedy course building up to the Freedom Theatre's first ever comedy night.

What interested me about this piece is how Alhayjaa and Shehada used comedy to enact representations of their friends and classmates back in Palestine, both amplifying their voices and resisting the commodification of their experiences simultaneously, and I suggest this started to engage with care as a methodological device. They reference original stand-up routines developed during Thomas and

[18] Since conducting this PhD research, Israel's war on Gaza broke out, following Hamas' attack on Israel on 07.10.23, which killed around 1200 people and took more than 250 as hostages. Israel's response resulted in mass killing of more than 33,000 Palestinians and wounding more than 75,000 (at the time of writing), and the inciting of genocide, according to the ICJ ruling in Jauary 2024. In December 2023 the Freedom Theatre was raided and vandalised by Israeli soldiers, and its two directors Ahmed Tobasi and Mostafa Sheta were arrested (Al Jazeera 2023).

Beale’s comedy course, and eventually show film footage, translating onstage from Arabic to English and using a comic device of contextualising jokes for a British audience. These interruptions prompt questions of how performance with and by refugees can be read with distance, yet still open up potential for solidarity for non-refugee audiences through the use of subversive tactics. I observe within this piece the performers engaging with modes of care for each other, the people whose lives are ‘storied’ and the political and social context it takes place in. I argue this results in a subversive autobiographical performance that playfully manipulates and stretches the audience’s perception of life in a Palestinian refugee camp, Islam, comedy performance and what it is like to be born in occupied territory. By using the metatheatrical precinct of the comedy night the piece generated an encounter with the audience that rethought spectatorship of perceived suffering.

Both of these pieces reconceptualise what refugee performance might be, leading to prescribed narratives being resisted and new forms of solidarity emerging. Michael Balfour argues that refugee performance can enter into a ‘spatial politics of inclusion’, entering a ‘third space’ as described by Homi Bhabha (1994). Balfour observes:

> The way performance work for, by and with refugees is constructed and viewed is inevitably circumscribed by these understandings of refugees as traumatised victims. Popular, political and academic definitions of the meaning of refugee status and refugee identity inevitably form the back-story for theatrical practices. In this way the testimonies/life stories/narratives of refugees are framed and defined before a word is spoken or gesture made (Balfour 2013, p.28).

Lost Sheep is an example of practice that negotiates these politics and actively resists their implications, subverting preconceptions of what refugee actor-participants might create when theatricalising their lived experience. Developed by acta community theatre in Bristol for the 2018 REACT festival, a four-day event

showcasing theatre made by refugees, the piece brought together theatre makers and largely Sudanese residents of Ashley Housing project, a local accommodation provider for refugees and migrants. According to the project's director, Aqeel Abdulla, unlike other projects I have mentioned, *Lost Sheep* did not explore the refugee 'experience' per se, neither was the word 'refugee' mentioned in the piece or within the process of making it. Instead, the performance explored life within a Sudanese village and was centred around a simple premise of an absurd and comical feud between neighbours, framed around the mysterious disappearance of sheep, shown by a wooden sheep that moved to and from each side of the stage throughout. Given the context of the show's origins, it's rough and readiness was familiar to me. Some participants were performing 'live' for the first time, one man was holding back nervous laughter as he said his lines, Abdulla was onstage adopting a director-actor-facilitator hybrid role, performing a quiet mode of solidarity that kept the participants at the centre. I saw this piece several months before starting my PhD project and was joined by three members of Phosphoros, who, at the time, were residents in the housing project I was managing, so there were echoes in the overall practice we found joyfully resonant. For Abdulla, the dramaturgical choices were intended to challenge what refugee theatre tends to be, and I observe this as resisting the 'inevitability' Balfour mentions. In a short video accompanying the festival, Abdulla discusses a hope that the audience 'realise that no one who belongs to a minority group is a spokesperson for their group, but they are speaking for themselves.' (2018). I am reminded here of Luc Boltanski's critique of a politics of pity, producing hyper-singularised portrayals of suffering: 'It is he, but it could be someone else…Around each unfortunate brought forward crowds a host of replacements' (1999, p.12). The decision for *Lost Sheep* to shift focus away from dominant narratives of displacement was a display of respect, allyship and visibility. Their rejection of "refugee" as a static identity marker and singular defining

characteristic resonated with my intention to problematise how refugees engage with the performance of life narratives.

Unlike most examples cited within this chapter, and the unfolding practice I continue to examine, Lost Sheep does not focus on selfhood, and it is important to consider more broadly the limitations of privileging notions of the individual in refugee performance. Jeffers outlines some of the risks which could be associated with performances that focus on selfhood, including the appearance of bureaucratic performance, whereby cultural expectations of silence, passivity, trauma, and victimhood are reinforced, even inadvertently (see Jeffers 2012 p.42). Moreover, a riskier pitfall Jeffers describes is a ‘liberal attitude’ among practitioners which leads them to ‘ignore, or at least underplay, narratives which demonstrate any transgression on the part of the refugees’ (p.46). I agree with Jeffers and in the development of the practice research discussed in this thesis have sought an approach which moves beyond reproducing simplified constructions of refugee identity and instead becomes multivocal. I suggest that emphasising selfhood, especially when the testimony belongs to the speaker, can undermine the possibility for complex, messy, and unfavourable narratives, when balanced with a focus on privacy of the individual. Conversely, privileging communal perspectives and a collective voice could provide an alternative mode of representing shared experience and broader political issues. These ethical considerations are not binary, and, as I examine throughout this thesis, artistic representation of refugees carries myriad ethical issues which must be continually reassessed. For example, insofar as an excessive focus on the self might perpetuate the problematic notion of the singular refugee story, there is political importance in witnessing the intricacies of a life narrative, in the context of refugee lives being reduced to stereotypes. What I attempt to explore within the following pages, particularly in relation to my work

with Phosphoros, is that the collective can present personal, shared, fictional narratives in productive ways that emphasise diverse experiences whilst also challenging notions of testimonial veracity. By developing a mode of authorship that sits somewhere in between the personal and the more universal, I argue the composite can be a productive site for refugee storytelling.

Restoring agency over testimonial narratives of displacement

This brings me to my final category of refugee performance: pieces which involve the testimonial and performance of the self. Through my analysis, I examine how personal narrative opens up forms of representation not otherwise afforded to refugees, and how theatre can disrupt cycles of vulnerabilising asylum stories or calcifying distance between those who help and those who are helped. Crucially, I look at the subjectivity of the storyteller and the importance of regaining agency over one's own testimony. As argued by Steve Wilmer, when refugee actors embody their own histories, there is a 'degree of authenticity to their stories', which are ongoing as they live with their aftermath (2018, p.84). Poet and refugee literature scholar Yousif M. Qasmiyeh observes some of the ways refugee communities produce counter-narratives and make meaning in situations of forced displacement. Much of his research takes place in the Baddawi camp in Lebanon, his birthplace as a Palestinian refugee. Considering narrative subjectivity in the protracted site of the camp, he asks: 'So who is the witness in a refugee camp? Who is the owner of the testimony? Is it the refugee herself or those who (are able to) come and go?' (2020, p.54). The ambivalence Qasmiyeh references raises an interesting point about the commodification of refugee stories and the status of researchers and artists within these communities. I offer some examples here of practice that engages with these problematics and then reflect on how my practice with Phosphoros, conducted

before I started this PhD project, opens up key challenges which my research inquiry seeks to address.

A key theme that I observe in creative projects engaging with testimony and performance of the self is the commitment of artist-practitioners to dialogic approaches, facilitating creative spaces based on allyship, mutuality and collaboration. Themes of care also emerge here, and when I analyse Phosphoros' work I connect these ideas to friendship. It is important to bring to attention that modes of performance where refugees perform as 'themselves' are not intrinsically more ethical or responsible, and to observe that uncritically ascribing notions of empowerment to the act of voicing one's own life experiences can obscure uglier issues of translation at play. Julie Salverson describes an erotics of both suffering and injury that stems from uncomplicated portrayals of victims, villains and heroes, querying 'what choices do we give an audience about how to relate?' (2001, p.124). She critiques dynamics within testimonial performance that foreground the pain of injury over 'the complex terrain of laughter, of the imagination or the pleasure of encountering another person', questioning why injury is positioned as more translatable and faithful to grief (p.124). When refugees restage elements of their lived experience there is a risk of commodifying multi-dimensional lives into an erotics of suffering that privileges representations of pain and anguish as the most authentic retelling of refugee lives. What is missing from Salverson's analysis is the possibility of hope or recognition as productive concepts that may emerge when performances of lived experience are shown to an audience that shares said experience. Connected to my earlier points on selfhood, I am interested in the dynamics within performances where refugee lived experience is represented in the audience as well as onstage, developing an understanding of how this reconfigures forms of witnessing.

The first example I make reference to is PSYCHEdelight's *Mohand and Peter* (2022), devised by performers Mohand Hasb Alrosol Abdalrahem and Peter Pearson, and director Sophie Bertrand Besse, which explores friendship across borders. Pearson and Abdalrahem stage versions of themselves, a Sudanese refugee actor and a British actor from Newcastle who developed a close friendship through involvement in PSYCHEdelight's theatre projects welcoming refugees, migrants and non-migrants. In this piece, friendship is the conduit for reimagining hospitality, and this metatheatrical strategy frames the piece in practices of solidarity rather than voyeurism. The show centres around Mohand magically imagining his enormous family back home, whom he wishes he could introduce Peter to, using clowning and physical comedy to become an array of characters. Whilst the show was lacking in political context, limiting its overall political message both about the UK's treatment of refugees as well as the fragile state of Sudan, the use of comedy joyfully challenged dominant narratives that restrict refugees to passive victim stock characters. Further, dramaturgical decisions such as the use of Arabic language gestured an act of welcome to Arabic-speaking audience members, particularly refugees whom the company engaged through a targeted marketing strategy. One reviewer noted that 'with a large Sudanese contingent in the audience, it was really special to witness the reactions to some of the text that we couldn't understand' (The Family Stage 2022), highlighting the potential of attentiveness to audience encounters in forging a meaningful connection.

Another example of practice driven by collaboration is Ella Parry-Davies' *Soundwalks* (2018-). This is an audio project that invites us to listen via headphones to testimonial narratives of migrant domestic and care workers, as we retrace the same steps as them in a place that has significance in their stories. Parry-Davies describes

the creative process as collaborative, and outlines a methodology centred around respect, nuance and productive solidarities:

> A soundwalk expresses just a fragment of a person's experiences and perspectives. As listeners, it asks us to acknowledge the limits of our understanding, as well as our points of affinity, alliance or empathy. This collection of soundwalks aims to centralise migrant workers' own decision-making about what story to tell; not to fully capture an individual's life story or an experience shared by an entire population. Processes of making the soundwalks were also shaped by the realities of time, labour, precarity, unpredictability and transience. (Soundwalks)

What is most powerful about *Soundwalks* is the symbolic invitation to walk *alongside* migrant domestic and care workers as we listen to their testimonies, rather than *in their shoes*. I am reminded of Jeffers' description of the ethical potential of civil listening and hospitable stages, imagining a 'face-to-face relationship between performers and audience members and the notion of being shoulder-to-shoulder with other audience members' (2013, p299). The *Soundwalks* are conversational, interrupted by sounds of laughter, cooking and busyness; and without extensive narrative shaping they are intimate, weaving the everyday with testimony of injustice. In one piece, *not nothing*, Ella invites Ann to 'close our eyes, and think about what you can hear', to which Ann replies: 'We are in Holland Park. I choose this place because this is my memorable place when I decided to run away from my employer'. In the space of several minutes, Ann's chosen experience is documented and listened to, unscripted and fleetingly, in an act of recognition and justice.

> So, I run away. I bring my clothes and one of my hand is rubbish, pretending that I'm throwing the garbage, if they wake up so they don't ask where I'm going. They're only thinking that I'm throwing the rubbish. That's the way how I run away. When I run away from them, I feel like I am free like a bird! Yeah. (Ann, Soundwalks)

Listening to a *Soundwalk*, the speaker as author shifts the audience's position to being adjacent to them. The difference in form is key to this encounter, made possible by the audio format. Sonic theorist Brandon LaBelle argues the intensively

affective potential of listening, whereby ‘one is situated within an extremely relational instant, one conditioned by the silence of thought…and in sounding forth one may vary the conditions of that attention, to nurture and care, as well as to argue and disrupt’ (2020, p.8). The political potential of Soundwalks rests on its commitment to amplifying the voices of those with lived experience rather than collapsing into speaking *for*, which speaks to LaBelle’s suggestion that ‘speaking for oneself as a displaced and itinerant subject is often gaining momentum through critical rhythms that break the space of appearance and its borders’ (2020, p.121). This performance of the self makes possible a response that is imbued with a sense of ambivalence, rather than over-identification and passive sympathy.

I am drawn to the notion of ambivalence when considering refugee engaged performance, which invites useful critique around the limitations of theatre in forced migration contexts. Caroline Wake’s survey of Australian theatre making in the 21st century highlights the shifting priorities of theatre makers balancing dramaturgical intentions with desires for authenticity and the navigation of ethics and aesthetics artists in this field contend with. Wake’s description of the ‘fifth wave’ of performance engaging asylum seekers in the Australian context (in 2013-2020) tracks a significant change in intention, moving from work that ‘emphasises the power of theatre to one that reckons with its inherent impotence’ (p.559). She refers to Powerhouse Youth Theatre’s play *Tribunal* (2016), a participatory piece which combined testimonial performances with references to legal documentation, dance, song, and intimate conversation over tea and sweets in the foyer. This project developed a politics of refugee performance that amplified plural and diverse perspectives of the asylum experience, co-devised with refugee participants and inviting participation from lawyers and other stakeholders. Wake praises its modelling of solidarity and intersectionality, citing an exchange between an audience

member asking ‘what can we do?’ being greeted with responses such as ‘get to know an asylum seeker, convince three friends to change their minds, demand more from your local and federal government’, and ‘listen to the stories’ (Thatcher 2016 and Dow 2017 in Wake 2023, p.558). The ambivalent relationship this piece had to the emancipatory politics of earlier work in its lineage foregrounds the importance of dialogue, listening and being with over grand claims to enacting swift change.

On a somewhat similar theme, theatre practitioner and researcher Catrin Evans discusses how attentiveness to space, collaboration and hope made visible an ‘aesthetics of care’ (Thompson 2015), within the 2017 *Share My Table* participatory arts project in Glasgow, engaging refugees and asylum seekers as well as Glasgow’s wider community over a series of weekly workshops. Evans interrogates the complex politics of refugee-engaged arts work, particularly around empty gestures of integration, and imports bell hooks’ theorising of the practices of freedom. Like Parry-Davies, Evans describes a collaborative process, drawing on bell hooks’ theorising of discovering community through recognising ‘the value of each individual voice’ (hooks 1994, p40), and resulting in ‘collective listening’ (hooks 1994, p.84). Evans describes the project as engaging with an attentiveness to care, and an aesthetics of process. The multiple art forms used; writing, exhibitions and workshops, ‘became a practice in and of themselves of *inviting visibility* - of normalising the process of being seen and heard as one’s self’ (Evans 2019, 46-7). Faith, a participant, reflects on how this felt: ‘Every day we are refugees or asylum seekers to someone. Here we are ourselves’ (in Evans 2019, p.46). The spaces of care this project generated indicate the potential of artistic practice in establishing alternative solidarities that actively and counter state-led processes of invisibilising and categorising refugees and asylum seekers. I have taken influence from Evans’

practice research, whilst developing my own focus on inter-relational and ultra-relational care experienced between peers.

A project that engages with similar themes of collaboration, dialogue and community, which extends more frequently to public audiences is Stories and Supper. They are a Waltham Forest (London) based storytelling charity that runs creative projects for refugees, asylum seekers and local residents, often with a food or 'supper club' element[19]. Through storytelling workshops, participants develop stories that are often reflective of their lived experience and are supported to share these at supper events, through poetry or alongside written or filmed recipes. Food, home, family and friendship often form the basis of stories, along with collective activities members take part in, such as tending to a shared allotment or engaging with tapestry and other crafts. Testimonial narratives are reframed away from a singular focus on asylum and toward multi-layered, domestic and personal stories that sustain multiple elements of the self. Geography scholar Olivia Sheringham, who is a Trustee of Stories and Supper, argues the project creates spaces of encounter that 'demonstrate an active and collective resistance to the silencing of refugee voices', in so doing generating a quiet politics of welcome (2019). Where my research differs from projects like Stories and Supper and PSYCHEdelight is in its specific focus on young people, and a recognition of the intersectional elements of oppression unaccompanied minors are facing, rather than the expansive themes that draw new neighbours together, united in a sense of shared community rather than peer-to-peer intersubjectivity. The examples of participatory practice I have referenced in this section engage with practices of care and solidarity and form part of the lineage in

[19] Phosphoros has collaborated with Stories and Supper multiple times since 2017, and I have co-authored a soon-to-be-published article with director Helen Taylor and trustee Olivia Sheringham on developing a care focussed methodology during the COVID-19 lockdown.

which my research sits, which develops an original focus on unaccompanied minor refugees as an overlooked group.

Phosphoros Theatre and the performance of lived experience

A gap in refugee performance work that my research explores is how performance shifts and changes specifically when representing the lived experiences of unaccompanied minors. The performance work I have previously developed with Phosphoros provides a useful starting point for identifying key challenges the research attends to and contextualises some of the thematic areas that I interrogate through my inquiry. Characteristic of Phosphoros' work is how it plays with testimony, making clear to the audience that *everything we say is true… or nearly true*, or that *you're not here to judge whether we're credible or not* (Phosphoros Theatre 2016; 2018). How personal narrative is explored in Phosphoros' work is also constitutive of an early exploration of the theme of care in relation to unaccompanied minors, which appears in subtle ways.

This can be seen in the company's first show, *Dear Home Office*, written and directed in 2016 by Dawn Harrison and Rosanna Jahangard and created in collaboration with the company of actors. The show tells the story of 'Tariq', a sixteen-year-old unaccompanied minor who is played by each of the actors and based on all their lived experience of coming to the UK alone as teenage refugees from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Somalia and Albania. As well as a dramaturgical and facilitative role, I performed in the show as a version of myself: 'Kate', the 'key-worker', similarly based on my own lived experience of managing a supported accommodation for refugee young men (four of whom were in the original cast).

The multi-faceted forms of care emerged in the production as ultra-relational and surprising, not only through the theatricalisation of everyday encounters (visiting the Home Office, college, the GP and social services), but also through video footage of a residential trip in the Derbyshire countryside depicting Easter egg hunts, water fights, face painting and frivolity. I became aware however that what isn't visible in the production is how the structures of support shaped the project. It is these dynamics of care that would become a cornerstone of my practice research, exploring more purposefully how care can be at once ethical, political, and, as Thompson asserts: beautiful (2020, p.38). Fleeting gestures of care between myself and the actors onstage as I supported them navigate their first experiences of performance started to raise interesting questions about how care between the ensemble of actors and in relation to the devising process itself might become visible in the production itself. I found myself reflecting on my own shifting roles too; whilst "off duty" during performances, my identity as some of the actors' "real" key-worker did not disappear (and was made visible to the audience through accompanying information about the show), rather it was positioned alongside my role as a facilitator and performer. Amanda Stuart Fisher discusses the resistant practices of care arising in this piece in *Performing Care*, observing:

> Caring within this play emerges not only as part of its material content but also as an aesthetic practice. The caring structures of the play's development process, visible through the video footage, also reveal how performance of care can enact a mode of resistance to 'care-less' state processes that are structured around the concept of care as quantifiable economy (2020, p.3).

Reflecting on this performance and Stuart Fisher's comments, I found myself thinking about how performance practices can create the conditions for care to be exposed and strengthened through participatory theatre, whilst also decentring attention on 'professional' figures of care (such as myself). It was with this concept of a decentred practice in mind that my PhD research began to take shape and move

beyond Phosphoros' existing archive of practice to new, research-led ideas. As I shall go on to explore the following chapters, my thesis considers how care can become a dynamic and productive starting point for performance-making, and that the rehearsal room can become a means of enacting solidarity and resistance.

As I argue through this research, one way care can be mobilised within creative practice is through the mode of friendship, and this is something I have observed emerging in Phosphoros' work ahead of my PhD commencing. In *Pizza Shop Heroes* (2018-2020), written by Dawn Harrison and co-directed with Pavlos Christodoulou, male refugee identity, coming of age and future fatherhood are explored through an episodic structure based around the precinct of a pizza shop. The way the actors engaged with testimonial performance revealed a thematic of friendship or perhaps camaraderie that started to take on an aesthetic dimension. Towards the start of the play, the four actors share a long passage of storytelling depicting the forced migration journey of 'the boy'. The story is told using third-person address creating an almost Scheherazade-like quality to the otherwise passive activity of sleeping:

> **TEWODROS:** The boy slept and slept – dreaming of the New Land that lay before him…the green trees and the wide roads and the buildings lit up like palaces… knowing that his journey had been worth it because now he was safe.
>
> (Phosphoros Theatre 2018)

In this production, we explored ways of enabling each of the actors to speak and share their own experiences through testimonial forms of performance. One way we did this was that each of the actors took turns to pass each other the microphone and hand the next speaker a pizza box with the scene title on it, saying for example: '*scene five: the prison of no escape*'. As each actor spoke, the other would stand next to them listening, in a display of solidarity and recognition of the narrative; the

boy was them too. Allied onstage as friends and castmates, this simple dramaturgical decision served as a reminder to audiences of the solidarities and friendship made possible by the theatrical frame. The political pertinence of these gestures of allyship shifted in and out of focus but sometimes shaped not only the development of scenes but also the methodological approach of the creative process itself.

An example of this is when the show was staged in October 2019, two days after headline news in the UK had covered the story of thirty-nine Vietnamese people, including ten teenagers, found suffocated to death in a sealed refrigerated lorry in Essex, having been smuggled to England (BBC 2021). Emirjon's section of the story resonated starkly with this incident, detailing 'the boy' on the last part of his journey, in a refrigerated lorry: 'The smell of the petrol was very strong, but it was a good thing because it meant the dogs couldn't find him'. In a co-written chapter in *Crisis for Whom?* Syed reflects on how it felt to perform something so close to a live issue:

> All four of us had had dangerous journeys in lorries and found the development of this story heart-breaking and shocking… We knew that not only Emirjon, but the audience as well would be hearing his words with the tragic news in their minds. I can't remember the exact words or the strength of the hugs we shared backstage, but I remember trying harder than I ever have to make the performance the best I could. On that day, the stakes became higher (Duffy-Syedi and Najibi 2023, p. 213).

In this instance, the liveness, subjectivity and intersubjective care between the performers reveals itself on and offstage, as they navigate multiple forms of visibility to the audience. In other words, once the house lights are turned back on, the audience recognises the enduring experience of refugeeness and is reminded that their struggle is ongoing and in the context of wider injustice. While we are used to seeing refugees being the recipients of aid from NGOs and the state, I realised that we rarely witness the crucial bonds of friendship and mutual support that refugee

youth provide for one another. I began to think about ways that my practice might work with these relationships of solidarity and camaraderie to disrupt our understanding of allyship and the power dynamics of care and support in these contexts, whilst also grappling with critique of the 'inherent impotence' as described by Wake (2023, p. 559). As I started to consciously develop new forms of practice, I wanted to find ways of exploring the innate sense of care and solidarity I had observed between the refugee actors I was working with and to look at how these types of caring relationships when examined in performance can disrupt how we think about care and support.

Research questions arising from the margins of performance, care and migration

The examples of practice I have examined within this chapter, including productions I have been involved in creating, reveal some of the problematics and paradoxes at the heart of making and watching refugee performance.

There are three key areas of questioning that I would like to draw attention to, which have helped influence my research questions. Firstly, the risks that come with communicating refugee experiences; how do artists rethink voyeuristic processes that further concretise an us/them dynamic? What is the resulting impact of spectator and spectated entrenched in an immovable binary? Do immersive dramaturgies challenge these modes of witnessing or simply invite passivity? Secondly, I am interested in how hope and futurity is figured within refugee narratives, and how stories might be seen as fragmented and without a resolve. How might refugees representing themselves subvert audience expectations of staging displacement? Thirdly, I have been interested in exploring the possibility of a validating form of recognition between refugee audience members and performers, developing a care-filled mode of practice that conceptualises this. Building on this further, one of the

concepts that has emerged strongly within my work with refugees, which is not addressed in depth within existing performances, is the potency of self-sustaining networks of friendship and how this leads to what I would describe as a radical form of solidarity.

Concepts of crisis and precarity have formed the contextual backdrop to this research, and performance has demonstrated its capacity for utilising the affecting potential of human connection to disrupt hostile modes of engagement with refugees. However, this work also asks us as artists to think about the ethics and politics of our practice and how we can develop methodologies so that these practices do not end up replicating some of the objectifying processes that are enacted by the state asylum system. Given my focus on the underrepresented community of unaccompanied minors, which differentiates my inquiry from existing scholarship, it is important to ask how might my research intervene in these debates. In what ways can performance be used not to enact symbolic border enforcement but to stage acts of collective resistance to the violence of the asylum system? As I will discuss in the next chapter, developing a research methodology informed by an ethics and politics of care enabled me to expand the parameters of my engagement beyond interdisciplinary borders, placing value on alternative forms of knowledge production and ways of making performance. Crucially, the crisis of representation I have outlined which has an impact not only on policy and media discourse but on the daily life of refugees and asylum seekers, is put further under pressure when applied to the specific population I am most interested in. Unaccompanied minors remain a small category in terms of numbers, but I argue their lived experiences must not be overlooked, and focusing on them stretches concepts of care in new directions.

As I formulated my research questions I arrived at a central methodological challenge for the practice researcher, which became critical when working with this group of people. How could I both *do* the work and observe it? How would my analysis shape itself around my activities in the room, and, as a reflective practitioner, how could I cross the boundaries between artist and observer? Considering the shape-shifting nature of the practice researcher reminded me of where I find the most exciting, relevant, revealing moments of practice; usually only visible due to my involvement or adjacent position in the work. Practice researcher James Andrew Wilson articulates similar thoughts, grappling with the conflicting modes of 'inside' and 'outside' knowledge production. He asks: 'How can our position inside our art be the place from which we conduct our research and communicate outwards to the academy?' (2017, p.6). When I arrived at this PhD research I brought with me a body of practice that I wanted to interrogate and develop further through an independent research project. However, I struggled to conceptualise what my practice meant within the structures of academic frameworks, and what my practice research would (or could, or should) look like. Moreover, I couldn't articulate why much of my existing methodology was so messy. Deepening my engagement with care ethics has transformed how I understand my practice, the communities I work alongside, and the relational space we occupy together. Foregrounding care as a central concept is politically charged and imbued with hope. Further, in forming creative, enduring or fleeting resistances to slow violence, I believe performance can radically reimagine the experiences, hidden perspectives and storied lives of unaccompanied minor refugees. I address the following set of methodological and theoretical questions, which inform the rest of my thesis:

1. How can performance practices create new representations of refugee experience that stage resistance to reductive constructions of refugees broadly, and unaccompanied minors specifically, that are reproduced in the media and public discourse?

2. How can an attentiveness to the value and practice of care when working with unaccompanied minors shape a performance approach that enables refugee actors and participants to establish alternative processes of narration about their lived experience?

3. How is the role of the theatre-maker and researcher reconfigured when creating participatory performance about refugee lived experience, and how might this contest processes of everyday bordering that map onto arts practices, both as a result of notions of crisis and slow violence as well as an increasingly hostile political environment?

4. How can care as a mode of methodological inquiry reveal meaningful ways of engaging with participatory, autobiographical and dialogic modes of research, and how might this enact solidarity?

Chapter Two

Performance of selfhood: developing a research methodology rooted in care that reimagines unaccompanied minor identity as the basis for alternative solidarities

Muhammad arrives at our session very late, perhaps by an hour, possibly more. This is not out of the ordinary. He'd texted me to let me know, and my plan has enough flexibility to account for delays and lost time. When he arrives, he asks me and Syed, who is co-facilitating with me, to prepare for a funny story. The night before, he explains, he spotted a mouse in the bedroom of his temporary accommodation and had tried to chase it out (or kill it) by hitting the floor with a broom handle. Eventually, the elderly man who also lives in his building knocked on his door to complain about the noise, and after Muhammad told him of his dilemma the two of them drank tea and talked about Iraq. Then, this morning, his Key Worker[20] *came round to assist but she was equally terrified of the mouse and had no success getting rid of it. Muhammad tells this story with the same self-effacing comic timing as another he tells us later of being stuck in a sleeping bag in the Calais "Jungle" and remembering he had a blade in his pocket which helped him cut open the zip. He laughs and claps his hands as he remembers needing to urinate and acts out shouting at his friend who had left him on his own as he was stuck. Through his performance, Muhammad turns the story into a funny and engaging skit, despite the circumstances surrounding it being distressing.*

[20] I am using 'Key Worker' to describe a professional who coordinates the care of a Looked After Child or Care Leaver. They liaise with social services and the housing provider (or may work for the housing provider).

I include anecdotes like this within the narrative of my research inquiry because they offer insight into the methodology I have developed and adopted throughout this project. In doing so I acknowledge my own identity as a practitioner, researcher and ally, and demonstrate how I shape my practice and the projects I develop to facilitate creative conditions for refugee young adults to explore multiple ways of narrating their lived experience. Thus, in this chapter, I consider the development of a methodology that invites performances of selfhood and draws on various ethical, political, social and theoretical propositions that have been formative to the aims and structure of my practice research. I engage with scholars from across the humanities, particularly James Thompson, Lisa Tillmann-Healy and Caroline Lenette, whose discussions of care, friendship and refugee engaged research extend my understanding of how concepts of care, responsivity and equity can be used to enhance performance practice around selfhood.

I also discuss the ethical dimensions of this research, building on my engagement with other forms of refugee-related practice and scholarship as explored in Chapter One, such as 'slow violence', paradoxical visibility and invisibility, and post-humanitarian approaches to representation. I draw on Taiwo Afolabi's proposal for 'ethical questioning' as I examine what my methodology entails, how it was designed and how it can intervene in the field of refugee performance. In doing so I also look beyond performance studies and across the humanities, for example Yousif M. Qasmiyeh's work in refugee literary studies that foregrounds personal, intimate and local stories of displacement, that do not require bureaucratic currency.

The 'stuff around the edges' of making theatre with refugees

A central element of my research methodology addresses how I attend to the demands of conducting practice research for, alongside and with people under the

control of the UK's immigration system. My approach does not only take account of the aims and objectives of each practice research project, it also engages with what I am calling the *stuff around the edges* as a lived, embodied way of accounting for the socio-political conditions outside of the project, inside the project. Drawing on and extending contemporary conversations in adjacent areas of practice, particularly James Thompson's ethics of care in action, I outline how I embedded within my practice an awareness of what it means to establish relational spaces with refugee youth. The practice I have developed with Phosphoros before starting this research has informed my inquiry and is therefore examined briefly as it usefully serves as a prelude to my thinking in this area.

The origins of Phosphoros' work directly connect to my curiosity about performance-making colliding with care. Before the company had garnered enough of a reputation within refugee and arts networks respectively, and secured sustained funding, we created theatre in the living room of the supported accommodation provision in North London I was managing at the time[21]. Most of the residents living there, all of whom were young men aged 16-21 who had arrived in the UK weeks, months or years before to seek asylum, who would take part in weekly informal drama workshops. Several of these individuals went on to join Phosphoros Theatre, and those who were not particularly interested in drama would drop in to play games with us, watch a rehearsal or take pictures. This living room was relatively small and strewn with pool cues, motorbike helmets and game consoles; there was little room to stand in a circle, run around or practice movement sequences (for those we would have used the garden, weather permitting). Sessions would be impacted by recurring interruptions familiar within a busy supported accommodation: the washing machine

[21] The housing project I describe was run by Paiwand, a registered charity based in North West London which serves as a refugee community organisation supporting refugees from all backgrounds with a particular focus on Afghanistan and its diaspora.

constantly running; residents cooking in the kitchen next door; pizza deliveries; phones ringing; loud music; hoovering; and the occasional police officer knocking at the door.

The members of this group had no experience of theatre (though one resident had long played live music and sung at community events back home in Eritrea and then in London), so our process began initially by developing a shared “language” of drama, as it became part of the furniture of the house. The significance of supported housing as a site of community, belonging, friendship, rebecoming, and kinship has often featured in Phosphoros’ work, highlighting how these spaces are intrinsically woven into the tapestry of the company’s practice. Several years later when designing my PhD research I reflected on these early developments of refugee-engaged practice, which arose responsively without knowing what the trajectory would look like. As I have articulated my practice research methodology I have reflected on Phosphoros’ work, which sits independently and adjacent to my PhD project, and built on scholarship and a long research process to think differently and deeply about performance, care, solidarity and method.

A challenge faced by practice researchers is the task of articulating research imperatives within disciplinary norms. As I explore in this chapter, the disconnect between *doing* the research and *writing* the research reveals original methodological insight about the practice itself. The *stuff around the edges* of the research owing to the precarity of the lives of refugee youth involved; factors outside of the rehearsal studio, workshop space or online “room” changed the course of the inquiry and illuminated new meaning I had not considered. As I developed a framework through which to conduct the research I imported ideas from Melissa Trimingham’s proposals for practice research (or, practice as research, ‘PAR’, as she terms it). She describes

PAR as an iterative and fluid process, following a ''hermeneutic-interpretive' spiral model where progress is not linear but circular; a spiral which constantly returns us to our original point of entry but with renewed understanding' (2002, p.58). Responsive and relative to the researcher practitioner themselves, the hermeneutic-interpretive spiral results in research findings that are 'merely *an* answer, but never *the* answer' (p.57). I took these ideas in new directions as I engaged with the tense relationship between material and social conditions inside and outside the research and the lived experience of the refugee youth that I worked with.

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the relationship between artistic representation of displacement and the technocratic apparatus of state borders is exceedingly complex, and its impact bears an imprint on my methodology. Whilst sometimes the divergences in and outside the 'spiral' have been exciting, spurred on by the discovery of a particularly illuminating book chapter or an electric moment in a studio session, other times the spiral of my research has been shaped and put under pressure by realities caused by living under border control, or, less specific to the research, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020. The ever-shifting nature of these critical instances has led me to describe them as 'interruptions', to reference their sometimes turbulent presence and capacity to initiate an unexpected change of direction. As a consequence of this approach to practice research, I develop knowledge in ways that *only* happen through the collaborative practice itself, not solely through my analysis as a research method.

This being said, my research inquiry has evolved out of two initial hunches. These are:

Performance of the self can enable unaccompanied minors to construct life narratives in ways that destabilise processes of everyday forms of bordering.

And

Performance of the self can help unaccompanied minors maintain a sense of hope in the context of precarity.

It is through these two basic propositions that my research intervenes in debates around care, solidarity, and performance of refugee lived experience. As far as the 'hermeneutic-interpretive spiral' shifts, influences and furthers my research, these provocations remain a foundation. There is an astute observation here about the passage of time and the iterative process of research. Later in this thesis, I explore the notion of temporalities of hope (Kallio, Meier and Häkli 2021) to examine how the creative practice I developed provided conditions for refugee youth to reconfigure how they were conceptualising their lived experience and current circumstances. The temporariness of displacement characterises many life experiences of refugees and asylum seekers, so understanding how I could develop a methodology that critically engages with this was key. Asylum seekers 'wait because of mobility and for mobility' (Kohli and Kaukko 2017, p.491), and this paradoxical experience of waithood creates a stagnant living condition permeated by state control. Refugee studies scholar and film-maker Sue Clayton expands on these ideas, describing the 'parallel number of contradictory timelines' unaccompanied minors somehow hold:

> First a notion of the life they had before whatever crisis made them leave – a life which can seem to them like a mythical and timeless Utopia; second, the journey with its ellipses and confusions its stops and starts; and finally the rhythms of life in the host country, more orderly and regulated but always rushing towards a precarious outcome at 18 – one which will hardly ever lead back to that precious safe remembered childhood place (Clayton 2019, p.123).

These identity politics are complex, and result in unaccompanied minors specifically and refugees more broadly being stuck in limbo whilst waiting to be recognised as a refugee, 'an identity for which they have no desire but which they passionately desire at the same time' (Jeffers 2012, p.37-8). As I explore in more detail below, I approached my research with a curiosity about how hope could be woven into its research methodology. In the context of growing up within the asylum system, unaccompanied minors' hope, I argue, is radical. To be hopeful is to cut through systems of oppression that enforce bordering not only of bodies but of possibility for future change. To quote Les Back: 'Hopeful possibility and action can be sustained without necessarily being hostage to the belief that everything is going to improve or turn out well' (2019, p.7). This is an interesting point to consider; the number of children waiting for asylum decisions has increased significantly over the last ten years. Data available accounts for separated children as well as those with family, with the number of children waiting longer than a year for a decision increasing from 563 in 2010 to 6,887 in 2020, with almost 500 waiting 3 or more years, and 55 more than 5 years (Refugee Council 2020). What does it mean to maintain hope in these circumstances? I intended to construct creative spaces that encompass dramaturgical characteristics of performance such as risk, repetition, imagination, failure, pride, frustration, illusion, climax and resolve, thus offering alternative temporalities that rupture stagnation, interrupting processes of slow violence. As I will now discuss, performance-making can become a site where refugee voices can be amplified rather than spoken over, and to achieve this entails paying rigorous attention to how forms of structural silencing may creep into practice and how to avoid this.

Building blocks of an ethical practice

Creative practice with refugees and asylum seekers entails a complex set of risks and ethical issues. I am acutely aware of the stakes involved in this area of work, and the

possibility for arts-based research to do more harm than good to refugee contributors, collaborators, participants and audiences. These pitfalls may include interventions that further vulnerabalise, exploit, appropriate, turn into spectacle, over-simplify, (re)traumatise or even interfere with immigration matters. When transferred into the public realm, whether in live performance, digitally accessible archives or publication, these issues are heightened and troubled further. The ethical framework I therefore adopt is less of a fixed framework and more a set of principles that is iterative and mobile and which can respond to the moments of interruption projects encounter and the needs of those I am working with. To paraphrase Patti Lather: maybe it's good that I don't know how we want to talk about these issues. When I write, reflect and talk about the individuals who have contributed to this research am I talking *about* them? *For* them? *With* them? In other words, she supposes: 'we *should* be uncomfortable with these issues of telling other people's stories' (Lather and Smithies 1997, p.9).

There are learnings from the field of socially engaged theatre which highlight knowledge of refugee artists and other practitioners embedded in these modes of making work. In 2015 Tania Cañas, director/member of RISE Arts, a refugee and asylum seeker welfare and advocacy organisation in Australia shared a blog titled: '10 THINGS YOU NEED TO CONSIDER IF YOU ARE AN ARTIST—NOT OF THE REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER COMMUNITY—LOOKING TO WORK WITH OUR COMMUNITY'. Social science scholar Caroline Lenette observes the importance of retaining capital letters when citing this piece, as it 'conveys the weight of their message, perhaps out of frustration from repeatedly witnessing mediocre and self-serving practices' (Lenette 2019, p.84). Each item on the list is followed by a short statement, unapologetically instructing the reader: I interpret these not as invitations or suggestions, but demands and hard truths, written as a collective voice: 'We are not your next

interesting arts project. Our community are not sitting waiting for our struggle to be acknowledged by your individual consciousness nor highlighted through your art practice' (RISE 2015).

The list consists of:

1. Process not product
2. Critically interrogate your intention
3. Realise your own privilege
4. Participation is not always progressive or empowering
5. Presentation vs representation ('know the difference!')
6. It is not a safe-space just because you say it is
7. Do not expect us to be grateful
8. Do not reduce us to an issue
9. Do your research
10. Art is not neutral (RISE 2015)

Point 4 is particularly relevant to consider within my methodology: 'Participation is not always progressive or empowering'. Cañas elaborates:

> Your project may have elements of participation but know how this can just as easily be limiting, tokenistic and condescending. Your demands on our community sharing our stories may be just as easily disempowering. What frameworks have you already imposed on participation? What power dynamics are reinforcing with such a framework? What relationships are you creating (e.g. informant vs expert, enunciated vs enunciator) (2015).

These are pertinent questions for me to consider when engaging with collaborators or contributors who hold less structural power than me as the researcher. To consider this further, I draw on Caroline Lenette's book *Arts-based methods in refugee research* (2019), which outlines a proposal for democratic research models, which she argues contribute to a wider project of decolonising approaches to research. A central approach she adopts is the repositioning of people she involves in her research as 'Knowledge Holders', rethinking deficit-based models that tend to dominate associated discourses. Lenette argues: 'using the term 'Knowledge Holders' instead of research 'subjects' or 'participants' acknowledges people's unique

expertise, their agency, and the range of life experiences they bring to redress some of the power imbalances in research' (2019, p.24). Critiquing the notion of 'giving voice', Lenette's approach focuses on 'political listening', which unsettles dominant understanding and unequal distribution of power over knowledge. Importing some of this thinking into my own developing methodology led me to consider how co-produced knowledge and analysis can alter where the centre of 'authority' may lie in this research project. Without the burden of proof required in other sites of asylum testimony, one of my key research objectives is to explore a responsible, ethical inquiry where stories are not scrutinised for credibility or formed under attestation of authenticity. Thus, I have shaped my methodology to engage less with processes of healing or forms of emancipation and more with a politics of resistance.

Nonetheless, in practice I remain alert to the overlapping factors that may put my methodological intentions under pressure. Cañas' sixth point: 'it is not a safe space just because you say it is' (2015), prompts critique of my guiding principles of friendship and solidarity, as outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, and emphasises the importance of continually questioning and reflecting on my ethical decision making. Whilst there are practical factors that contributed to how my research was received by those taking part, including its partnership with trusted host organisations, Phosphoros' own reputation and existing relationships with those involved (with the exception of Stories for Sleeping), establishing a 'safe' space requires ongoing commitment and reconfiguration rather than liberal overuse. The projects I describe in this thesis were relatively short in length, ranging from a seven-day rehearsal process and performance (All the beds I have slept in), to contained online workshop series (Stories for Sleeping), and creative processes lasting a few days in the context of the pandemic (Connected Hearts and A bed for the night). Beyond the scope of my analysis here is a more in-depth reflection on the

collaborative processes undertaken by Phosphoros on a larger scale, which have generally involved eight to twelve weekends of rehearsals followed by national touring. The demands of these professional theatre tours are huge and warrant careful planning and the ability to navigate interpersonal dynamics and conflict within longer creative processes. Over the past nine years since Phosphoros began, these working practices have changed shape and developed continuously as we have grown in knowledge, resources and core funding. These changes include structural changes like incorporating as a Charity and the implementation of a board of trustees; staff development around trauma-informed practice; training artists and facilitators from refugee backgrounds to co-lead the work; and integrating wellbeing and pastoral care through creative access workers and 1:1 tailored support and advocacy. However, the inner-workings of Phosphoros as an organisation is beyond the scope of this thesis and extends outside my research inquiry, so my focus remains on how my practice research nurtured conditions of care.

Returning to methodological focus, inspired by the list of '10 THINGS YOU NEED TO CONSIDER…' and applying this approach to the UK's political climate, I facilitated an online roundtable discussion co-produced by Phosphoros and Counterpoints Arts during Refugee Week 2020. My colleagues and I wanted to generate discussion about how creative work with, for and about refugees and asylum seekers could actively resist structural oppressions triggered by UK border enforcement. We titled the event 'challenging hostile environments in the arts', and the panel consisted of academic and community theatre artist Dr Aqeel Abdulla (director of *Lost Sheep*, mentioned in Chapter One); multidisciplinary producer Tobi Kyeremateng; rapper, poet and educator Mohammed Yahya; and Syed Haleem Najibi from Phosphoros. The discussion, with contribution from an online audience, covered creative processes; community engagement; representation of refugees in the cultural sector more

widely, as well as in funding applications and press coverage; and the responsibility of cultural sector venues and organisations in playing active roles in undoing hostility. I drew together a summary of key thoughts around best practice when facilitating participatory work with refugees, a group we recognised during the discussion as being 'positioned (and stigmatised) by those in power as 'hard to reach', and this was circulated on social media throughout Refugee Week. The list consisted of:

- Seek out the grassroots; this work might already be happening
- You can't assume trust, it needs to be earnt
- Understand the context and politics of the work you are doing. It doesn't exist in a vacuum
- Co-creation and design of the work is important. The community should set the agenda
- Actively unlearn language that secures deficit positions and fixes hierarchies of power
- Consider the care needed in your practice throughout. Build it into your planning and budget
- Be critical of the idea that you are 'giving someone a voice'
- If you haven't had fun, something has gone wrong'

(Phosphoros Theatre 2020)

These proposals offered useful insight for me to take into my inquiry. If these approaches to practice challenge hostile environments and subsequent slow violence incurred by the state, might they also engender a mode of hospitality within host communities? Dialogic approaches such as these may open up the potential for arts practice and research to mobilise notions of sanctuary. Conceptualisations of art as host have been explored in recent literature and aid my thinking here. Alison Jeffers, for example, discusses how the act of listening at refugee theatre events 'can be construed as a civil act that simultaneously challenges notions of togetherness and opens up tough questions about responsibility' (2013 p.299). 'Civil listening', she argues, can generate distance from feelings of 'togetherness and false bonhomie', as we build 'a civility, going through the process of becoming civil' (p.308). Hospitality can emerge within research processes too, and Lenette describes how a commitment

to participatory, trauma-informed and respectful approaches can be generative of ‘hospitality’ within research processes, and contribute to a wider project of decolonising research agendas in refugee studies (2019, p.229).

Importing some of these ideas into my methodology, whereby dialogic exchange unfixes what I might describe as deficit positions and notions of voicelessness are problematised, I developed approaches that sought to reposition refugee voices from the margins to the centre. On this theme, I aimed to be astute to how top-down power imbalances might factor into research processes more widely, including institutionally. As Lenette points out, assumptions around perceived ‘vulnerability’ and generalised understandings of where agency lies may become ‘embedded in institutional ethics review frameworks, which position people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds as vulnerable, passive ‘objects’ of research’ (p.91).

Applied Theatre practitioner and scholar Taiwo Afolabi proposes an approach to ethical practice, both in terms of ‘writing’ and ‘doing’, which he terms ‘ethical questioning’, which is particularly helpful in framing how I handled challenges arising in my project. Drawing on Amanda Stuart Fisher’s ‘ethical positioning’, Afolabi poses a set of iterative, continuous and reflexive questions, which ‘challenge practitioners to engage epistemic and ontological knowledge that is wholistic’, thereby setting up the researcher and practitioner ‘on the trajectory of self-discovery to challenge oppressive systems’ (Afolabi 2021, p.354), such as colonial legacies that may underpin practice. His article outlining this approach is concise, providing points of departure for the discerning practitioner and researcher, though, as he points out, ‘ethical questioning is an art in itself that must be learnt. It requires recognising one’s power and privileges - its strengths and limits’ (p.354). Afolabi categorises the questions into five key critical areas: power and privilege; shifting identities and the

researcher/practitioner; socio-economic and cultural realities of the population/community and partnering organisations; and knowledge production control' (p.354). To take the first point as an example, the questions surrounding power and privilege are as follows:

> Who is in control of the project? Who makes decisions? Who holds absolute power in the project? and How aware is this entity (person, group or organisation)? What are some of the ways to trace and minimise power and privilege in non/academic knowledge production? What processes and methods can address power imbalance and, in the process decolonise knowledge production? Who defines what is 'problematic'? (p.354-5).

Throughout my project, I continued to grapple with 'ethical questions', whether those offered by Afolabi or emerging through my own reflection. When the material conditions of the research changed in micro and macro ways, I re-entered the 'hermeneutic-spiral' as described by Trimingham (2002), and regained focus by reflecting on ethical questions I had tweaked, shifted and rethought throughout the process of my research thus far. As I will explore in Chapter Four, this approach was stretched in new ways during the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby I struggled to fathom how I could recreate an approach to performance-making if I could not be in a space *with* my collaborators and participants due to national lockdown measures. My methodological guiding principles were put to the extreme, and I had to carefully reimagine how my practice research could be reconceptualised whilst retaining a critical engagement with hierarchies of power, commitments to inclusivity, representation and dialogue. In work centred on themes of belonging and being with one another, how could this operate online?

Returning to the 'spiral' and interrogating the essence of my practice research over and over, through the lens of continued reflexivity, upheld my project's integrity and motivation. Within this iterative process of thinking and making lies potential for understanding more deeply processes of thinking and making in relation to refugee

youth experiences. Crucially, the global circumstances beyond my control furthered my attentiveness to what Thompson describes as an ‘aesthetics of care in action’ (2015), and, as I will explain in the next section, this shifted focus to the *stuff* that I had previously perceived to be on the edges of the research. Thus, care as a mode of methodological inquiry became increasingly necessary.

Methodological possibilities of care

Through my research questions I pay attention to the potential of a care-filled practice generating dialogic modes of research. Ensuring care informs my creative practice means there are aspects of the work I do not write about, for the sake of upholding a commitment to the shared spaces with those who have trusted me to listen to their stories, thoughts and experiences. Nonetheless, these moments, be they private, banal, challenging, traumatic or sensitive, each further my understanding of creative practice with refugees, and at times I find thematic connections with the research. I was careful throughout the creative process to maintain that I invited people to share only what they felt comfortable to share, and to offer reminders of my role as a researcher and my eventual documenting of the work we undertook together. At times, a personal story of violence, exploitation or trauma would emerge, or a piece of information that connected directly with an ongoing asylum claim. These are the sorts of details I have deliberately omitted from my writing in order to protect the sensitive nature of these testimonies, and an example of how I have indicated this in my documentation is through the use of scribbling out words (see page 5). This highlights one of the limitations of engaging with lived experience as a starting point, because the circumstances of my collaborators were in varying levels of flux.

So far, in Chapter One, I have explored the emergence of care ethics as a framework influencing my research, and outlined some of the key arguments and examples within theatre and performance around how care is enacted, explored or positioned as foundational to creative practices. Now I examine how I foregrounded care as method, examining how this puts creative work with refugee youth under pressure in interesting and provocative ways, enacting an approach that could be described as 'trauma-informed'. I will also continue to develop my engagement with friendship, influenced by Tillmann-Healy's 'friendship as method' which informed how I conceptualised my approach to navigating risk, ethics, commitment and responsibility within my project.

My intention as an experienced and caring practitioner is to facilitate an equitable space, and this is modelled through formal and informal research approaches, and influenced by processes like Afolabi's aforementioned 'ethical questioning' (2021). My research does not take place within a therapeutic context, and through my inquiry I do not expect to arrive at singular therapeutic outcomes. However, it also does not take place in a vacuum where people's lived experience is left outside the room. I therefore draw on theorisation around 'trauma-informed practice' to shape my approach, as well as attending to the aesthetic and methodological potential of care.

Caroline Lenette situates trauma-informed approaches as integral to ethical research with refugee communities. However, she clarifies, 'unlike trauma-centred interventions, examining trauma is not the primary concern of trauma-informed research' (2019, p.15). She elaborates: 'The aim of trauma-informed research is to collaborate in a way that neither triggers past trauma nor excludes trauma narratives if and when these emerge. Clearly, a strong relationship of trust, and the need for

sensitivity and adopting flexible processes are crucial to trauma-informed research practices' (p.16). This clarification is important and is a reminder of the importance of recognising and validating traumatic experiences, rather than uncritically limiting their presence. Extending Lenette's discussion here, I am interested in how I engage with trust to navigate risk. I return to the anecdote detailed at the start of this chapter where Muhammad is stuck in his sleeping bag before freeing himself with a blade. Listening to this story involves risk. I do not know what he is going to say, or whether he has planned what he is going to say next. Risk requires trust. Trust in myself, of any assistant facilitators I am joined by (on this occasion, Syed) and of the individual/s I am engaging with. Our collaborative space becomes a container for stories, questions, experiences and, sometimes, traumatic narratives.

By adopting a care-centred creative approach that is attentive to the individual I intend for my practice to resist forms of slow violence that hamper personal dignity and uncritically assume homogeneity of experience warranting a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Involved in the design of a methodology rooted in care is practical decision-making that takes into account ethical conditions. James Thompson sets out three components of developing practice that harnesses 'care aesthetics': preparation; execution; and exhibition (2015). Understanding and attending to this framework, in particular 'preparation', helped map out the potential interconnections between different phases and moments within my project, without restricting attentiveness to care to the periphery. 'Preparation' refers to crucial decisions made about accessibility, for example considerations around physical environment, timing and financial barriers, which Thompson argues 'demonstrate and model a form of mutual regard' (p.438). Often relegated to the edges of analysis of participatory arts work, when considered within a framework of care these details serve as a reminder of the interconnectedness between access and aesthetics.

Thompson asserts they are ‘not mundane organisational matters, but crucial ethical propositions’ (p.438). Returning to Fisher and Tronto’s four interconnected elements of care (attentiveness, competence, responsibility and responsiveness) aids my thinking here, particularly in their proposal that these elements need constant evaluation. In applying these ideas to my research I commited to sustaining and developing an understanding of the complex myriad barriers, not always disclosed, that impact how (or whether at all) people engage in the work. By maintaining an ongoing awareness of these barriers and how they change and shift, I remained responsive to the individuals at the heart of my practice research projects.

The possibility for solidarity to form as part of a creative encounter is what makes Thompson’s approach particularly relevant to my developing practice. Moving on to ‘execution’, he argues that mutual support and collaboration between individuals can result in ‘a shape, feel, sensation and affect’, and do not need to be building towards wider output (in other words, ‘exhibition’). According to Thompson: ‘aesthetic value is located in-between people in moments of collaboration, conjoined effort and intimate exchange: these are new virtuosities of care that do not rely on the singular display of self-honed skill’ (2015, p.438). Crucially, within this description of an aesthetics of care, there *is* potentiality within public acts, which ‘clearly present relational opportunities’ (p.438), thus forming an important component in establishing what he describes as an ‘astonishing sense of connection between different people involved in making art together’ (p.439). I engage with Thompson’s discussion as I consider co-creation and self-authorship as modes of performance that form (slow) resistances to dominant representations of refugee experience. I push these ideas forward in new ways, by examining how care emerges through an attentiveness to friendship. I am compelled to use concepts of friendship as a methodological underpinning to my practice research because they help frame

my critique of fixed hierarchies of power and resist reproducing a form of engagement conditioned by perceived refugee victimhood. This has enabled me to explore how friendship becomes a marker of subjectivity that care produces, and how in building up the subject, a methodology rooted in friendship unbalances power dynamics.

As I have already outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, my PhD project was developed through three modes of engagement: firstly, a semi-structured period of seven days spent with actors (and friends) from Phosphoros whom I had already collaborated with for around three years, resembling a 'Research and Development' style theatre-making process. Second, structured workshops for participants I did not know, with clear, deliverable outcomes outlined to the group and staff members in charge. Third, informal, ad hoc creative collaboration with a small number of people over online messaging and video calls, phone calls and in-person writing or making sessions. It was during the third format that ideas around friendship and care, and their intersection with trauma-informed methodologies became most relevant. These collaborative forms of practice can disrupt other modes of engagement where the refugee and non-refugee researcher are located in predetermined roles of helper and helped (Scheibelhofer 2017, p.195). As observed by Stuart Fisher, 'it is through the caring encounter that the givers and receivers of care learn what caring is and how it feels' (2020, p.7). In the context of bending time and temporalities of waiting, slowness became its own sort of gift. Surrounding each moment of performance or creative writing, or each story unfolding were trips to McDonald's, conversations about our respective families, and rehearsing lines for a performance at college. We encountered each other outside and inside the research at the same time.

Interestingly, as I reflect on my initial hesitance to make these modes of engagement

visible as *research*, I notice Lenette's reflections on her methodological shift to incorporate alternative approaches into her social sciences work. She remembers honestly: 'I initially considered arts-based methods as an 'aside', a creative or niche approach at the periphery, rather than a legitimate, rigorous research approach' (2019, p.23). Conversely, the focus I had placed on particular modes of performance practice was overly narrow and did not take into account the value of wider forms of meaning-making, such as modes of caring, which Stuart Fisher argues can expand our understanding of performance (2020). Thus, in recognising these internal biases I could identify which hierarchies of knowledge are upheld or dismantled. In practical terms, this involved carving out space where individuals could choose what stories they told, when, and how. The types of stories that emerged here did not need to hold the bureaucratic currency required in state asylum settings and remain personal, intimate and local. I am reminded of Yousif M. Qasmiyeh's description of 'embroidering the voice with its own needle' (2019), seeing 'the voice within its owner, as a given and not to be given'. My methodology was not designed to *give voice* to refugees since to do so would suggest prior voicelessness. Instead, I developed a model where the use of co-authorship and performing one's own life experiences became boundless and enables overlooked stories and knowledge to be made visible outside of official or evidence-based accounts. Accordingly, these embroidered voices may be fragmented.

As I adopted an ethic of care I navigated when *not* to ask more questions, *not* looking more closely and *not* inviting discussion on a theme I know could be distressing, even if we had spoken about it before, outside the context of my research. I draw on James Andrew Wilson's learning from his PhD practice research, to understand how 're-animation' can be configured as an alternative to 'excavation', situating repetition of practice as a way of seeking alternative forms of knowledge, akin to

Robin Nelson's description of 'liquid' knowing (2013, p.48) (see Wilson 2019). To return to an archaeological metaphor: 'if we are diggers, we are in constant danger of damaging the artefacts we unearth' (Wilson 2019, p.11). Instead, I leant on the 'hunch' of the practice researcher, trusting my overlapping instincts and 'grafted expertise' (Hepplewhite 2021) as a theatre maker, researcher, youth worker, and so on. If I desired to document a patchwork of findings based on the lived experiences of refugee youth then I may have felt inhibited by the qualitative and changing nature of this creative process. However, my practice research methodology reveals meaning in silence, gaps, and parts of narratives that appear missing. For Tillmann-Healey, navigating these issues of testimonial truth is how her approach uses the privilege of the researcher for liberatory ends. 'We never ask more of participants than we are willing to give', she explains. 'Friendship as method demands radical reciprocity, a move from studying "them" to studying *us*' (2015).

This approach is not without critique, and the methodology I lay out within this thesis also exposes its limitations (with the exception of *Stories for Sleeping*, which involved partnering with organisations). My decision to involve existing collaborators rather than recruit new participants clearly significantly enriched the practice developed, as it built on prior conversations and ideas instead of starting from a place where trust had to be established and parameters tested. However, by selectively inviting individuals to be involved with my research, I was inadvertently curating the responses I would get. In other words, I consciously excluded members of Phosphoros' wider community who were, at the time, navigating some of the more extreme manifestations of slow violence within the asylum system, such as homelessness, repeated failed asylum claims, as well as severe mental health

challenges[22]. Whilst this decision demonstrates a clear awareness of the limits of my role as a researcher and a commitment to avoid imposing undue pressure on those facing severe precarity, it also constrained the breadth of my engagement with participatory practice.

One of the privileges I held as an artist-researcher is the opportunity to build relationships slowly and somewhat differently to other forms of research with refugee youth, for example in social sciences. Generating research through practice and creative methods can capture unique vocabulary outside of conventional interviews. In the context of my project, exploration took time to develop, particularly when people were using their second, third or fourth language. Without being restricted to the limitations of interviews, questionnaires or other time and format-bound research methods, conversations and discoveries within the creative process could challenge my thinking and turn my perspective on its head, directly influencing what I would introduce next. Entering the research spiral at different points, and being open to change has enabled me to enact a stance of reciprocity.

In reflecting on my creative work with both new youth participants as well as existing collaborators I aimed to maintain an equality of voices throughout the research process. It was a deliberate choice I made at the start of the process to make the devising process driven by collective decision making. This aligned with the project's focus on care which in the context of theatre making meant establishing collective ownership over the process. This raised important ethical considerations, particularly regarding the potential for unconscious bias in the exploratory work we undertook together, or for these individuals to feel under pressure to fulfil my objectives by

[22] To avoid sounding remiss in this reflection, it is important to clarify that the members of Phosphoros' community that I mention here were still able to engage with other projects I was delivering with Phosphoros outside of my PhD project.

giving, sharing or saying more than they felt comfortable doing so. The dual role of researcher and friend that I held in some parts of the project further complicated these dynamics, heightening the tension between where the boundaries of research ended and my personal self began. In other words, at the end of a rehearsal, what changed? How do I authentically write about creative work enclosed in a research process when some of those involved were also part of my life? These blurred lines between researcher objectivity, personal involvement and participant motivation required navigating from a standpoint of care, which I used to prioritise attentiveness and empathy. I aimed to uphold reflexivity remaining critically aware of the limitations, as well as the possibilities, implicated in my research methodology.

In so far as the workshop space became the *container* for these encounters, so did preparatory work, including online meetings, phone calls or face-to-face meetings. One such conversation with Muhammad revealed insight into the complexity of the methodology I was developing, and its dialogue with the socio-political context of the hostile environment. When I first spoke to Muhammad as part of my research inquiry he was 18 and waiting for the outcome of his asylum claim, and he had been a member of Phosphoros' youth projects for around 6 months, where I had met him weekly outside of the context of my PhD. During this time I observed Muhammad feeling stuck, bound by the "system", restricted from working and stifled from looking ahead to the future. Muhammad was holding onto the temporal checkpoints of refugee experience: 'Everything changes when you get your visa', he said. He spoke about the importance of 'the piece of paper' that would secure his protection (and future) in the UK: his refugee status and acknowledged the encroaching borders that rise when one is unsuccessful. Situational waiting is intrinsic to daily life as a refugee, but, as Kohli argues, 'not all waiting is the same'. Drawing on Vitus' description of the 'de-subjectification of children' (2010, p.41), he argues that 'the

ambiguousness of waiting, together with precarious living conditions in which asylum-seeking children often wait, positions them into 'no place' and as being 'no one' (Kohli 2018, p.492). Muhammad's reflection, which I quote at length, demonstrates the extent to which his life had been affected by the precarity of waiting within the asylum system:

> When you come to this country you feel so scared. You've passed 8 or 10 countries, and you've left your country - your mum, your dad.
>
> You know your future is connected to one piece of paper. If the government doesn't give you that paper your life will be so hard. The government is pushing you. We are so scared in that first few months. You're thinking all the time about what happens if you don't get it.
>
> If you get that paper, life will be so good. You can work, go to college, make money to get nice clothes, nice shoes, a nice watch. You can get that thing - what's it called when you can start driving? A driving licence.
>
> It's like you can breathe. If you don't get that paper they don't deport you back, but they push you away. You're not allowed to work, they push you to leave. But after that, life will be so good, if you are smart. You just think about how to get that paper.

What became clear to me in this discussion was Muhammad's ambivalence about participating in activity outside of the tunnel vision toward his refugee status.

> If you come to me and say "Muhammad let's do this drama", I just want to say "No Kate, why would I do that?" I don't have energy for it. Everything is connected to that paper. To that ID. If you get that paper you are a different person. (Muhammad 2021)

I do not intend to use "tunnel vision" as a criticism here; rather I use it to describe the state of uncertainty forced on individuals like Muhammad by a state system that bureaucratises as it securitises, leaving little room for personal fulfilment and leisure. The concern he raised: 'No Kate, why would I do that?' encouraged me to think more critically about how I situate the politics of my research. Muhammad's comments also offer an important reminder of my inability to 'help'. In other words, involvement in my PhD research has no bearing on the thing he is yearning for.

Thinking through this exchange, I clarify my intention: not to generate knowledge about the lived experience of unaccompanied minors, but to develop creative practice that establishes new and meaningful ways of considering care as interdependent between friends and peers.

This conversation reveals how moments of discomfort for me as a researcher enacted critical instances of interruption to my research process, causing me to pause and consider how the practice was not losing from its grasp the wider political backdrop, but keeping it clearly in its eyeline. In fact, Muhammad did continue taking part in the research and ended up contributing some of the submissions I found the most illuminating, as the project progressed (see Chapters Four and Five). Had we not been able to talk about his doubts and concerns about engaging in a creative project whilst his house was on fire, so to speak, he may not have taken part at all. The reciprocal trust we were able to negotiate together ultimately helped me realise that making visible his reflections on living within the asylum system was vital in how he wanted to engage with performing his life narratives. Through reflecting on and returning to the complexity of messy narratives throughout this project I have intended to explore the methodological challenges of assigning theoretical frameworks to real people[23]. It is the task of me as the researcher to remain ready to keep grappling with ideas and modes of engagement that present nuance, contradiction, a sense of unfinishedness, and change. In a sense, these methodological borders are ones I have attempted to dismantle and resist. As I explore in the next section, I position performance of the self as a possible way to address issues of slow violence.

[23] In discussing the ambiguity of the real, I am not using quotation marks, because ''real' in quotation marks insinuates that the real is not real. Real (without quotation marks) insinuates that the real is real' (Martin 2013, p.177).

Politics of visibility in the context of slow violence

Earlier in this thesis I located ‘slow violence’ as a key concept within my inquiry, drawing on Achielle Mbembé’s notion of necropolitics whereby a hierarchy of deserving is enforced that determines who has a greater right to life. Recent work in migration and refugee studies is starting to position the widespread ramifications of asylum policy as ‘slow violence’ (see Mayblin, Wake, Kazemi 2020; also Saunders and Al-Om 2022), which, as I have discussed already, provides a useful conceptual backdrop to my research. The impact of slow violence is viscerally felt by many of the contributors to this research, as expressed in Muhammad’s words: ‘they don’t deport you back but they push you to leave’ (2021). Mayblin, Wake and Kazemi describe the human classification and differentiation at play in the everyday lives of asylum seekers, reinforcing logics of human hierarchy (2020, p.121). Referring to the repeated disempowerment and restriction of rights and dignity afforded to asylum seekers, they conclude that ‘legal obligations are therefore fulfilled to an absolute minimum, to a point where asylum seekers are merely prevented (not always successfully) from physically dying’ (Mayblin et al 2020, p.121).

Extending these ideas further, I observe connections between Mbembé’s necropolitical logic and the paradoxical construction of which refugees have a right to humanity, namely in the comparison between how ‘the West’ responded to Ukrainian refugees following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine in an escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The considerably warmer reception these refugees received arguably revealed a logic based on perceived sameness; forming a ‘conscious collective’ built on participation in familiar events such as the Eurovision Song Contest and European football (see de Coninck 2023). Evidently, there is a disconnect between who is deserving of a quality of life and I found myself asking: how might my practice research engage in interventions that restore care to the lived experience of

being a refugee, thereby resisting border enforcement that actively dehumanises? Can performance of the self destabilise assumptions about who has a right to a life without precarity? What can creative practice reveal and explore that other forms of research may not? These provocations connect with my research questions, which consider the types of everyday bordering processes that map onto arts practice.

At the heart of these sorts of questions is a consideration of how the shifting ground of knowledge functions in my project, and in the following paragraphs I draw on analytical and reflective discussions that offer insight. Similar to Lenette's term 'Knowledge Holders' which rethinks how refugees are positioned in research processes, refugee studies scholar Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh proposes a reframing of people with lived experience as 'analysts of their own situations, and those of others' (2017). These linguistic shifts are significant and recognising the analytical contribution of my colleagues' challenges uncritical notions of 'experts by experience', which risks being somewhat static and without opportunity for interpreting or reading one's own experience. Before embarking on my first practical project, I recorded discussions with three of the actors from Phosphoros who would participate in my practice research project. Goitom, Emirjon and Tewodros discussed with me their identity, motivation and values as artists affected by displacement. Away from the usual busy, fast-paced environment of our rehearsal room or tour schedule these conversations opened up meaningful space for the actors to analyse their own situations. In doing so they revealed some of the complexities of performing refugee identity, including their perceptions of how these representations are received. Listening to their reflections, shared relatively early in my research in August 2019, helped me understand more deeply some of the relational engagement between refugee performer and audience, and the extent to which my own gaze was circumscribed by my positionality in relation to issues in forced migration.

Emirjon's motivation for being involved with performance was to raise awareness: 'I want to give messages to all the people who have bad opinions about refugees. I want to change their views'. His relationship with the identity marker of "refugee" was complex. As an Albanian, he is aware his whiteness, alongside a lack of general knowledge within British publics about his home country and its current absence of armed conflict or occupation, means he sometimes faces surprise or confusion when sharing his country of origin. Whilst he noted that he '[didn't] think it was good to use the word "refugee"', he shared an urge to 'tell people how it really is in my country. People don't know - it's in Europe, they don't think there's problems there. I want to change their opinion and give the real story about how it is' (Emijron 2019). All three of my colleagues talked about the prejudices, misconceptions and assumptions held by people who have not experienced the asylum system, and this demonstrated an active resistance to expectations forced onto them, resulting from the conditions sprung from the UK's hostile environment.

For Emirjon, the emotional understanding of the impact of these dominant narratives is why he feels refugees tell their stories best: 'We have the original feeling inside us. If you're not a refugee you can act, but you don't have that feeling in your heart'. Goitom offered his analysis on the complexity of audience response, positioning himself as aware and strategic in his refugee-artist identity:

> They think about refugees in bad ways. They always fight, they mess with girls - we don't. We're refugees and normal people. We care about our identity, we care about humanity, we have friendships. When they see the show they come up and say 'well done, I haven't thought refugees are like these people'... well, they can't say that, but they give you these kind of words. I think we need to tell them more and more (Goitom 2019).

Tewodros also reflected on the expectations he suspected audiences might hold when they watch him perform and offered interesting critique:

> I believe they have two expectations. The first one is negative, second positive. First one: maybe they've never had an experience seeing refugees as an actor, a performer. They might think 'this show might be rubbish, but let me just support them, let me be part of this activity'. But the positive one… they might want to know about refugees; the real challenges, the journeys we made. They might come with these ideas, and when they see our play we might change their mind (Tewodros 2019).

His perspective here resonates with Lilie Chouliaraki's critique of post-humanitarian responses to migration narratives, whereby Orientalist, colonial modes of 'saving' vulnerable others centre on the 'emotionality' of the observer, in what she describes as the 'staging of spectacles of suffering' (2013, p.27). Chouliaraki builds on Luc Boltanski's theorising of a politics of pity, whereby suffering is consumed and made readable to those more fortunate, similar to Tewodros' reflections above. Boltanski describes a process of hyper-singularisation that renders complex individual experiences depersonalised and over-representative: 'It is he, but it could be someone else: it is that child there who made us cry, but any other child could have done the same. Around each unfortunate brought forward crowds a host of replacements' (1999, p.12). Attempts to "humanise" refugees are clearly complex, and, as Tewodros' comments indicate, imbue ambivalence. These forms of representation occur as refugees move between invisibility and hyper-visibility, where markers of displacement are thrust upon individuals, laden with meaning beyond legalities.

Elsewhere, Tewodros talked about the feeling he has when being described as a "refugee performer" (and other types of artist, such as "refugee comedian", in his work outside Phosphoros). He was concerned that associated with the label of "refugee" is the assumption that he's 'doing it for the first time', highlighting a perceived lack of craft. He stressed that 'first of all, we're all human beings', and whilst he acknowledged the descriptors others give him 'are to encourage us, not

drag us down', it left him feeling marked out as "other", bound up in the audience's expectations of him. As I argue through this research, the methodological approach I adopted leads to dynamic forms of engagement that evoke solidarity and more just ways of understanding and responding to experiences of forced migration. In other words, the arts practice has the potential to transcend boundaries that divide us, rather than reproduce them.

Encountering hope within creative practice

Centring my methodology around care is intended to resist the experiences of slow violence I examined in Chapter One. Shifting focus from humanitarian approaches, conceptualisations of displacement can be animated through alternative forms of engagement that hold different currency to bureaucratic sites of storytelling. A key idea which has driven my inquiry is hope, which I discuss through the concept of alternative temporalities. There has been recent work undertaken around the possibility of radical hope and forced migration, which informs my engagement in this area. As I have outlined thus far, the temporal uncertainty, anguish and conditions of living within the asylum system create a stifling impact, contributing to a 'Kafkaesque' lived experience (Griffiths 2014, p.1997). Similarly, Ravi Kohli describes the experience as 'rudderless', noting that 'although experiences of cycles of waiting, escaping and arrival are diverse, waiting time is noted as being long and empty' (2018, p.491). Exploring waiting as a 'liveable space', Kallio, Meier and Häkli position 'radical hope' as instigating 'open-ended future as potentiality', whereby chronological markers of time and the social conditioning they bring are rethought to create new significance 'when a person's life is at the brink of losing all meaning' (2021, p.3). They continue:

> With this move from hopelessness to radical hope, we trace how people turn away from the idea of future defined by closed-off and unattainable goals - such as gaining a refugee status, getting an education, receiving adequate treatment - and instead embrace

> futurity as an unsettled and ambiguous horizon in which a meaningful life may continue (p.6).

Here, non-linear, abstract notions of hope emerge as ‘thin political possibilities’, rather than set outcomes. At first glance, these concepts appear limited in scope and neoliberal in tone; should refugees not worry about their asylum claim? As the authors explore in their study and interviews with asylum seekers, radical hope can become a disruptive space that interjects in linear bordering practices and enables asylum seekers and refugees to ‘[reclaim] their future in the present as a space in which alternative ways of being and relating can be embodied, lived and practiced’ (Kallio, Meier and Häkli 2021, p.13). The quiet politics at play here result in asylum seekers and refugees reclaiming dignity over how they conceptualise their present circumstances. Refocusing my attention on youth, anthropologist Alcinda Honwana’s concept of ‘waithood’ (2012) is helpful to read in parallel with the concept of radical hope. She considers the experience of African youth ‘living in a period of suspension between childhood and adulthood’, arguing this liminal space can precipitate disenfranchisement due to exclusion from socioeconomic and political agency, and thus become the driving force for social change. Honwana argues that ‘young people in waithood are indeed creating new dynamic sites for inventiveness and survival’ (2012), and makes reference to the ways they discover new ways of making meaning out of their life circumstances: ‘Senegalese and Tunisians use the French word débrouillage (making do); while South Africans say: ‘we are just getting by’. As I too have argued, spaces of liminality and prolonged waiting can be revisioned in subtle yet dynamic ways.

In Chapter Four I mobilise these ideas most prominently, exploring how radical hope as a framing device and a means of thinking about the future became a useful component in my approach to developing creative writing with refugee young people,

leading to meaningful new states of becoming. Foregrounding this practice is an attentiveness to how creative processes can engage with hope beyond linear temporalities. The work of Yousif M. Qasmiyeh responds to questions such as this, and through his refugee literature studies scholarship and poetry I have arrived at a clearer understanding of how radical notions of hope might function in my methodology. What strikes me in Qasmiyeh's writing is his engagement with time. He describes a process of 'writing the camp', offering observations on the ways refugee writing and narrative navigate 'temporality, permanence and liminality' (2020, p.52). He observes his writing practice not as 'delving deeply into the personal but hovering above it', eliciting an interesting alternative framing of testimonial voice. As he writes the archive, he writes *about* the archive. Qasmiyeh documents traces of life displaced, and these fleeting images represent the everyday, micro, bodily, community-based, painful, tender aspects of life that are often overlooked in humanitarian and other forms of representation of displacement: 'my mother's food jars, her dried vegetable – prepared with the intention of using them at a later date, whenever this date happens' (p.57). The camp, he writes, is time.

> The meaning of time is the meaning of what can and cannot move in time and at the same time.
> The elderly woman by the mosque once claimed to have seen time in the flesh.
> My camp's gravedigger neither prays nor fasts, he is only capable of digging.
> Skinning is separating the skin from the flesh, never the flesh from the skin (p.65).

As Qasmiyeh 'hovers above' the personal he personifies time as shifting, embodied, alive. Time, as I have observed in my analysis of radical hope and waithood, can create the conditions for hope. The permanent temporariness of the asylum experience involves looking in both directions; moving forward and looking back, even if the future remains distant. Documenting hopeful temporalities preserve archival memories beyond formal means, and one way of conceptualising hope is to

engage with the possibility of archiving the past, in so far as it assumes a sense of futurity. As Qasmiyeh writes: ‘remembering the camp becomes the prerequisite for remembering ourselves in/outside the camp’ (2020, p.54); bearing witness to the breadth of experiences forced displacement establishes political solidarity. He describes the potential of refugee writing as ‘an eye beyond eyes’; ‘co-seeing in writing what would otherwise reach its end without being remembered as the lived’ (Qasmiyeh 2020, p.57-8). Importing some of these ideas into the context of performance of the self, I am interested in how the personal in relation to the collective can illuminate meaningful ways of listening to refugee narratives. Further, how might these forms of performance establish radical encounters with audiences, specifically those with refugee backgrounds themselves?

A question I was left with ahead of commencing my practice was: how might radical hope be mutually exchanged and encountered in ways that sustain as well as resist? And, returning momentarily to my earlier question of *how to maintain a sense of hope in the context of precarity*, I reflect on my evolving response which builds on ethical positions on care. In their work on radical care, Hobart and Kneese discuss care strategies used when institutions and infrastructure ‘break down, fail, or neglect’ (2020, p.3), paying attention to the radical potential of reciprocity and attentiveness to inequity. Drawing on Elizabeth Povinelli’s anthropology of the otherwise (2017) they locate hope in crisis and disaster, arguing ‘it is precisely from this audacity to produce, apply, and effect care despite dark histories and future that its radical nature emerges’ (2020, p.3). Reminiscing on the question I struggled to grapple with when working with asylum seeking youth, and which ultimately led me to this research, a way to discover hope is to find an ‘otherwise’. Hobart and Kneese continue: ‘radical care can present an otherwise, even if it cannot

completely disengage from structural inequalities and normative assumptions regarding social reproduction, gender, race, class, sexuality, and citizenship' (p.3).

In the context of my research with current and former unaccompanied minor refugees, the 'otherwise' that we may discover might be one that ruptures the narrated lives that seldom include their own voices, rather are captured in proformas, reduced to jargon and described using the language of dehumanisation. Attending to hopefulness as a radical alternative to narratives of moral panic presents an 'otherwise' where resettlement, adolescence and becoming adult can be imagined outside of the pathologising identity of 'service user'. Accordingly, concepts of hope and care have the potential to emerge both for the audiences and tellers of stories and, as I explore later, may become multi-directional and interconnected.

Holding on tightly, letting go lightly

To draw this chapter to a close I reflect on some of my methodological choices in action, and the development of my first practical project helps bring these reflections to life. Inviting four actors from Phosphoros to collaborate with me on a new piece of performance signalled a departure from how we had worked together before, following a rehearsal process leading up to a tour. Focussing on co-authorship and co-creation without predetermined outcomes or performance dates meant encountering new sets of possibilities, risks, frustrations and stumbling blocks. Primarily it involved me encouraging experimentation, testing and discovery, and resisting a collective urge to finesse. On reflection, many of the critical instances within this process, which I explore in more detail in the next chapter, became moments of discovering an 'otherwise'. Foremostly, I intended to facilitate space for

the four actors to work with me as collaborators rather than 'participants', somewhat different to much other research in this area, and I wanted to disentangle the researcher / researched relationship that established a type of power dynamic that did not resonate with how I felt the research *should* develop. This is not to overshadow the differentials of power within the project, in which I was unambiguously at the helm, but to approach it from a standpoint that considered - celebrated perhaps - the collaborative nature of my approach.

On our first workshopping day together I fixed a big piece of paper to the wall that said: 'hold on tightly, let go lightly' (inspired by Anne Bogart, 2007), and together we discussed how it felt to start a project together where we did not have a set plan or expectation of where we might arrive. In the next chapter, I discuss in more detail the challenges my collaborators felt with this approach, and what it revealed about my research inquiry. Fortunately, I had anticipated that my desire to *be with* creative mess, risk and failure would feel daunting to these particular performers, as it had the potential to contradict the expectations they had of themselves and the type of theatre they were used to creating: lines learnt, scenes blocked, muscle memory informing each step. I was careful in navigating this approach, understanding the responsibility I had in supporting creative exploration whilst also recognising the relationship between unfinished, rough performance and a staging of (perceived) vulnerability.

However, I also followed the hunch I had as a researcher and artist that the anxiety that accompanied this methodological challenge was characteristic of the slow violence of bureaucratic forms of storytelling where there is no margin for error; the burden of proof becomes a chokehold. I took proportionate creative risk in playing with failure and experimentation, trusting both my own research process as well as a

continual preparedness to venture in and out of the research spiral, assessing and reassessing each step as it came. Whilst I was keen not to represent refugees through a discourse of vulnerability and voicelessness, I remained acutely aware of the external factors constraining their voices from being heard. This understanding of how contingency and constraint had the potential to cloud the expression of my collaborators is, I argue, key to dislocating and critiquing any comfort, familiarity or ease found in artistic encounters that reproduce institutional dynamics.

Through a methodology designed to listen differently to refugees, beyond scientific approaches as well as neither pathologising or romanticising, I explored what it means to encounter each other in a dialogic space. What this also entails is resisting tropes of equivalence with refugee experience on behalf of the non-refugee audience member or reader of my research. The stance I take here borrows influence from Patti Lather, who proposes that research which interrogates and invites distance between reader and 'subject' may contribute to 'refusing the liberal embrace of empathy that reduces otherness to sameness… declining the too easy to possess knowledge and casting doubt on our capacity to know' (2000, p.19). These issues are written into the politics of the research; as Afolabi questions: 'How does the political and the pedagogical affect knowledge production and dissemination and its control?' (2021, p.355). As I consider how knowledge production emerged through this research I ask: how do borders become written into performance-making processes? How can uneven relationships between refugee and non-refugee artists become unsettled?

In this chapter, I have laid out the methodological cornerstones of my unfolding practice research, which is itself an exploration of methodology. It has not been my intention to describe a neat or even a processual approach, but rather to illuminate

the lived conditions inside and outside the creative spaces the research has occupied, and how this connects to my methodological approach. I have described the occurrences around the margins of my research as the *stuff around the edges*, and have highlighted how they have informed the development of my practice. Additionally, I have explored how radical hope has informed my methodology, offering new and alternative temporalities to those that present extended waiting. In these contexts, creative expression can become a meaningful form of engagement. Drawing on research models that incorporate friendship as method I have explored the continuous ethical demand of performing self through a lens of care, and how radical reciprocity might emerge through these processes as a contestation to the slow violence faced by those living within the asylum system.

By introducing some of the conversations I have had during the research, more of which are to follow in subsequent chapters, I aim to reflect on ethical questions posed in the field, for example, as Carolyn Ellis enquires: 'how do we honour our relational responsibilities yet present our lives in a complex and truthful way for readers?' (2007, p.14). Key to addressing this question is understanding the value of friendship as a dynamic component of the research methodology I have initiated, bringing with it openness, trust and mutual respect and contingency. When the unexpected and life-changing global circumstances of the pandemic occurred in March 2020 and rendered my planning impossible, I grappled with the task of reconceptualising my project activities to work more expansively, and with a greater number of people, in alternative ways. The most respectful decision for me to make, as a friend first and researcher second, was to deeply understand the precarity precipitated by the pandemic, which had a varied impact on my initial collaborators' abilities to join me in the next phase of my research. Following my own guidance, I had to *hold on tightly and let go lightly*.

Chapter Three

Interruptions on/offstage: interconnected care and co-responsibility in artistic processes with refugee performers

All the beds I have slept in is documented on pages 3-15 of my collection of practice, which can be found using this link: https://www.canva.com/design/DAGAOeJtviQ/Cs9_czoifPOSnMQxU8y0Cw/view?utm_content=DAGAOeJtviQ&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=editor . I make reference to specific pages throughout, and suggest you watch the recording on page 8 either at the start or the end

Introduction to 'All the beds I have slept in'

In this chapter, I examine my first practice research project, the development of a performance called *All the beds I have slept in,* exploring how this creative process moved forward my thinking around the function of care within my inquiry. In doing so, I interrogate how I developed a practice in which elements of care within the lives of my collaborators shaped and formed my artistic process. The methodological approach I laid out in the previous chapter enabled me not only to use performance to re-animate and restage interconnected care but also to explore how co-responsibility and values of solidarity and friendship could be used to shape the performance of life narratives, leading to new insight about the use of lived experience when creating performance with refugees. Through reflecting on several critical instances, or turning points, in my first practical project, I reveal what a performance approach rooted in solidarity and care might look like.

There are four central 'characters' in this chapter, Goitom Fesshaye, Emirjon Hoxhaj, Tewodros Aregawe and Syed Haleem Najibi, who worked with me as actor-

collaborators (and have already featured earlier in this thesis). During the time I developed this first practice research project, they were members of Phosphoros, and all came to the UK as unaccompanied minor refugees. Alongside this, our connections with each other overlap. I was one of the first professionals Emirjon came into contact with on his arrival to the UK from Albania in 2015, when he came to live in one of the two supported accommodations I managed; the other housed Goitom, from Eritrea, and I became the 'key worker' for both young men, providing holistic support with education, health and independence as they adjusted to a new country. Since moving on from those houses, my role has shifted and we have continued to be close. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Syed, though unconnected to the housing project, was also one of Phosphoros' original members, and is also my husband. Tewodros (or Teddy), from Eritrea and Ethiopia, discovered Phosphoros on the social media platform Facebook in 2016 and then joined the company. The five of us knew each other very well, and I am aware of the privilege I had as a researcher being able to communicate candidly with my collaborators.

These interpersonal relationships may appear somewhat unusual for a research context, and it is therefore somewhat redundant to claim a sense of distance from my research inquiry. Rather than being complacent about this point, I have considered how to retain ethical rigour and critical engagement with the research, and some of these reflections emerge in this chapter. However, in so far as I interrogated the relationship between practice-led research and the heartbeat of the theatre company I am part of, I recognised the tension and then embraced it and continued with my inquiry as I began to feel, as I will discuss in this chapter, a clear sense of what I was discovering about the performance of life narratives with refugees.

My approach to this project was framed by my overall research questions, which consider how performance practice can create new representations of unaccompanied minor experience beyond reductive constructions in public and media discourse. My inquiry raises the question of who speaks about refugees, in what way, how, and - importantly - for whom. Due to the specific set of circumstances underpinning this research (by which I mean my connection with Phosphoros), I was able to work closely with emerging artists who had lived experience of being unaccompanied minors *and* had existing arts practices, having been members of Phosphoros for two to three years. The foundational work undertaken together before my research project influenced the journey the practice took, which would not have been possible without this pre-existing partnership. However, my practice research took these working relationships in new and original directions, not least because I was keen to explore different forms of collaboration in response to my research inquiry. Having engaged with extant scholarship in performance and migration studies that critiques hegemonic representations of refugees I wanted to develop performance that rejected fixed knowledge of what refugee narratives might be. The first practical project, which is the subject of this chapter, was an opportunity to creatively intervene in these debates.

The project consisted of a seven-day devising process in August 2019, resulting in a twenty-five-minute work-in-progress performance entitled *All the beds I have slept in* that was performed at 'Collisions', the annual practice research festival held at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in September 2019. I worked with Emirjon, Goitom, Syed and Tewodros as well as three members of Phosphoros' creative team: Dawn Harrison, Juliet Styles and Pavlos Christodoulou, who came into the process at various points to contribute dramaturgically and practically. While the parameters of the project were familiar; I was, after all, collaborating with actors I

had worked with before, the thematic area of exploration and the methodology of the creative process was developed in innovative ways, reflecting the new dialogue we were having and my extended engagement with the theoretical discourses underpinning my research. In this way, my first practice experiment contained within it an intersection of the past and present work of Phosphoros in ways that oscillated between the productive, tense and unfamiliar. Documentation of the process of making *All the beds I have slept in* can be found on pages 2-6 of my collection of practice, which contextualise the recording of the piece (page 7) and full script (pages 8-13).

A key thematic I explore in this chapter is the relationship between the performer and the performed, specifically in relation to staging refugee lived experience. In *Theatre of Real People*, Ulrike Garde and Meg Mumford discuss the way the aesthetic of the "real" functions to 'invite fresh ways of perceiving diverse and unfamiliar people' (2016, p.4), suggesting that destabilising the notion of authenticity is what achieves this, reminding audiences that the real is an ambiguous phenomenon. Phosphoros has been playfully disruptive in how it deals with possible audience expectations of watching theatre performed by refugees, speaking both directly and obliquely to institutional processes of testifying, and the dominance of the Western gaze on migrant others that tends to collapse into exoticism. The ways the company describes its relationship to the "authentic" makes reference knowingly to the commodification of asylum seekers' "truth", and, subversively, sets up the actors as gatekeepers of this information, unapologetic that the stories they tell are unfinished, incomplete, unresolved.

As I have already highlighted, Phosphoros uses dramaturgies of the real to make clear to the audience that the performance is real, but also fictional: true or nearly true'

(Phosphoros Theatre 2016). In this way, Phosphoros rejects an uncritical approach to telling refugee stories, yet refuses to make testimonial narratives straightforwardly comprehensible. Caroline Wake raises pertinent critique of the use of testimonial performance and theatre of the real, commenting on the ethical pitfalls of soliciting testimony which can 'reinjure refugees either because they have already told their story too many times and/or they have never told it on their own terms' (2019). In the context of my practice research, rather than collapsing into a power dynamic where I, the 'citizen-artist', attempted to bestow audibility and visibility onto refugee-participants, as critiqued by Wake, I was developing new work with existing collaborators who were paid, emerging performers with almost a hundred performances under their belts. In this sense, to borrow Wake's terms, they were not voiceless, nor faceless, but ready and familiar with drawing on their lived experience as part of a collaborative practice.

As I commenced my practice research I was interested in continuing to explore this approach to performing refugee identity, and, given the lack of representation within British theatre of refugee life narratives told by those with lived experience, I recognised the importance of finding ways to platform their voices. Furthermore, I listened to the reflections from my collaborators about what they wanted to achieve during the work we undertook together, and these are transcribed on page 5 of my documentation. Their responses display a combination of determination ('we think that unaccompanied minors are important'; 'we tell our stories how we want to'); ambivalence ('if not us, then who?'); and an awareness of their own journeys as artists ('now we can control the stage, not like 2015 when we started'). This final comment reflects a shift in power dynamic from participant to maker that highlights the legacy of their previous work with Phosphoros, and is a reminder that whilst they identified feeling this sense of ownership at the start of my project, a sense of equity

is not inevitable nor quickly achieved. Hence, the project began with a shared motivation to use the lived experience of themselves and their friends as a basis for social change.

A key limitation I initially faced in the practice was wanting my collaborators to shift from actors to actor-devisors, deepening our collaboration by involving them in all stages of dramaturgical and editorial decision making. I did, however, feel apprehensive about the gaps in our collective experience. Whilst I reflect continually about not having forced migration experience, I was unsure to what extent my collaborators would consider their lack of theatre-making experience as a potential limitation. Although these experiences are different, I highlight them to show the diverse forms of knowledge each person brought to the process. Early on I sensed frustration from one of the performers who was unsure why we had not arrived at the *story* quick enough, and while I valued an iterative approach, others grew impatient with the lack of immediate discoveries. A turning point came after four days of Research and Development when, during a reflective discussion, someone suggested the play should be about the process of making the play. Whilst this meta-theatrical structure had potential, I felt it emerged from frustration with our stalled progress, offering a way to break the cycle. This moment prompted me to reconsider my assumptions about equitable collaboration. I realised that, for some, the creative process provided a rare space in often hectic lives where they didn't feel the need to control every decision to feel fully engaged as part of the group that held values of care, collaboration and authorship simultaneously.

The dramaturgical focus on authorship continued to leave imprints on the development of *All the beds I have slept in*, though my primary concern was to examine the relationships between the structural, creative and methodological

conditions inside and outside the creative process, and consider how this manifested in performance through a politics of care. Another key theme which shaped and informed this project was masculinity under pressure, reflective of the gendered migration pattern of unaccompanied minors who are predominantly young men. As I outlined in the Introduction, unaccompanied minor young men are bound by the contradictory risky and protective categories of maleness and childhood, and it is therefore critical to adopt a gender lens in my critical analysis here.

At this point, I suggest referring to page 7 of my documentation and watching the twenty-nine-minute recording of *All the beds I have slept in*, and/or reading the script on pages 8-13, ahead of engaging with my subsequent analysis.

Ultra-relational practice rooted in informed solidarity

As discussed already in this thesis, I am acutely aware that the notion of “care” has existing connotations for current and former unaccompanied minors, who have experienced the ‘care system’ and later become ‘care leavers’. Sylvan Baker and Maggie Inchley, discussing their verbatim work with care-experienced young people, observe the ‘ugliness’ of care in relation to the experiences of those living within the state care system. They describe the sense of dehumanisation felt through being erased by a ‘jargon of care’; of being ‘vulnerable’, ‘hard to reach’ or ‘non-compliant’ (2020, p.178-9). By structuring their research dialogically to engage with care-experienced young people as co-researchers rather than ‘informants’ or ‘subjects’, and using verbatim practices to ensure their voices and words were centred, Baker and Inchley aim to subvert uneven power dynamics present in traditional research processes. Whilst I am cautious not to make invisible the different power relations present within the practice I have developed relating to my

own structural and institutional capital, I locate my work within this same lineage of ethics that informed Baker and Inchley's practice-led research.

As outlined in the previous chapter, reflective approaches such as Taiwo Afolabi's 'ethical questioning' frame how I consider intricately the ethical dimensions of this work, as a non-refugee artist and researcher. Though he offers questions as points of departure, several directly apply to my project as I reflect retrospectively:

- How can we rethink notions such as: vulnerability, partnership, participation, accountability, and the ethics of witnessing in socially engaged arts practice?
- What processes and methods can address power imbalance and, in the process decolonise knowledge production?
- How does the practitioner's lived experience inform the practice?
- What's the practitioner's relationship to the social issues or subject of inquiry?
- Who is the author of the collective knowledge and experience?
- How are the community recognised and positioned to control their knowledge?

(Afolabi 2021, p.354-5).

I would suggest the importance of mutual respect when creating and rehearsing work is a thematic that underpins these different imperatives. In turn, they respond to an awareness of the need to continually reflect on the relational quality of the space established, as part of an ongoing feedback loop. I approach the practice with values of reciprocity and exchange. In relation to cultural work with displaced communities, Alison Jeffers describes the relationship between host and guest as a potential threat; she references postcolonial theorist Mireille Rosello's description of the 'uncomfortable and sometimes painful possibility of being changed by the other' (Rosello 2001, p.176 in Jeffers 2012, p.51). The notion of being *changed* by an engagement with refugees resonates with my reading of Lilie Chouliaraki's work around spectatorship, whereby dominant practices of assimilating the suffering of others into a comparison of the self are challenged as the possibility of theatre as a

form of representation regulates our ‘affective proximity and contemplative distance from vulnerable others’ (2013, p.192). Thus, I resist any notion of remaining *static* as a researcher in the context of creative, political, social and personal change relating to the experiences of those who take part in my PhD project. We (myself and the actors) face change iteratively, separately and together.

I draw here on ‘friendship as method’, defined in my Introduction as a key influence in my approach to performance making. Within friendship as method, Tillmann-Healy argues, radical reciprocity may emerge, as the researcher looks at a collective ‘us’ rather than taking an outsider position on studying ‘them’ (2003). In the context of migration, relationships formed within cultural work with refugees is a topic occasionally discussed (see Herz 2018; Scheibelhofer 2017; Allsopp and Chase 2020), but often scholarship in this area focuses on cross-directional relationships between refugee participants and non-refugee practitioners; rather than nuanced dynamics that might problematise the boundaries between personal and professional commonly upheld, left open to critique. In the next section, I examine how the processual development of the practice and the adoption of cyclical care amongst and across refugee communities more broadly shaped the formation of this practice.

Caring for strangers and identifying legacy

Around the time of *All the beds I have slept in*, myself and my collaborators were having dinner with my parents, and the conversation turned to me leaving home at the age of eighteen, prompting deep regret and sympathy from my refugee colleagues. When I clarified that I left out of choice to go to university their responses shifted into confusion: ‘why would you *choose* to leave your parents?’ Since finding out about my departure from my childhood home my colleagues would frequently accuse my parents of “disowning” me, much to the amusement of

everyone (my parents included). In these exchanges, all of us would be as bemused as each other as stark cultural differences in familial commitment and kinship draw a confusing comparison with the lived experience of young adults forcibly displaced as separated children. I draw attention to this friendly teasing for two reasons: firstly, to set up the context for why domesticity, home, bedrooms and beds became such a prominent theme in this project, and also to highlight the myriad ways in which the practice I engage with during my PhD research acts as a space where understandings of family, care and hospitality are renegotiated, problematised and reimagined again and again. Thus, it was through one of the actor's chance encounter with two refugee strangers that I saw a symmetry between the aims of my practice research and the conditions in which it existed. As a result, my understanding of strangerness (see Ahmed 2000), empathy and allyship were challenged, and together with my collaborators we, through the practice, named how gestures of kindness become echoes of the encounters of care and solicitude that have happened before. Further, in articulating the following chain of events within this thesis I am consciously attending to *the stuff on the edges* of the research, and making visible the myriad ways my dialogic process unfolded.

As I compiled preparatory materials for the first phase of the practice research, in the summer of 2019, Phosphoros was in the middle of touring the show *Pizza Shop Heroes*. The company had been in the middle of a technical rehearsal at Tara Theatre in South London when one of the actors, Tewodros, called to say he had been delayed because he had happened upon two destitute men who urgently needed help. Walking through a busy London train station, Tewodros had seen the men looking confused and ill at ease so he moved closer, with the hunch that they, like him, were *Habesha* (people of Eritrean and Ethiopia). Indeed, the two men had recently arrived in the UK and did not know what they needed to do to secure

accommodation or support. Tewodros had an instinct that these two men shared an experience with him. When I asked him later, he said: 'I simply knew. I can simply identify any Habesha I see in the street…' He continued: 'it's blood, Kate. When you see your own people something inside you will tell you – it clicks' (Tewodros 2019). As the rest of the company continued to prepare for the evening's performance, Tewodros spoke with the men, gave them some cash and brought them coffee, and then, knowing that (arguably) the most urgent thing for a newly arrived migrant to do is to enter the immigration system[24], directed them to the Home Office to apply for asylum. He apologised for not being able to support them more (he was an actor and needed to perform in his play!) and gave them his phone number in case they needed it later. When he finally arrived at the theatre he was met with further advice from us, before getting ready to go onstage.

The urgent and practical needs of asylum seekers are seldom spoken about in abstract, romanticised or euphemistic terms in the context of Phosphoros, and I have adopted a similar approach throughout the articulation of this research. I pitch this attitude against humanitarian discourses, including those which captured the British public's imagination in the aftermath of the "refugee crisis in Europe". British charity Help Refugees' *Choose Love* campaign is an example of feel-good altruism in its use of an all-encompassing slogan that is at once affecting yet makes possible disengagement from the harsh reality of life within the UK's immigration system[25]. This arguably exemplifies the marketisation of humanitarianism, described as 'philanthro-capitalism' (see Chuang 2015; Parry-Davies 2022), which ultimately reproduces paternalistic relationships between the global north and south, and sees

[24] Guidance aimed at asylum seekers from campaigning organisation Right To Remain states: 'the Home Office expect people to claim asylum immediately on entry to the UK. If you do not do this, the Home Office will use this to argue you are not really in danger.' (Right to Remain 2020)
[25] 'Help Refugees' was rebranded as 'Choose Love' in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, and explained this 'unifying name more accurately reflects the change we want to see in the world' (Choose Love 2020)

action as inward facing, focussed on the self, rather than the other[26]. Correlatively care ethics have sought to articulate the interconnections between people somewhat differently. I return to Tronto's theorising of care, and her discussion on responsiveness in relation to vulnerability, arguing against the interchangeability of people. Rather than upholding notions of sameness through taking up the other's position we build on their own experience of the self. Thus, as Tronto claims, 'one is engaged from the standpoint of the other, but not simply by presuming that the other is exactly like the self.' (1993, p.136). The knowledge within our rehearsal room, both personal and professional and the intersections in between, meant we collectively had experience of the bureaucracies and intricacies of the immigration process. As I listened and contributed to the company discussion on what steps we thought Tewodros should take I noticed a change of register away from the traumatic and towards practical considerations. In other words, it went without saying that these men were scared, exhausted and potentially traumatised and that they were victims of a hostile immigration system that is unjust. It was time for pragmatism; and for action.

Later that evening, the two men got back in touch with Tewodros, who encouraged them to stay the night on his sofa. He and I spoke on the phone the next morning about the next steps he could take, and he ended up supporting the men to access accommodation and advocacy services from the Refugee Council. Tewodros didn't stay in touch with the men, but the ultra-relational encounter he found himself at the centre of became a frequent point of reference during our creative process when we began working on my research inquiry a few weeks later. I was struck by Tewodros' responsiveness and attentiveness to the possibility of hospitality, and reflected on how this instance resonated with my engagement with care aesthetics,

[26] See Chouliaraki (2013) for more discussion on this topic

and intersections between performance and care. The ‘Circle of Care’, described by Suzy Willson, director of Performing Medicine, and Peter Jaye, emergency medicine consultant, is relevant here. It draws attention to how attentiveness to another’s needs and reciprocity can inform practice and how practical gestures of caring, such as non-verbal communication and ‘understanding the perspectives and contexts of others’ can strengthen an empathetic approach to healthcare that incorporates compassion. Willson and Jaye observe central elements of performance structure the Circle of Care, namely the ‘constant acknowledgement of the relationship between your own experience and the experience of others’ (2017, p.643), and this maps directly onto my unfolding practice. I began to understand Tewodros’ actions as gestures that bear the imprint of help he had previously received himself on his own “journey” (in many senses of the word). The exposure afforded to me throughout my research process to daily experiences such as Tewodros and the strangers inform how I engage with migration discourse and as the interplay between life as an artist and life as a refugee became put under pressure as we developed our creative work together. I found myself thinking further about how these intersections related to solidarity and care.

Tewodros’ decision to approach the men, even though they were strangers, was based on a hunch, Storytelling theorist Michael Jackson (2002) refers to the ‘unabridged gap’ between refugees and non-refugees, and this helps contextualise why Tewodros ‘simply knew’ he must intervene. Jackson’s description of a refugee’s experience of arrival, as follows, correlates with my own imagination of the experience Tewodros witnessed:

> To find oneself alone in an unfamiliar neighbourhood is to be overwhelmed by the dread of speechlessness and the panic of flight. Moreover, because one’s own face, one’s own language, and one’s own gestures are not mirrored in the world around one, one becomes invisible. People stare at you or look right through you. You feel exposed and alone (2002, p.71).

The sense of helplessness of standing in a train station not knowing what to do or where to go is somewhat lower in stakes than other situations of flight, but nonetheless, I imagine it as a stressful, risky situation that encompasses the 'dread of speechlessness' described by Jackson, and reveals the pervasive consequences of slow violence the asylum system and its lack of hospitality. In offering help, Tewodros' actions rethought refugee subjectivity in relation to solidarity. By opening up his home to the strangers, he resisted the dissonance between public and private space, stretching what gestures of welcome can look like. One consequence of an over-emphasis on non-refugees as caregivers, advocates, practitioners or allies, and refugees solely as receivers of care, is that the relationships formed across and within refugee communities are underexplored, and it is this concept that I became interested in illuminating further in the practice we were developing.

Tewodros explained that his decision to help the strangers was impacted by his inability to repay the help he had received himself in his own past. He didn't expect anything from the two men he had met, nor envisaged keeping in contact with them, but felt confident that one day when they had the means they too would step in to support someone in need. Goitom, one of the actors in the room, described this as 'legacy', and this became a key element in my thinking through practice. The potential for care to have a lasting impact reminds me of Tronto's argument that care should be conceptualised as a practice, rather than disposition or emotion (1993, p.119). When Goitom identified Tewodros' actions as 'legacy' he was acknowledging his role in a support system that is complex and which can be self-sustaining. I began to think about how my developing performance practice might foreground and amplify these collective experiences, and through doing so what I might learn about solidarity and interdependence.

When we started exploring these ideas creatively in the studio context, I was curious about whether this was simply an individual experience of Tewodros or resonant of something shared, so I asked my four collaborators to think about other times they had provided support for peers, friends or strangers. Syed joined Tewodros in being candid with sharing anecdotes, and they reflected on generosity in terms of cash, hospitality and resources that I noted extended beyond the remit of the majority of my own friendships. Goitom and Emirjon, however, struggled to offer examples of how they had offered similar help. Surprised by this, I asked how often they translate from Tigrinya[27] or Albanian respectively for friends over the phone or in person. 'Oh, all the time', Goitom told me, revealing that weeks before when he had been tasked with street flyering for Phosphoros at the Edinburgh Fringe he had in fact spent 90 minutes sitting in a coffee shop translating over the phone for a friend attending an appointment at the job centre in London. Both Goitom and Emirjon saw this labour as unremarkable, and I found myself curious about the invisible help that goes on within the (current and former) unaccompanied community as young people try to retain a sense of control over their own lives, not least because of the gaps and lapses in support from state care structures.

Further, I wondered how these self-sustaining forms of care could inform a performance practice seeking to represent their lived experience. In Performing Care (2020), Amanda Stuart Fisher considers how performance provokes a rethinking of how caring encounters operate within dynamics of power and structural inequality, observing that care opens up 'new ways of understanding the relationships of dependency and mutual support that make performing possible' (p.66). The concept of care as self-sustaining was becoming central to my overall inquiry, and with it

[27] Tigrinya is an Ethiopian Semitic language spoken in Eritrea and Ethiopia

raised original provocations around allyship, friendship and solidarity. Importantly, it also required a tentative approach, in order not to reproduce discourses of vulnerability already underscored within the community I am committed to representing in respectful ways. I draw on Tronto here, who deconstructs how "neediness" is conceptualised as lacking autonomy, power and capability, thus 'the result that one way in which we socially construct those who need care is to think of them as pitiful because they require help' (1993, p.120). Perhaps the reluctance of Goitom and Emirjon to identify their role as care-givers highlights an uncomfortableness with seeing friends and peers as vulnerable, which raises interesting questions about how permeable the boundary is - or can feel - between the helper and the helped. Further, it raises the question of how one sees and understands vulnerability and who has the right to this mode of being. As I discuss how personal anecdotes influenced our collaborative creative process, I also heed caution about the ease at which discourse becomes exclusionary. By making visible these mutual modes of caring, I felt it might also open up the possibility for these young men to become more visible, and less othered, by society.

Working through these ideas became a process of trying to think through the modes of spectatorship I wanted the practice to establish, that would stage a dialogue with the ideas around care I was also starting to articulate. As my collaborators began to identify, perform, share and adapt stories, the importance of solidarity became more visible. As a result, the collective authorship of autobiographical narratives was becoming more purposeful and engaged within this practice research project. A brief discussion exercise at the start of the process captured how my collaborators were associating feeling with action. I offered four prompts, inspired by live artist Bryony Kimmings discussing her devising method on social media: *I want to talk about; I want to use; I want to reveal;* and *I want the audience to feel* (Kimmings 2019) The

last response drew parallels with Smith and Schaffer's discussion around empathic identification, whereby stories of difference are recuperated into 'more familiar frameworks of meaning', enabling witnesses to 'dispel the fear of otherness by containing it' (2004, p.25). Reflecting on the affective potential of human rights narratives on various publics, and the universalising risk they entail, Schaffer and Smith suggest that 'sometimes stories told by activists are collapsed into the politics of the struggle' (p.64). I was interested in how the practice might critically engage with these ideas, given that the actors discussed a desire for the audience to feel as they did. Goitom wanted our piece to encourage the audience to 'tell their friends what we feel like', whereas for Syed it would manifest change if they were 'motivated, angered, provoked'. Joining this activity was Phosphoros' co-Artistic Director Juliet, who shared a hope that the audience feels 'engaged, connected and implicated'. I share more of these responses on page 4 of my documentation.

These overlapping intentions were realised in how Tewodros' experience was explored through performance, not through his own voice, but Emirjon's. This moment was inspired by an improvisation Emirjon and Goitom had been supported to develop where they had read out facts and the audience had to guess whether they related to Albania or Eritrea. I was drawn to the jovial manner in which Emirjon had performed this, reminiscent of a pub quiz host. I wondered whether this format could accommodate Tewodros' story and our subsequent engagement with it, with Emirjon representing the collective voice of the group, speaking beyond his own experience to something shared. The resulting dialogue we created went like this, taken from scene 10:

EMIRJON: You're in the middle of Victoria station and you see two men speaking your language. You can tell they're new here, and they're looking lost. What do you do?

A) Avoid eye contact, and zip up your jacket so they can't see your country's football shirt. They'll never

know you speak their language.

B) Buy them a coffee and a train ticket to the Home Office in Croydon.

C) *Take* them to the Home Office in Croydon and translate for them at reception.

D) Invite them back to your house –
Make them a lovely dinner while they have a bath –
Let them use your laptop ALL evening –
Give them your comfy bed while you sleep on the sofa.
Take them to the Refugee Council to find emergency Accommodation.
Give them twenty pounds as you wave goodbye.

What would you do?

In this moment of performance, a playful relationship is set up with the audience, as Emirjon invites them to feel how he feels. When Emirjon presents his provocation, the audience is at once faced with a refugee performer who represents both the suffering stranger in the train station *and* the person who helps. The details offered (the T-shirt with the national football team, the specificity of the care given) provide a sense of the 'authentic', yet the mode in which the scenario is offered remains hypothetical and abstracted, therefore determining not only what has happened in the past but what could happen in the future, and what they could do. By disrupting the audience's gaze to point inward, the consumption of suffering is rethought to arouse implication and potential action rather than pity. Though fictionalised, the detail Emirjon offers makes the encounter specific, rather than a universal depiction of suffering. As the audience's gaze is momentarily shifted onto their own imagined response, there may be a possibility for examining not only their own desires, reluctance or ambivalence towards the ask, but also the assumptions made about what the actors would do, or did. Further, they may consider what they, the spectators, would and wouldn't do if confronted with the same situation.

I am reminded here of Julie Salverson's discussion of transgressive storytelling and the 'aesthetics of injury' that can emerge in refugee performance. Salverson reflects on a performance project she led in 1993 with a group of refugees living in Canada, called *Are all the birds in Canada the same?* which aimed to educate Canadian audiences and problematise the category of 'refugee'. She describes the challenge faced by theatre practitioners to 'imagine a theatre and a pedagogy that recasts the script of injury, risking a freedom which sets the terms for social existence rather than rebelling against it' (1999), and encourages artists and researchers to consider issues of identification, implication, and responsibility. In the video footage she describes, featuring refugee participants in interview style segments alongside satirical portrayals of well-intentioned but clumsy and self-centred activists, she argues 'they invite an encounter that does not dismiss empathy, but rather challenges the terms on which it is negotiated' (1999).

I argue that *All the beds I have slept in* achieved a similar effect, in that it implicated the audience as active witnesses and invited them to listen to refugee voices through a different register, thereby troubling notions of the refugee life story. Salverson offers provocations in relation to performance that testifies, speaking to the binary ways refugees and citizens are constructed, with 'refugee as victim' and 'artist/activist as rescuer'. In *Are the birds in Canada the same?* she argues, the Canadian audience were unable to meaningfully listen to the refugee narratives because of the artistic team's reluctance to portray ''one' 'personal' 'story'', and, accordingly, they were 'caught up in what they don't like about portrayals of *themselves* and the proximal relations implied in those portrayals' (1999). In *All the beds I have slept in*, possible refugee subjectivities are reimagined through emphasising their identity as artists; as they occupy the stage as actors *and* refugees simultaneously. A deliberate dramaturgical decision I made that emphasises

these nuances and perhaps responds to Salverson's critique, is the limited inclusion of figures of authority driving the narrative, which forms a deliberate counterpoint to the ways refugee stories are usually told, and shifts the balance of who speaks for whom.

Instead, refugees are positioned as potential caregivers. When I presented Emirjon with the script extract above, his initial instinct was to perform with a sense of confrontation and judgement, as if making a point to the audience about what the *right* answer was. This hadn't been my intention when suggesting the idea; instead, I wanted to explore how a refugee could be repositioned as a helper, in doing so thinking anew how care is held within refugee communities. I was interested in how an audience may make sense of the question posed, and how they might understand the expression of everyday solidarity as potentially transgressive. As I have detailed in this section, thinking through the potentiality of the work has been central to my methodology, responding to critical instances, or interruptions, like Tewodros' chance encounter. As this part of the work saw care and solidarity emerge as key themes, it was the exploration of a very different story that interrupted how I understood border politics in collision with my practice research.

Listening differently to stories about survival

I'd now like to move on to explore a moment during the development of *All the beds I have slept in* that exemplifies the unsettling and powerful nature of self-authorship and the challenges it presented me with as a theatre maker. As discussed in detail in Chapter One, refugees are subjected to ongoing narrativisation of their "stories", either by the various interpreters who rearticulate their experiences into comprehensive accounts, or through their own testimony which they must continually narrate in line with state border control, which, as April Shemak argues, becomes the

required mode of discursive engagement, likening it to ‘passwords, shibboleths, watchwords’ (2010, p.18). Accordingly, Shemak notes, asylum narratives and human rights discourses are ‘inherently literary because of their narratological elements’ (p.35), which affords them narrative authority in their recognisability. In other words, the futures of refugees are determined by the kind of story they can present and how they tell it. The story I will recount here again refers to Tewodros, this time describing his closest moment to death: crossing the Mediterranean sea in a dinghy and only making it to shore after being rescued by a larger boat, facilitated by an elusive and benevolent figure. As I will discuss, an interruption to this story led me to key insights about how I wanted to embed self-authorship within the theatre-making process, and this intersected with navigating borders appearing in my research process and troubling notions of perceived authenticity.

Tewodros’ story started on the Mediterranean s ea, with him hoping to get far enough away from Libya to escape the torturous prisons he had fled (see Medecins Sans Frontieres 2019). He told the whole company this story as part of a wider discussion where we worked together to generate ideas. I wrote down notes, and he clarified the details to me on the phone soon after. His story began on a boat: ‘There were more than 120 people. The boat was seven metres long, and it was pumped plastic with different colours – some silver, some orange’. He was joined by other refugees from Syria, Tunisia, and, like him, from East Africa. Someone tried to call the coastguard staff to seek safe entrance at the port of Sicily, but these systems do not always function to protect. Tewodros was critical of the attitude of the coastguards: ‘Sometimes the person doesn’t pick up. I think intentionally, or maybe they are too busy. But maybe they just don’t want to help’ (Tewodros 2019). There is much critique of the Italian coastguard system, significantly in relation to the deaths of 268 people (at least sixty children) who sank aboard a vessel off the coast of Italy

in 2013 (Perrone 2019), and Cox has described the ‘maritime dramaturgies of migration’ produced through representing these experiences (2023, p.579). As Tewodros crossed the sea, the driver of the boat called another number, keeping his phone dry from the waves in a plastic bag, hoping to get hold of a man they know as *Abba Mussie*. Tewodros’ memory was fragmented but also lucid:

> Abba Mussie speaks for the Italian government. I don’t actually know who he is, whether he works for the government. I think he does. We only know his voice. Everyone knows about him – he’s well known amongst people who come on this journey. Abba Mussie speaks 6 or 7 languages – Tigrinya, Amharic, Arabic, English… Most people don’t speak English so he helps. Abba Mussie asks lots of questions. ‘Are there any pregnant women? Any kids?’ He asks for details – how many people, the colour of the boat, and who is on board.
>
> I didn’t speak to him – only the driver does.
>
> After the call, you wait for 10 minutes and then the people come in a bigger boat, or a helicopter like an aeroplane. One by one they pick you out of the small boat and put you in the bigger boat, and it takes you to Lampedusa or Sicily (Tewodros 2019)

As we sat in a rehearsal room and listened to Tewodros’ testimony, Goitom shared that *he too* had Abba Mussie to thank for his safe passage. The two men, both from East Africa, were sure that we must include this story in the show we were trying to create because it would speak directly to those who had made the same journey as them, and recognise their experience too; they identified the power of shared memory within a disparate community. They reiterated that the identity of Abba Mussie remained unknown to them: ‘No one knows Abba Mussie by face – you don’t actually see him. His name is passed around. You know that if you need help you call that number. You call Abba Mussie.’ Despite the enigmatic nature of this figure (as opposed to any other humanitarian worker they had encountered fleetingly before), neither Tewodros nor Goitom had tried to work out who this man was, they both simply described him as an ‘angel’ who saved their lives. They suggested that ‘Abba Mussie’ could in fact have been five or ten different men, and ‘Abba Mussie’ may not

have even been his real name. I was fascinated by this story that had never emerged in any other explorative work we had done together, yet seemed so monumental.

After the session, we searched online to see if this *Abba Mussie* was linked in any way to the Italian coastguard system, and another colleague, Pavlos, shared a discovery the next morning. In fact, many people knew Abba Mussie ‘by face’, as he had been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2015. His name is Father Abba Mussie Zerai, and he is an Eritrean priest living in Switzerland. He answers ‘distress calls’ throughout day and night from desperate migrants who have found his phone number ‘scrawled across the wall in a Libyan detention centre’. Tewodros and Goitom looked at a photograph of Father Abba Mussie Zerai and they were faced with the stranger that had saved them. Zerai is quoted in NBC saying ‘why am I activist? Because I say these people [are] like me’ (Burke 2015). As I watched Tewodros and Goitom’s amazement as they looked back at an Eritrean elder I wondered how this new information – an interruption to their narrative – might impact their relationship to their imagined Abba Mussie and their experience of salvation, and which version we would explore onstage, if any.

The dramaturgical approach I facilitated following the emergence of the Abba Mussie story engaged with both the ethics and aesthetics involved in performing the self. I wanted to revisit a performance technique familiar to my collaborators, due to being a common characteristic of Phosphoros' theatrical style: actors collectively sharing the narration of a singular story as a way of generating dynamic distance from individual testimony. In this instance, I was keen to explore how the performance could respond to and stage the actors’ developing interest in speaking beyond their own experience and recognising the potential for recognition from a future audience. The epic and exceptional details we had discovered were inspiring and evocative of a

grand - yet invisible - gesture of solidarity that excited me as a theatre-maker. As I read more about Father Abba Mussie Zerai I thought about how some of the facts about the scale of his intervention could be woven into the narrative; how far his quiet promise of help had travelled - to Indonesia and Cambodia (and now a rehearsal room in London). However, I realised that shifting focus in this way would detract from the mythic status this man had held in the minds of Tewodros and Goitom for several years. When Tewodros had been on the boat in the dark, black water, alone but for 120 others, it had not occurred to him to think about the man behind the phone. This man had become an abstract figure, a sort of divine intervention that could transcend the cynical exchanges of remunerated help which had betrayed him and his fellow passengers. Abba Mussie represented hope.

Collectively then we decided to tell the version as Tewodros remembered it, bringing the other actors in to share the telling of the story, speaking beyond their own experiences as they enacted collective solidarity and nodded to the potential recognition of audience members. The four actors use a bed frame as a dinghy and the binary of self and other is troubled as they reflect on hierarchies of human suffering as a collective, staging a political moment of solidarity with each other, those who are still in transit, and those who came before. The following dialogue is taken from Scene 8:

EMIRJON: And I don't know how old he is, or what he looks like, he is just a voice.

GOITOM: He is speaking, shush…

SYED: But all voices are not the same. Some do not see us as equal, human. Some do not even pick up the phone.

TEWODROS: Does he know what he does for us? The difference he makes? That he saved my life?

ALL: (IN OWN LANGUAGES) This is Abba Mussie. How can I

help?

TEWODROS: (ENGLISH) This is Abba Mussie. How can I help?

I reflected on why I had been curious about the “true” story of who *Abba Mussie* was; my hope, I think, was for a factual version of what I perhaps initially heard as a disjointed account. But to re-animate the self-authored story Tewodros had offered was to share the version that was real to him, and these dramaturgical decisions resist researched “truth” in favour of collective and affective remembering. Further, it made possible the creation of a performative moment that bore witness to Tewodros’ own memory of Abba Mussie, capturing the idea of this person’s significance, and what he meant to him. As such, this ensured the story was told from Tewodros’ perspective rather than mine. To place care centrally within a rehearsal process is to foreground the needs of those telling and performing their own stories and to create a methodology in which their own relationships with their pasts are protected, honoured and incorporated. Thinking about these creative choices both collaboratively and with a care-centred approach was underscored by the research methodology of exiting and reentering the spiral of inquiry I had set up, whereby I could grapple with my inquiry through different vantage points and step back in (productive) uncertainty.

The relationship between care and dialogue was key here and lays fertile ground for resisting how migration is theatricalised, specifically the event of a boat crossing which has become a perennial image of refugee journeys, yet often dehumanises. On reflection, perhaps this story was not about Father Abba Mussie Zerai at all, but how the *figure* of *Abba Mussie* radically changed Tewodros and his relationship to hope, awakening an obligation to reciprocate the care he had encountered from a stranger he could never thank. A gesture, perhaps, that contributed to him reaching out to two strangers at the train station and offering them unconditional care, even hope.

Through this moment of practice, my role as a practice researcher was stretched and changed, as I navigated alternative ways of making sense of the experiences spoken about, which made me rethink engagement with the real.

In *Human Rights and Narrated Lives* (2004) Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith discuss the ways narratives of suffering become reduced as they become bound up in the 'messiness' of a negotiation of the tense relationship between aesthetics, commerce and politics. They argue:

> The pressure to conform the 'messiness' of personal testimony to the protocols for codification of a human rights abuse, to contain it within a standardised, often chronological, format that more easily addresses the series of questions the inquiry has established as critical to the goal of documenting a particular human rights issue, subsumes local knowledge and conceptual frameworks for understanding different cultural experiences and traditions to the national and international frameworks of human rights law. (2004 Schaffer and Smith p.37)

Considering these complexities, it is also worth acknowledging that the dramaturgical device of the boat crossing is not without critique. Emma Cox and others have critiqued the dehistoricising effect of 'liquid imagery'; boat crossings wash clean complex and specific histories leaving generic 'migrants' behind (Cox et al 2020, p.7). I wanted us to engage with these narratives carefully, recognising the risks of these stories reducing focus to one moment within forced migration experiences, rendering invisible the slow violence of what awaits on arrival. By listening differently and choosing not to move the narrative someplace else; to the realm of humanitarian intervention, the scene complicates and deepens the narrative of crossing the Mediterranean by boat, a story usually confined to bureaucratic discourse. Thus, the performance of personal narrative captured the simultaneous vulnerability and agency at work in Tewodros' story and the impact of this on the theatre-making process that followed. However, whilst this section of the practice prompted a productive set of events that challenged how I, and my collaborators,

were engaging with the real, it also represents a moment of navigating failure. In trying to sit with the 'messiness' as discussed by Schaffer and Smith, I feel on reflection that the scene in performance did not fully capture the overwhelming emotional realisation that occurred through looking into the face of the man who had been a saviour, nor did it reference the scale of his intervention over many years for many others. As I reflect on this, I think about what it means to read a text in multiple directions, or for a text to be 'uncooperative' (see Lather 2000, Lather and Smithies 1997) and consider what is required to honour a process that is at once multi-vocal and deeply personal.

One of the problematics of working with self-narration of real events is that often the stories lack resolution or are always ongoing, whether this is because the story's outcome has not yet been reached, or because decisions were made (both artistically and ethically) regarding omissions. I import Lather and Smithies' words again to illuminate the politics of this approach; they reflect that their research methodology 'has made a claim on us to not drown the poem of the other with the sound of our own voices, as the one who know, the 'experts' about how people make sense of their lives and what searching for meaning means' (Lather and Smithies 1997, p.xvi). When read in the context of work with asylum seekers and refugees this reconfiguring of expertise and the role of the researcher mirrors how the critical instances described here continued to challenge and stretch my research inquiry, leading to continued insight around care-centred and dialogic performance practice which resists hegemonic conceptualisations of unaccompanied minor experience. Further, the *interruption* to the process in the form of unexpected documented "truth" presented a significant moment of rethinking where the narrative authority lies in my methodology.

Staging emerging solidarity between refugee youth

The third moment I will position as informative in the development of *All the beds I have slept in* ties together multiple stands of my thinking that have emerged during the first two years of my practice research. Namely, the notion of care between refugee youth communities (particularly young men), and the convergence of life inside and outside the theatre-making process. I also stage a dialogue with other ideas I have explored in this chapter, as I shift my focus from care-giver back to care-receiver, with renewed depth and politics. Thus, in this section, I look at ways the practice was able to examine the sustained model of care that I argue is so intrinsic to groups of unaccompanied minor refugees. My theorising of these ideas contributes to recent discussions in migration studies internationally from across disciplines, exploring how care *between* refugee youth needs to be better understood, having been largely overlooked, and certainly not attended to in performance that addresses the refugee experience. I will also look further at how the politics of care were becoming formative in the research, and how, unlike the previous two examples I have discussed, I began to see affective solidarity written into the performance, similar to what James Thompson describes as an 'aesthetic of care' (2015). Reflecting on a story told by Syed during the devising process, I put under the microscope the notion of messy stories, finding detail in silence and being cautious not to overwrite the complexity of personal memory with new restrictive narratives.

A central proposal in care ethics is the rethinking of boundaries between public and private life. I explore here the motif of beds that emerged in *All the beds I have slept in*, and how stories of tenderness, friendship and home-making became activated within the process. The title of the performance output of this phase of the research came to be *All the beds I have slept in*, and arose during an exercise where myself and my collaborators all suggested titles of '10 plays we could make' (other

suggestions can be found on page 6 of my documentation). Sleep, or lack of it, is frequently discussed in research concerning unaccompanied minors and youth on the move, since insomnia, poor sleep hygiene and disrupted sleep and common repercussions of time spent destitute, imprisoned, detained or travelling through the night (see Lawrence and Michelmore (2019); Carr, Hatzidimitriadou, Sango (2017); Kaukko and Wernesjö (2016)). Reflecting on my time spent working in a supported housing context, intimate knowledge of the sleep experiences of the young men I worked with was a familiar (and often necessary) part of my attending to their wellbeing. What struck me when my collaborators and I started talking about sleep was my desire not to separate their experiences pre-migration and their lives in the UK. In other words, performance and creative practice were not merely a way to explore identities fixed in time; their identities were also inscribed by their recent experiences of becoming performers.

I considered my research questions and my desire to facilitate nuanced narratives that rethink essentialist constructions of unaccompanied minors solely as "service users". The frame of a list as simple as 'all the beds I have slept in' encompasses tents in refugee camps, crates in refrigerated lorries, a bunk bed in a smuggler's flat in Italy, as well as hotel rooms paid for by Arts Council England during work with Phosphoros. As I focussed on surprising, fragmented narratives brought to life through this dramaturgical structure, another *interruption* forced me to apply my thinking in new ways (again). This occurred halfway through the development of *All the beds I have slept in* when Syed was given a day's notice to move out of his "Emergency Temporary Accommodation"[28]; another of the ongoing, unexpected and non-linear disruptions that occupy the lives of not only current but former unaccompanied

[28] Emergency Temporary Accommodation is housing provided to asylum seekers who do not have recourse to public funds (in other words, who can't access social housing).

minors[29], because it seems the precarity that haunts an existence forged 'on the move' continues even many years after settling in the UK.

When Syed shared with us his frustration and sense of helplessness of his uncertain housing situation it was a stark reminder for himself as much as the rest of the group of the ever-present, though sometimes latent, possibility of dislocation for asylum seekers specifically and refugees more broadly. As he moved into his new Emergency Temporary Accommodation he reflected that he felt he was 'going back to square one', making another temporary home. I return here to my discussion in the previous chapter about temporalities of displacement in the context of slow violence, whereby stability and settledness can be ruptured at any given point, establishing a permanent state of limbo. Thus, asylum seekers 'wait because of mobility and for mobility' (Kohli and Kaukko 2017, p.491). In resisting modes of waiting and linearity, possibilities of radical hope are revealed, which may bring new ways of making meaning about one's own life and experiences. In this sense, Syed's bed in the present helped us look at his first bed in the UK. Following on from my earlier discussion in this chapter about the thread of kindness that contains within it a legacy of care, Syed reanimating his initial days in the UK precipitated a group reimaging of an aesthetic of care, made visible through unfixing the boundary between public and private and letting these two realms collide. In doing so, I argue, we were collectively discovering how the creative practice could provide conditions for temporalities of hope to emerge, as well as a firm focus on friendship.

An image that exemplifies these ideas most vividly to me is of two teenage boy characters, played by Syed and Gotiom, holding onto each other as they sleep; our

[29] I recognise precarious housing, including but not limited to Emergency Temporary Accommodation, affects a much wider group of people than refugees and asylum seekers, and this is beyond the scope of this research.

depiction of Syed’s first night in foster care. Unable to sleep in the single bed in the twin room of a foster home in North London, though finally in a safe(r) place after his 8-month journey from Afghanistan, Syed’s roommate - coincidentally from the same town as him but also a stranger - instinctively removed the duvets and pillows from their adjacent beds and set up a sleeping arrangement reminiscent of Afghan *toshaks* (floor cushions), on the space in between. This boy put his arms around Syed as they slept next to each other, dislocated from the old place in a space of possible re-becoming as a new home was cemented in an imagined brotherhood. I found the tenderness of this intimate image of care overwhelming, as Syed described it; finding home in the embrace of a new brother (who, years later, remains his closest friend).

James Thompson reflects on noticing himself use aesthetic criteria to describe care, in reference to an exceptional case of the care encountered by a colleague from the Democratic Republic of Congo who stayed with him and his wife in Manchester whilst receiving physiotherapy as he recovered from an attack. Thompson remembers the response he and his wife had to the care provided by the physiotherapist: ‘We were drawn to some quality in the touch, the attentiveness and the focus of the relationship that demanded to be appreciated using a language more usually associated with artistry’ (2020, p.36). The moment I wanted to capture in relation to Syed and the act of co-sleeping with his foster brother was private, intimate, domestic but also seemed to communicate something about the way care was being re-imagined in this moment. Recognising the potential aesthetic quality of care between the two young men, capturing something of Syed’s own personal narrative as well as illuminating something insightful about his and Goitom’s present-day identities as refugee actors and friends, saw the performance offer new insights into friendship as a radical form of solidarity.

As I have discussed earlier in this thesis, youth on the move are required to perform vulnerability in different and highly codified ways. What this performance moment allowed for was nuanced, ‘beautiful’ solidarity to emerge. Unlike the actual event, where Syed’s roommate spoke the same language as him, in the scene described he enacts a version of himself alongside Goitom, who speaks Tigrinya. We played with silence and how shared experience might become generative of informed solidarity across language. In performance, before the sleeping arrangement is made on the floor there are three beats: Goitom introduces himself; he signals to Syed to put his new pyjamas on, which he does with much embarrassment; Goitom realises Syed has scabies and gives him a bottle of lotion to help. The idea of scabies arose, as many of the ideas in this project did, through conversations on the fringes - the edges - of the work, including snatched conversations during Phosphoros' summer tour schedule. In between tour dates, several items of costume held in storage had been nibbled by mice. The actors were horrified and feared there was an infestation of bedbugs, prompting a lengthy discussion about the horror of them and their friends trying to control various vermin. Though unrelated to hygiene, scabies and bedbugs are rife in hostels and other overcrowded living situations (including encampments like the Calais “jungle”), so are a familiar condition to people in contexts of displacement (see Richardson et al 2021). When Goitom hands Syed the bottle of cream and demonstrates how to use it we learn two things: that Syed hasn’t told anyone he is ‘itchy’ (his foster carer, social worker or community nurse), and that Goitom has had scabies before. Scene 3 plays out as follows, as written in the stage directions:

> GOITOM: You are itchy?
>
> *Goitom scratches himself to demonstrate. Syed just looks embarrassed.*
>
> *Goitom opens his drawer and gets out a tube of cream, shows how to rub all over himself. Syed shakes his head, he doesn’t want to use the cream.*
>
> *Goitom shrugs and gets into bed.*

> *Goitom switches the light off.*
>
> *Syed can't sleep. He can't get comfy on the bed. It's too soft and unfamiliar.*
>
> *Goitom sighs, switches the light on. He knows what to do, but there's precautions to be taken first. He puts on a pair of long socks, tucks his pyjamas in; puts on a long sleeve top which he tucks tightly into his waistband, and finds a pair of winter gloves.*
>
> *This done, he pulls his own duvet onto the floor between the beds and encourages Syed to do the same. Then he lies beside him and puts his arm round him.*
>
> *Now Syed can sleep.*

In a moment of potential embarrassment or shame, Goitom's character knows what to do. The image of wrapping himself in clothing to avoid his skin touching Syed's is funny, playful, awkward. He negotiates physical closeness with the stranger beside him, and without words shows they are allies; they are in this together. Looking toward an aesthetic of care rather than locating personal narrative within familiar bureaucratic spaces we moved away from trying to critique existing categorisations of youth on the move and instead tried to listen in different ways, unearthing new insight about friendships built in these circumstances. Here, a moment of potential disgust, revealing the indignity of continued displacement, is co-opted to show the potency of solidarity and tenderness that perhaps offers a temporality of hope. Sara Ahmed emphasises the experiential quality of 'uncommon estrangement' in forging friendships between migrant strangers that come to life when identification takes place. She describes this as a 'community of strangers' being established (2000, p.336), resulting from what Norma McCaig terms a 'sudden recognition of kinship' (McCaig 1996, p.115 quoted in Ahmed 2000, p.337).

The stories that emerged in the practice may not hold bureaucratic currency, but illuminate the self-sustaining practices of mutual care that, as I continue to reveal

throughout this thesis, are interwoven in the experience of unaccompanied minors conceptualising family anew. What was particularly exciting and clear to me through practice was that telling stories and narrativising memory through a theatre-making process that unearthed meaning and testimonial truth not otherwise visible and therefore not necessarily understood by the professionalised structures of care that seek to provide support to refugee youth. When Helen Taylor talks about finding the emotional truth in refugee testimony she draws attention to the importance of 'listening to silences' (2013, p.51) to discover meaningful knowledge outside of official or evidence-based accounts. This had a resonance for the practice as I suggest we too used silence to generate forms of caring solidarity to shift how audiences were encountering unaccompanied minor young men.

Rethinking failure, vulnerability and agency in performance

The last section of this chapter explores a key turning point in my research inquiry, in which I argue the practice saw a shift away from the performance *of* care and instead towards moments of performance *as* care, which brings me to establish my continuing theme of interdependence. Staying with the motif of interruption, I now interrogate how a series of onstage encounters between Tewodros and Syed as Syed forgot his lines during rehearsal and performance made me think afresh about the dynamics of care and solidarity present within the moments of performance and how these moments are understood and positioned within this research. Not only this, it deepened our collective understanding of how a politics of failure and a critique of vulnerability could have an aesthetic quality, through exposing the mechanics of performance.

The notion of *attentiveness* is key to my analysis here, and throughout the practice it was often in the moments of attentiveness to the value and practice of care found on

the margins that disclosed the most insightful moments of discovery. Embracing a practice of reading in multiple directions and making space for an iterative process in part made this possible, though *All the beds I have slept in* was also the first time I had not appeared onstage with these particular collaborators. Before this research project, in Phosphoros I had occupied an actor and onstage facilitator role, encompassing both pastoral and dramaturgical functions as I supported inexperienced performers and made visible the support provided by professionals (who are often women) to refugee youth. In this previous work, my onstage presence had also collided, sometimes uncomfortably so, with other dynamics that are gendered, classed and racialised, and which also bore imprints of the professionalised care that once framed the relationships I had with some of the actors. Thus, the 'messiness' of my multi-faceted role represented the connection between professionalised care to the artistic process and my commitment to embedding attentiveness to wellbeing into my creative practice. What I observed in the scratch performance of *All the beds I have slept in*, however, was a form of care that had developed through the process, but not directly as a result of something I had set up or implemented. In many ways, this embedded form of self-sustained care took me by surprise and in doing so helped clarify my understanding of a care-filled process.

There was palpable tension during the final rehearsal of the scratch performance. It was the first time the performers had shared work-in-progress with scripts in hand and under-rehearsed scenes that we had still been workshopping on the day, and it was also the first time I had shared work in my dual role of theatre maker researcher. Unlike our previous shows together, this time the audience was solely made up of *my* network of peers, colleagues and friends, and my role in shaping the work had a new form of visibility and potential for scrutiny. Perhaps it was an oversight not to engage Phosphoros' usual audience, including refugee teenagers, but

I anticipated developing the piece beyond the scratch performance and this development would involve public engagement that would also address questions around the accessibility of a research conference for this group. Back in the rehearsal room, it became clear that the four performers felt somewhat underprepared before going onstage. I observed that that their worries went beyond the pre-show nerves many performers experience; I understood that their concern over making mistakes onstage directly related to their heightened awareness of their refugee identity, and the expectations that surround their virtuosity as artists.

I return to some of the conversations I cited in the previous chapter, whereby the actors discussed their overlapping identities of artists and refugees. Whilst Emirjon and Goitom focussed on the potential of their work to ‘change people’s minds’, ‘giving a voice to the voiceless people’ and ‘showing that we’re normal people’, Tewodros acknowledged possible prejudices or assumptions the audience may have, with his concern about low expectations: ‘they think this show might be rubbish, but let me just support them’ (Tewodros 2019). In other words, he is aware that both a paternalism and infantilisation may become written into how he is perceived as an artist. In *Young Migrant Identities: Creativity and Masculinity* (2018), Sherene Idriss offers insight into how artistic identities like Tewodros’ can be messy, incomplete and contradictory. She details how visions of “authenticity” can be used strategically in over-saturated markets, but equally, in an enactment of Gayatri Spivak’s native informer role, artists representing their community can become ‘applauded for simply doing so instead of being rewarded or critique[ed] based on the quality of their work’ (Idriss 2018, p.142). When discussing the audience’s response to Phosphoros' work more generally Emirjon has said in the past that ‘obviously they’d be surprised – obviously’, but Tewodros worried that the audience’s awareness of the proximity between the performers and the narratives was to give them ‘some kind of

hint'. He suggested that this framing had a function: 'Maybe if you make some sort of mistake the audience will think *they're a refugee. English is their second language*. It's like an excuse'. Thus, the stakes were raised before sharing the work, as it was clear to me that perceived failure would potentially have existential ramifications. I had to find a way to work through the potential friction.

Syed was set to perform a monologue, script in hand, that detailed an exceptional yet deeply conflicted gesture of care from a detention guard in Greece. He had relayed this story to me during the creative process and I had subsequently edited and reformatted the text with him. He performs the scene bare foot, slowly washing his feet, hands, elbows and face as he observes the Islamic ritual *wudhu* in preparation to pray. He recites a memory of being kept in a Greek detention centre, conceptualised by his teenage self as 'prison', and the kindness and discretion offered on the holy day of Eid to all the Muslims to be able to pray outside together. The monologue treads between the stark reality of illegal and indefinite detention of children:

> SYED: I didn't know that word when I was there. It looked like a prison, felt like a prison, stank like a prison. The only difference to a prison is that they don't tell you when you can leave;

and the reminder that life continues in the darkest of times:

> SYED: there's a picture of me in there – someone had smuggled in a phone. I'm with another guy from Afghanistan and we're both smiling. He lives in Wembley now. He's a barber, and when I worked in a pizza shop he'd give me a free shape up for a large tandoori chicken pizza.

During the final rehearsal, Syed struggled to focus on reading the script whilst performing the washing ritual. Further, even though the text remained true to his

memory and was largely verbatim, there was a disconnect as he faltered and stumbled over the lines. I encouraged him to put the script away and tell the story as he had done to me, but instead, Tewodros picked up his own script and started prompting Syed, who then stopped looking at the script and together they made it to the end. The tender, trusting relationships built on informed solidarity that I had been so interested in exploring through the content of the work had become visible in this moment of last-minute replanning and final execution. Seeing this exchange helped me think through the potentiality of what *All the beds I have slept in* had achieved, and on reflection I would now suggest that I was observing the types of invisible structures of care that James Thompson terms an 'aesthetics of care in action' (2015; 2020) emerging in practices where the relationships onstage extend far beyond the moment in performance. Here, he argues, the aesthetic can contain 'the actual moment of building a more just distribution of caring and increase participants' capacity to care and be cared for' (2020, p.219). Tewodros wasn't just caring for Syed in this momentary encounter; he was caring for all four of the actors onstage, himself included, and protecting their integrity to avoid slippage into a discourse of vulnerability. This revealed insight into how the concept of the collective can collide with performance of the self, as a strategy of care and, in this instance, reframes intersubjective relationships within a community of actors through the protective lens of a radical form of friendship.

I am grateful that Syed agreed to continue to be prompted by Tewodros in the performance of *All the beds I have slept in,* as without him doing so I would not have arrived at the conclusions that the practice presented to me, bringing with it a deeper understanding of how performance can both stage and manifest interdependent care. There were six interruptions during Syed's performance; five of Tewodros starting the next line, and one where he walks offstage to get the towel

Syed had forgotten to place next to himself, to dry his face. Syed is centre stage standing above a metal bowl of water, and the other three actors are sat watching on two single beds; Goitom and Emirjon stage right, and Tewodros stage left. Tewodros is partly lit, sitting casually with his script in his hand and his head tilted, engrossed in Syed's performance. An image of Syed and Tewodros in this moment can be found on page 2 of my documentation.

What felt exciting to me as I watched Tewodros and Syed onstage was that the support taking place was based on their friendship and knowledge of each other. The telling of the story took on a collaborative, collective quality and reminded the audience of the bond they share that is complex, and that there is a deep trust between the two men. This moment of camaraderie was significant as it presented kinship instead of refugee young men as lone, separate, *unaccompanied.* When Syed reflected on how it felt as a performer he said to me:

> It felt like Teddy[30] was in the room with me when it happened, and now he's helping me to remember. As an actor I trusted him, because we'd worked together for such a long time – I felt supported and helped. As a friend it felt like we were sharing the experience – do you get me? Like he was there when it happened.

Syed also acknowledged the potential reception of the audience:

> I think it looked like it was too hard for me to tell the story, so Teddy was pushing me forward, in a supportive way. That's not true – the truth was that I didn't know the script. The audience can feel whatever they feel – our aim is to get the messages across. (Syed 2019)

One way to read this moment is to see Syed as feeling simultaneously autonomous as a refugee, in telling his story, and vulnerable as an under-rehearsed actor. Seeing these two states as interrelated helps me understand Tewodros' gesture as caring. It

[30] Syed refers here to Tewodros by his nickname, Teddy

wasn't that Syed found it upsetting or difficult to recall his memory, it was that he knew that by faltering he would inadvertently write himself into requiring sympathy. Further, he knew there was a shared understanding within the cast of the discourses of vulnerability thrown at their community. The result of witnessing testimony through these sorts of reductive frames, Cox argues, is that a 'victim-hope dialectic' is established (2012), whereby trauma becomes recognisable through the affective identification of hope. She questions whether theatre engaging with trauma has to attempt a hopeful conclusion to justify its 'artistic, narrative or even moral purpose' (p.128) and I suggest my research puts these ideas under pressure. The spontaneous performance of the self enacted here by Syed and Tewodros simultaneously engages failure, risk and friendship, and the dynamic performance of care replaces the more secure performance of victimhood. Moments like this disrupted the structure of trauma and hope, inviting us to understand this dialect differently. Through mobilising interdependent care and exposing friendship, hope emerges here not through the desire to be saved by the host community but through recognition of communal identities. A form of care had emerged through this project that represented not only allyship and knowingness about the shared experience of forced migration but also a sense of artistry in realising that exposing the mechanics of performance was not symbolic of failure. Instead, I argue, this wider demonstration of solidarity was an act of resistance to the narratives refugees are usually confined to.

As I have explored in this chapter, the methodological inquiry I embarked on in the first phase of my practice research led me to new insight into performance of the self, interconnected care and reimagining the ways the lived experiences of unaccompanied minors are told, reimagined and listened to. In forming a methodology rooted in care, conditions were established for care to emerge in

nuanced, original and surprising ways, most notably in the final example in this chapter, whereby I argue the practice enacted not only performance *of* care but performance *as* care. Characteristic of my research inquiry has been an attentiveness to what is happening in the background, on the edges and the margins of the performance, and where possible I have woven these parallel narratives through as I articulate the research in writing. Of course, there is much I do not mention, and also much I do not see, but as I move toward into examining the second practice research project I undertook, I note that I move forward by trusting my hunches built on care, solidarity and friendship as I tread this line. Watching Tewodros step into visibility from the dim offstage is emblematic of the iterative process this project has taken.

Importantly, the work undertaken in this phase of the research has furthered my interrogation of how performance can undercut the epistemic and slow violences that structure representation, experience and outcomes for unaccompanied minors. I reflect on Julie Salverson's work on transgressive storytelling as resisting reductive refugee narratives, in particular her urge for practitioners to move beyond binaries such as 'injured and oppressor, helper and helped'. I find myself importing her thinking into my own practice, asking how my practice interrogate Salverson's question of 'if I am not a victim, if I am not rescuer, what can I be?' (1999). Through the dialogical structures examined here, myself and my collaborators were finding multiple ways to answer these sorts of questions. This first stage of practice research also prompted new questions waiting to be addressed in the project's next phase. How might I design a creative process with care as a methodological *and* thematic focus? How could care between artists extend into care for an audience? Can performance create conditions for care and solidarity to become mutually constitutive? I continue to complicate and interrogate different sorts of performances

of the self in the following chapter, bringing new dimensions to my discussion as I focus on participatory practice with a larger number of refugee youth contributors (beyond Phosphoros' company of actors). In particular, I develop my exploration of the relationships between listener and storyteller; the forms of recognition and self-making that can emerge in performance by and for refugees; and the potential for solidarities to emerge outside of structural relationships of power. Though the next phase of the project encountered the most significant interruption of all, in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic, as I sought opportunities to stage a dialogue between performance and care and find echoes between the two practical projects in the form of their interest in sleep, belonging and friendship.

Chapter Four

Self-making, new intimacies and aesthetics of solidarity in digital storytelling by and for refugee youth

Stories for Sleeping is documented on pages 14-17 of my collection of practice, which can be found using this link: https://www.canva.com/design/DAGAOeJtviQ/Cs9_czoifPOSnMQxU8y0Cw/view?utm_content=DAGAOeJtviQ&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=editor.I signpost to the reader when to listen to particular stories, which can be found on page 17.

Parallel narratives of conducting practice research in the context of uncertainty

There are two ways to understand the context in which my practice develops in its second phase, and how this builds on the ideas relating to care and friendship I explored in the previous chapters. Considering that a key focus for this research has been the contingency of the practice and the concrete changing reality of the community with whom I work, it is impossible to think of one context (the evolution of the practice itself) without also engaging with the dramatic shifts in the other (the world it took place in). The most cataclysmic of these being the events of the COVID-19 pandemic and their impact on the next stage of the research. As a result of the pandemic, my original plan had to be changed dramatically as I reconfigured my practice to work within an online environment. The result was a new project, entitled *Stories for Sleeping*, which involved refugee youth creating sleep stories for their peers to be shared on social media. To recognise these adjacent contexts, I lay out below two alternative openings to this chapter, which examines the *Stories for Sleeping* project through written analysis and accompanying documentation of practice. These two alternative beginnings reveal two different locations within my research spiral, both of which had a significant impact on the direction of my

practice research, and generated methodological, ethical and practical questions I had not considered in the earlier stages of planning my project. This navigation of my situated knowledge as a practice researcher is intrinsic to my inquiry. As I make visible the tensions in my starting points I continue to adopt a self-reflexive mode of writing that can capture the critical, personal and reflective moments of practice that have deepened my argument.

Beginning 1: following my hunches

As I reflect on the development *All the beds I have slept in*, as detailed in Chapter Three, I identify how the nature of this collaboration with Phosphoros presented tension in terms of how the research was engaged with. Much of my project's initial phase was rooted in an exploration of a form of reciprocal care made possible by the collective space we were operating in as friends and frequent collaborators. This work laid critical foundations for my broader argument, which I wanted to develop to have wider relevance and scope. I wanted to understand how interdependent care might function and become an active element in a participatory arts context with refugee youth, and the discoveries I had made in my *All the beds I have slept in* prepared me to approach these themes with young people I had not yet met. Further, whilst the work-in-progress performance model opened up a wealth of possibility in terms of exploration and creative risk, its limited portability meant I found it hard to envisage how refugee youth might engage with the work as an audience. As I advanced my research I was keen to explore ways of positioning refugee youth more directly as an audience, and therefore needed to approach the next phase differently.

I also concluded the process of developing *All the beds I have slept in* with a hunch

that the journey to turning it into a full-scale production would pull me in a different direction as an artist researcher if I had to navigate the tension of balancing my research inquiry with the demands of producing work to pitch to venues and prepare for touring. I anticipated this subsequent creative process would become the focus of my methodological reflection, rather than exploring further the powerful ideas around performance and care that had emerged during developing the piece. I had not initiated the project with the assumption it would inevitably have a life beyond my research project, however, I was struck by how my collaborators connected with and related to the content we were exploring. This opened up new possibilities of talking beyond one's own lived experience and opportunities for peer-to-peer exploration and communication that felt too timely not to recognise and respond to. Thus, as my research inquiry took on a slightly different trajectory, *All the beds I have slept in* was developed by Phosphoros to become a full-scale production which was eventually performed in various theatres in 2021-23, including Leeds Playhouse, Bristol Old Vic, Northern Stage and Nottingham Playhouse. The show bore the imprint of the practice research as it grew, making an important contribution to the wider field of UK-based refugee theatre[31]. Ultimately, both of these phases of practice link together iteratively, both using forms of self-authored performance to approach similar themes of care, solidarity and friendship through a meta-narrative of sleep. However, in the *Stories for Sleeping* project I developed this further and these echoes ripple through my wider research.

There is a second, alternative beginning which I present as a parallel narrative to the section above, which locates the research in the circumstances it took place in: the

[31] More information about this production can be seen on page 15 of my practice documentation.

COVID-19 pandemic. Here, I foreground some of the complex and multiple impacts the global pandemic had on my practice and those who engaged with it.

Beginning 2: Practice research in a global pandemic

On 23rd March 2020, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced the country would go into national 'lockdown', responding to rising cases of the COVID-19 virus which had officially reached pandemic levels of transmission. Restrictions impacted multiple areas of daily life and changed as the weeks and months progressed: exercise was limited to once a day, pubs and restaurants closed, people were encouraged to shop only for necessities, socialising was limited to *bubbles* of different sizes, travel was restricted and monitored and the nation was advised to stay at home as far as practically possible. This period was characterised for many by loss, grief, distance, separation and a reconceptualisation of hope. Statistical remarks about deaths, mothers giving birth alone, lost school years, disappearing businesses and political disarray do not adequately capture the scale of the global crisis. As theorists, artists and commentators responded to the pandemic, societal disparity was regularly highlighted. Canadian scholar Laine Zisman calls for researchers to complicate the neoliberal narrative surrounding the pandemic that conceals social relations, refuting the notion that we were "all in this together". She says: 'We are not all experiencing the same pandemic. Resources, time, and access shape our daily lives differently. Our task as researchers might be to complicate a narrative that erases the precarity of the other (or our own)' (Zisman 2020, p.31-2).

This is particularly relevant in the context of this research. Scholars in migration studies have noted the exacerbated impact of the pandemic on the precariousness refugees and asylum seekers were already facing. In an aptly titled paper 'It's like

rubbing salt on the wound' a host of interconnected factors are identified that drastically hampered refugees' wellbeing and access, including digital exclusion; dispersal and overcrowded housing; waiting and uncertainty caused by closure of government departments; and financial pressure from increasing costs (Finlay, Hopkins and Benwell 2021). Reading the pandemic through the heightened experience of refugees and asylum seekers reveals not a new set of circumstances (*a new normal*) but an existing precariousness that was exacerbated even further. The impact of these factors on the research was significant, and I found myself rethinking its infrastructure entirely. I embarked on my second phase of practice with the knowledge that the aesthetics and performance of care I wanted to explore would need to be rethought outside of what I was familiar with: touch, togetherness, sharing spaces, connection.

I draw attention to both possible conceptualisations of the starting point of this project because they serve as a reminder of the continual tension often faced in practice research, whereby the researcher must navigate multiple states of tension within the different aspects of their work. Here I revisit some of the practice research outcomes explored in the previous chapter and explore further how lived experience interweaves with and grounds the practice I want to explore, identifying new ways in which my emerging methodology positions self-authored performance as generative of interdependent care and solidarity. In doing so, I argue, unaccompanied minors and other refugee youth can author their own lived experiences in ways that can resist slow violence by generating and making visible gestures of solidarity and friendship, resulting in new modes of collective and self-sustaining care. To map my project's development, I contextualise the practice in more detail, establishing it within the limitations and losses of the pandemic. I then examine how I developed the practice in this context, structured around three key

themes that emerged from the specific challenges that presented themselves to the refugee youth I was working with as a result of the pandemic: performance of the self; the stranger as audience; and listening as solidarity.

Elsewhere in this thesis, I have examined the proximity between myself and my research. Building on this, the research (and those involved as collaborators, participants and publics) has proximity with the live, ongoing migration politics I discuss. This presents me with an epistemological challenge. Whilst my inquiry unfolds and I enter and re-enter the research spiral with new insight which then imprints itself on the body or the page, I will eventually stop writing these reflections and they will become a formal submission. What does it mean when the socio-political context of migration and its impact on the young people I work with is ever-changing? How do I address the tension I have in writing about people amidst pending immigration processes? I have thought carefully about my responsibility towards contributors, particularly those with unresolved immigration matters, but the ethics of storytelling extends beyond this, to other characters in other people's stories who are (also) living in precarity. The complex temporalities that underscore my inquiry are not limited to individuals I worked with, but are woven into the backdrop of the project in its entirety. How did liveness, instability and a hardening of government discourse around the care and wellbeing of refugees affect the research? What methodological challenges appear when trying to arrive at conclusions to situations perpetually unresolved? I attempt to capture my experience in contemplating these overarching challenges and provocations through articulating intertextual neonarratives, and including the occasional coda to recognise life-changing shifts that happened between *doing* and *writing* the research, when the personal and the political collide.

It became increasingly clear as the research unfolded that every time I sat down to write the political landscape looked different, and I acknowledge but a few examples here. The 2022 Nationality and Borders Bill led to highly controversial plans such as the processing of asylum claims in Rwanda and the enhanced power of the government to strip away the citizenship of British nationals; the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022; news stories of increasing numbers of refugees risking sea crossings and drowning, teen suicides in the unaccompanied minor community, and carcerality through financial monitoring and GPS tracking of asylum seekers. These news items would punctuate the discussions I'd have with contributors and collaborators, each of them having differing impacts on individual lives. Not all the stories were entirely bleak. July 2022 brought an unexpected collision between my often overlooked subject area and headline news as long-distance runner Olympian Sir Mo Farah revealed he had been a victim of child trafficking and bonded labour as a domestic servant, prompting an outpour of public support, and acknowledgement of his birth name: Hussein Abdi Kahin. In response, the Home Office stated they would not take action over Sir Farah's deceptive gaining of citizenship, and there was a momentary sense of public empathy towards those in similar positions. Similarly, the 'Homes for Ukraine' government scheme received over 200,000 registrations ahead of its rollout, with £350 per month offered as a 'thank you' to hosts. In contrast, 82 asylum seekers died in government accommodation between January 2020 and May 2022, raising questions about systemic failures and inequality in forced migration experiences.

A year earlier, the evolving crisis in Afghanistan, with the Taliban seizing control of the country in August 2021, triggered a humanitarian crisis and withdrawal of Western aid, and momentarily dominated many conversations in the UK about forced migration. On this occasion the political backdrop of the research also occupied my

personal life, being the partner of an Afghan national who was watching the fall of his homeland, and fielding crisis calls from family members unsuccessfully attempting to board evacuation flights. I am reminded of Carolyn Ellis' observation that, in this sort of research, there is no leaving the field (2007, p.13). Later, in 2023, came seismic changes to the UK asylum system with the Illegal Migration Act gaining Royal assent in July of that year, promising that anyone who enters illegally, including unaccompanied minors and victims of trafficking, will be unable to seek protection and instead face forced removal, indefinite detention or removal to a third country such as Rwanda. As suggested by Wilmer, 'we can guess that the current treatment of Ukrainian refugees is an anomaly and that the walls of fortress Europe will close again in front of other refugees' (2023, p.76). I draw on these examples to highlight how theatre-making with refugees exists with a tense navigation of the personal and the political, engaging with personal conflicts and challenges while also reflecting the politics of the state and the carelessness of a government that continues to create a hostile environment for refugees.

Introduction to 'Stories for Sleeping'

Stories for Sleeping was a participatory drama and storytelling project that I developed to work with refugee youth to examine how care and friendship and their role in the support of refugee lived experience can be rethought in performance. To do so, I positioned hope and care as productive and generative concepts to frame the practice, which intersect with themes of liminality and transiency that structure experiences of displacement and resettlement. Throughout the first half of 2021, during national lockdown restrictions, I developed a series of storytelling workshops that engaged around 70 refugees, asylum seekers and newly arrived young people from a wide range of countries aged 15-21. Through the workshops, the young people explored and created audio narratives for their peers to listen to if they were

struggling to sleep, and these were shared online on Instagram and Phosphoros' website, and most were translated into the home language of the storyteller.

Some of the contributors to this project were members of Phosphoros' youth projects, who lived in different parts of the UK and would join me for regular online workshops, and occasional in-person writing sessions when lockdown restrictions allowed. I also recruited several partner organisations working with refugee youth[32] who hosted online (and sometimes in-person) workshops and encouraged their members to attend. Participation in the workshops was optional, as was the decision to submit stories and some young people chose not to. Generally, these groups received three structured workshops each, and some young people would continue their writing in their own time between sessions. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdowns, the majority of the project was delivered online. The practice overall consisted of around twenty five workshops, most of which took place over the video conferencing platform 'Zoom', alongside some in-person sessions, including two workshops in Nottingham for around forty additional participants who engaged with the story collection but did not contribute their own submissions. I designed and led all the workshop activities, and sometimes was supported in the delivery by an assistant facilitator from Phosphoros (Becca Prentice, Syed Najibi or Juliet Styles) and on two occasions Mohamed Abdu, a trainee facilitator from Phosphoros who supported Arabic speaking individuals.

[32] These included an English learning class from West London College; the Red Cross' 'Refugees and Befriending Project'; Baytree Centre's 'Into School' programme for young women; Springboard Youth Academy's half term project for newly arrived refugee youth; and the Nottingham Education Sanctuary Team ('NEST'). The first three groups I knew professionally but had not partnered with before; I am a co-founder of Springboard Youth Academy so knew the staff team; I had delivered a workshop to NEST in the past and they had seen Phosphoros' work before.

In the development stages of the project, I sought support from five young adults involved in Phosphoros' wider community who were interested in the themes of the project and wanted to enhance their leadership skills. Of the five, four sustained engagement with me through reflective, thematic and logistical discussions as I put plans together, and then they each assisted with at least three of the online workshops. It was beyond the parameters of this project to fully embed co-researchers within each stage of development, but the input and advice of these four individuals was helpful and informative when thinking through its design, and built in an ongoing mechanism for me to receive feedback from those with lived experience. This was particularly important when tasked with engaging groups to participate, ensuring my workshop materials were clear and pitched appropriately. Until now, my collaborators were friends and colleagues, but relying on external partner organisations usually meant relinquishing control over attendance, communication between sessions and tone-setting with the groups, as I was positioned as a guest rather than host. It also involved making my research methods clear and transparent to professionals whose presence is preconditioned as 'gatekeeping'. The credibility of Phosphoros as an entity behind me was useful here in contextualising my approach as experienced and reliable.

New methodological demands were placed on me as I tried to reconceptualise how to further my research inquiry in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, I had to reimagine what a care-oriented practice meant when the very notion of *being with* each other had suddenly become dangerous. In the context of national lockdown, the rehearsal room or workshop space as a site of care was no longer possible, and so my approach had to be reconfigured to be online. The exercises I led during the workshops took on new dimensions when delivered online, as we invited each other to view the tiny windows of our own homes, lives and personal domains. A

solo movement sequence depicting a ‘perfect night’s sleep’ hour by hour, for example, involved me as a participant-observer both recreating my own evening routines as well as pausing in my own points of stillness to watch other people’s lives in motion. Occupying rectangular boxes on my laptop screen were young people using their body language and objects close by to depict yoga poses, listening to music, praying, drinking tea, plaiting hair and applying moisturiser.

These embodied notions of comfort and care, revealed through performance, represented how sleep could be a conduit for exploring how the body establishes a sense of homeliness and safety, particularly in circumstances of precarity, and how the daily preparations for sleep might be understood as performative acts of self-care. It was these moments and the proximity between participants and the themes explored that really began to interest me. I realised that all the participants onscreen were participating from their bedrooms, and this contributed to my growing understanding of the practice, as my engagement with the young people became more personal and domestic as the online context opened new and poignant windows into daily life. The group I mention here, who showed me their ‘perfect night’s sleep’, never met in person during the project[33], and all lived in different areas of the UK. Nonetheless, there were a number of shared reference points which forged quiet and crucial connections at a time of increased micro and macro instability, and this resulted in the formation of a temporary yet meaningful online community.

As Britain ‘locked down’ and the entire population were confined to their homes, the contributors I worked with during this research shared feelings of being ‘stuck inside’, ‘trapped between the walls’ and ‘feeling like an animal in a cage’. As I

[33] Some, not all, of the participants later met in-person and became good friends through other activities Phosphoros was running, though this was outside of the scope of this research project.

worked from the stability and comfort of my home I thought about those whose 'homes' were transient, temporary, new and unfamiliar. Multi-dimensional relationships to place and space, and the complex phenomenon of 'home' for people displaced are themes discussed in refugee studies at length. For example, Giovanna Astolfo and Camillo Boano's Italy-based research into the imperfect ethics of hospitality looks at the contradictory feelings of many refugees around home as 'the opposite of home' as it starts to feel both 'a space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear' (2020, p.471). Troubling the notion of homelessness, they propose that 'for people on the move, rather than home being a fixed place it is a condition: the experience of being at home in the world' (p.472).

In my project, conceptualisations of home were represented creatively, and our discussions took on new resonance in the relational space I was trying to facilitate. The majority of people attending the workshops[34] were care experienced and living in foster placements, semi-independent accommodation or independent accommodation, and this contextualises how they engaged with their own - and each other's - domestic spaces online, given the commonality of experience. I, on the other hand, would 'join' workshops from my living room or home office space, rather than my bedroom. Not having my own sleep space featured in the background of my online workshops gave me the privilege of privacy, and made me more acutely aware of how much was being shared with me. Nonetheless, Building values of care and friendship into my methodology made me seek points of connection, and I joined in as young people in the workshops shared updates, developments and new objects of interest onscreen. These ranged from the predictable: houseplants growing, haircuts and new clothing, a cake just baked, to the more unusual: a tour of a garden, a

[34] A small number of workshop attendees had non-refugee backgrounds and were learning English at college, and some were not unaccompanied minors, but lived with family. The individuals I focus on in my analysis were current or former unaccompanied minors.

candyfloss machine, a new kitten. These moments felt significant and took on new importance in the context of separation.

As the project developed, it became clear that while the only context of the project presented some challenges it also opened up innovative and new ways of exploring self and collectively authored modes of performance, and enabled slow, thoughtful engagement where individuals could take part in the work while also remaining in spaces they may have felt safe in. However, I must not overlook significant challenges occurring due to digital poverty and often limited technical capabilities of those I worked with. I was aware that the experiential quality of the practice and the young people's engagement was impacted by ongoing and significant social and material factors including intermittent internet; lack of laptops, computers and tablets meaning individuals participated in practical, expressive workshops from smartphone screens; limited interface features compatible with phone screens (most pertinently the ability to see all users at once). Hence, the practice had to shift and change in response to these challenges and limitations, and I shaped my methodology to embrace digital possibilities whilst balancing this with the problematic of *coping* with them. As Hamington has observed, 'the pandemic dramatically highlights the complexity and persistent nature of privileges in society', rendering the precariat even more precarious (2021, p.285-6). These conditions created an interesting interplay with the theories of care, notions of home, the social reality of precarity, and conceptualisations of sleep, which I will look at in the following sections, as I explore how memory, self-care and hope were drawn out through performance practice.

Sleep had emerged as a theme in my first practice research project, *All the beds I have slept in,* as it unfolded, but in this second practical project I positioned sleep

more centrally. This made me think about the role sleep and practical issues of self-care and wellbeing play in the development of applied theatre practices. These types of projects tend to focus on narratives of change in relation to processes of self-actualisation or emancipation from oppressive structures or problematic power relations. However, this experience made me question how my practice would change if it foregrounded care and focussed more on the practices of sleep as a way of opening up new and original discussions of the relationship between care, wellbeing and performance-making more broadly. Interdisciplinary research in the fields of migration, childhood and psychology indicate there are very few studies examining the sleep issues affecting this group (see Lawrence and Michelmore 2019). Existing reports indicate poor or disturbed sleep, vivid flashbacks, nightmares and sleep terrors, contextual to both experiences in home countries and journeys to the UK. However, these sleep problems are often conflated with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which some experts argue is an unhelpful association (see Bronstein and Montgomery 2013). Further, studies suggest that young people may find talking about sleep easier and more directly relevant to their current lived experience, and it has the potential to address the critique of 'applying Western mental health concepts such as PTSD to UASC populations' (Carr, Hatzidimitriadou and Sango 2017, p.7), insofar as talking about sleep offers an alternative register to address issues of trauma. There is an overall lack of direct data collection from young people themselves (Bronstein and Montgomery 2013), meaning their voices remain on the periphery of research in this area. Caring practices developed to address poor sleep, such as Guatemalan 'worry dolls', sleep packs and resource packs exist, but, I argue, tend to be created without attentiveness to relational factors such as friendship and mutual care. My practice research sought to intervene in these gaps and create conditions in which refugee youth could reflect on, express and connect over their relationships to sleep, rather

than this conversation only take place in the context of pathology and research about them, without them.

I first observed these strategies for improving sleep hygiene when I worked in supported housing for refugee young adults, as I tried to better grasp the disordered sleeping habits I was observing in the young people I was supporting as an advocate and 'key worker', which regularly caused tension for myself and my colleagues. Carr, Hatzidimitriadou and Sango (2017)'s discussion of the fire hazards and other risks associated with refugee youth in supported accommodation placing towels over lamps to dim the light while they slept in order to recreate daytime sleeping (p.9) resonated with challenges I navigated between drawing attention to perceived 'concerning' behaviour (such as persistent overnight guests) and understanding self-care strategies young people were creating. The more I learnt about the lives of the young people I was working with, the more equipped I became at exploring the issues with the residents themselves in ways informed by an understanding of potential trauma, and gradually I was then able to grasp more intimately the ways isolation, loneliness, friendship and belonging were structuring many of their experiences in the UK, which has then informed subsequent practice, including this research. The *Stories for Sleeping* project provided space to collaboratively discover new and original ways of engaging with these issues through performance. It also enabled me to return more directly to unaccompanied minors as a focus group, opting to engage with a slightly younger demographic than my colleagues from Phosphoros, who are several years ahead in their resettlement in the UK.

The research methods discussed here also raise questions about my power and agency as a researcher in relation to young people with experience of forced migration (in other words 'the researched'). I was experiencing a different dynamic

to my first practice research project, due to their younger age, our lack of existing collaborative relationship, and (for many) that their engagement with me was via a support organisation or their college. To develop my research methodology in this regard, I borrowed Caroline Lenette's ideas around democratic arts-based research, as discussed previously, to influence how I developed my role as an artist researcher. Whilst working with my collaborators on *All the beds I have slept in* I engaged with provocations around the identity of 'refugee artists', the dynamic present was not shaped by the researcher subject dynamic as I was beginning from an existing collaboration and relationship between actor-devisors. Alternatively, in my second practical project, I based the practice more on what might be understood as a participatory approach more common in applied theatre research, which required shifting focus to working collaboratively in a youth-centred model.

I integrate learnings from Lenette into my methodology here, as she focuses on community-engaged principles and intersectionality, which she argues are useful because they contribute to a decolonised approach to research. As mentioned in Chapter Two, her use of the term 'knowledge holders' instead of research 'subjects' or 'participants' acknowledges the forms of expertise, embodied knowledge, agency and range of life experiences brought into participatory processes, in order to 'redress some of the power imbalances in research' (2019, p.24). Through my engagement with these ideas, I sought out new ways of positioning young people within my research methodology and this offered new ways of developing a practice that could move on from a premise of 'giving a voice' to another. Without the burden of proof so prominent in other sites of asylum narratives, in this project I developed new ways of thinking about refugee experience that challenged where authority lies.

Beyond this, I wanted to explore how unaccompanied minor experiences could be

spoken about *within* refugee communities, recognising these young people as active knowledge holders and sharers within the practice. The stories I wanted to explore in this project were aimed at an audience of young people with similar present circumstances, and the figure of this invisible audience member is central to how I developed the practice. Echoing the approach I developed as part of *All the beds I have slept in*, where I reflected on noticing things left unsaid, in *Stories for Sleeping* the storytellers spoke directly to the listener without going through the motions of literal and metaphorical translation they have otherwise had to when talking about their lives in institutional contexts such as the asylum process. This notion of a peer-to-peer encounter was the element of the project which attracted the most interest from the young people I met, and the change in audience served to produce a different dramaturgical approach which resulted in gaining new insight into how refugees' self-authored performances could be reconceptualised.

Interestingly, the distant figure of the young refugee listener that emerged in the imagination of the speaker became a conduit for filtering their ideas and reminding storytellers that narratives of trauma may not speak to the structural framing of bedtime stories. Instead, as I demonstrate on page 18 of my documentation, the thematics explored in the stories focused on hope, childhood nostalgia, hospitality and inner strength. Consequently, the stories refrained from excavating traumatic memories or reflections on subjects like systemic oppression in visceral ways, in doing so avoiding collapsing into Salverson's critique of an 'erotics of suffering' which I mentioned in Chapter One. Insofar as my approach aimed to support the storytellers to bring to our workshops only what they wanted to share, I worked hard to understand the implications of refugee youth drawing from their own lived experience for creative means. Building on my engagement with trauma-informed practice, I wanted to facilitate a space that could hold creative conversations about

the young people's lived experience, without shutting them down under an uncritical assumption that this is the most caring response. Yet the parameters I used to guide the content felt productive as a way of curating the direction of the workshop and overseeing engagement in a short term project. These practical decisions contributed to an overall editorial or dramaturgical responsibility I retained over the project, which I remained attuned to, so as not to reproduce what Wake describes as 'double silencing', whereby 'an artist solicits a story from a silenced subject only to silence them once again' (2019). Instead, the young people used creative methods to reshape their experiences and feelings in ways that could be reimagined to create a positive impact for others.

The concept of hope became the spine of these stories, enabling them to speak thematically to the problematics of temporariness and rupture that shape the precarity of refugees' lives, as examined in Chapter One of this thesis. By focusing on hope and its potential to be radically reconfigured through participatory performance I wanted to establish ways of resisting the experience of waiting and limbo often characterised through borderscapes of detention centres and refugee camps, both familiar spaces to many of the storytellers and which fix asylum seekers into a state of uncertainty.

What this approach to the practice achieved was an alternative way of refugees performing their own narratives that rejected those bound in an institutional and bureaucratic register, consisting of disbelieved claims, jargon and a language of dehumanisation. Instead, this practice created something else and developed ways of rethinking personal narrative through a lens of community and compassion. Through this, I developed a new understanding of performance's capacity to enact nurture and repair, and how this may function as the basis for an aesthetics of solidarity.

When rebuilding networks of care amidst a backdrop of ongoing rupture, moments of speaking to one's own circumstances with the intention of being heard reveal themselves as meaningful. What interested me were the ways in which creative practice can reveal, amplify and explore these experiences of repeated dislocation. I would suggest that in *Stories for Sleeping* three emerging findings unfolded, which I lay out in the following sections, and these exposed useful new knowledge about how to work ethically and with care when engaging with refugee youth and performance making.

Restoring dignity and care of the self

Through the set-up and structure of *Stories for Sleeping*, the project forged a different mode of testimony, as the pieces were produced with specific listeners in mind; young people who had a degree of shared experience. This required me to facilitate a practice of self-authorship that juggled individual's own personal navigation of hope and futurity with a focus on reflection as they created meaning through constructing stories. In this sense, the practice was created not only to consider how a story or a testimony was narrated but crucially how it would be listened to. In this section I argue that these modes of self-authorship enabled refugee young people regain some control over their own narratives, leading to restored dignity and new ways of caring for themselves and others. I focus mainly on three contributors: Muhammad, who I introduced in Chapter Two, and two young women who chose to be named Anna and Fini in my writing. I signpost when to refer to the documentation to listen to their stories, as well as when to listen to other example stories I have included.

Anna

A moment of practice that both challenged and affirmed my exploration of self-authorship involved Anna, a sixteen-year-old young woman from Iran who lived in the East of England. Anna worked with me, supported by my assistant facilitator Becca, to create a piece of writing called 'Spring' which she later recorded. The piece is a hopeful reflection on her journey through adolescence, touching on themes including resilience and influential women around her. She developed 'Spring' over several online sessions I ran for members of Phosphoros living outside London. I compiled Anna's first draft with other material she had contributed during the sessions that I had noted down, and then presented it back to her so we could collectively edit it together. This was a process I adopted as much as I could when working with smaller groups as I found it established a helpful starting point for collaborating across language barriers. The piece illustrates how the imagined audience member generated self-reflection from the storyteller, as Anna thought carefully about how she wanted to position herself in relation to her listener. This approach resonates with Thompson's model of caring for an audience (2020)as she considers carefully their experience and what they benefit from hearing. Witnessing Anna develop this form of self-authorship helped me reframe how I thought about hope, moving past a romantic engagement with this concept to something more political.

Anna identified several feelings she wanted the listener to experience, offering: *happiness, thoughtful, proud, meaningful, hope, peaceful*. She intended for her piece to instil a sense of peace before bedtime, as well as life lessons she had learnt, both in her home country and the UK. She interspersed this with her own mantras and affirmations ('you can't buy happiness, you build happiness'); and details of her own self-care practices ('after having a hot chocolate, doing yoga and having a

shower I rest with my thoughts'); and questions directed at the listener ('do you live with your auntie? I hope she teaches you as much as much as mine has'[35]). In the piece, Anna introduces the image of the 'glasses of negativity', which she takes off to replace with the 'glasses of positivity'. She says to the listener: 'I wonder if you feel the way I do. Do you wear the negative glasses too? I hope you can take them off'. Here, Anna envisions herself as having agency and responsibility over creating change for herself and implicates the listener as having this potential too. Through self-authorship, she displays her own vulnerability in exploring how she engages with the world, yet discovers her own language for describing her state of being. Sometimes she talks directly to the listener:

> *Sometimes it's ok not to be okay, and you can have a bad time because you are missing your family. Maybe you cry but that's all natural and understandable. Do not let this nostalgia and unhappiness keep you from living in the moment, learning new things and stopping you from thinking about your future.*

Elsewhere she reflects inwards:

> *When I feel peaceful I sleep deeply. After having a hot chocolate, doing yoga and having a shower I rest with my thoughts. I think about the people who came before me, my best teachers. Courageous and inspiring women.*
>
> *My mum is one of the strongest and bravest women in my life. She has always worked hard to make me and my sister happy. I'm as proud of her, as she is of me, and I am motivated to work hard to pay her back for all the happiness she gave me. When you find someone precious like this, never let them go.* (Anna 2021)

Like many of the young people I met, Anna wanted to make her listener feel brave, countering the feelings of powerlessness I have discussed elsewhere in this thesis. However, as I listened to individual stories unfold I found myself challenged by the urges young people were bringing to assure the listener that *everything will be ok*. I

[35] 'Auntie' and 'Uncle' are commonly used to address foster carers, which Anna is doing in this extract.

wondered whether I had, in a sense, over-theorised what I understood hope to be. I had been engaging with hope as a concept in its abstract form, examining its radical potential when shattering linear temporalities, which I felt was pertinent to my unfolding research inquiry. Here, I began to realise that a form of neoliberal logic was inadvertently starting to creep into how hope was being represented in some of these performances, which required me to reflect more critically on how I was engaging with the themes of the stories myself, given my positionality and absence of forced migration history. When young people in the workshops would return to the mantra of *everything will be ok* I found myself feeling troubled, knowing that precarity would continue to underscore the experience of many of their peers and, potentially, themselves. I was conscious that for Anna this hope (in part) seemed to connect with her image of a mother, however I was also aware that for others the image of a mother could also be a source of loss rather than sustenance. I am reminded of the problematics involved in singular stories transferring to the universal.

Towards the end of ‘Spring’, Anna says:

> *People who experience difficult things are very lucky because they are no longer ordinary people, they are strong and experienced. People become stars and shine in hardship.* (Anna 2021)

Whilst I understood Anna’s instinct here to raise up her peers, her words sat at odds with me and were emblematic of my uncomfortableness with the tropes of resilience that tend to dominate discussions about unaccompanied minors. As a practitioner, Anna’s words at this point presented me with a degree of conflict and some dilemma about how to best move forward with this stage of our story-making. Nonetheless, they were her words, not mine, and for me to overshadow her message with my own ethical standpoint on representation would reproduce the sorts of power differentials

I was trying to resist within this practice research. As I reflected on my unease in this moment and my concern that struggle was being romanticised, I reminded myself that Anna was at once talking to the listener and herself. In this sense, she knew in ways I did not about what this story needed to say, and the mode of self-authorship made it possible for her do this.

Listen to *Spring* on page 19 of my documentation.

Muhammad

The moment of practice described with Anna was not the only time my methodological approach was challenged. In Chapter Two I reflected on Muhammad's ambivalence for the *Stories for Sleeping* project, specifically in relation to the disconnection he felt about taking part in a creative process whilst his immigration matters remained unresolved. His response highlighted the oppositional incompatibility between a political system enforcing hostility and my intention of exploring an ethic of care. His response is an active reminder that this creative process is not abstracted from its socio-political reality. I anticipate it was likely that others shared Muhammad's perspective and decided against taking part in my research project for similar reasons. I appreciated Muhammad's honesty in his critique of my research intentions, which I suggest was made possible due to the trusting relationship we had entered into. Muhammad and I continued to chat in loose terms about the themes of the research, and a couple of weeks after our initial conversation he decided he *did* want to create a story, which then turned into three. The stories were constructed through a verbal and written collaborative editing process over phone calls, video calls and email, and eventually we met in person to explore them vocally before recording. Muhammad created three stories: *The Wolf*,

recreating a childhood cautionary tale often told in Kurdistan; *Recipe for Sleep*, offering advice to someone struggling to sleep; and *The Trail*, which explores interrelational care between newly arrived refugees, and best demonstrates how self-authorship became a channel for Muhammad to regain control over his own narrative, which had been repeatedly bound up in the bureaucratic process of the immigration system as he waited for the outcome of his asylum claim.

The motif that Muhammad kept returning to was the notion of helping others because they had been helped once before. When developing *All the beds I have slept in* (see Chapter Three), Goitom had described this as 'legacy', and here Muhammad termed it a 'trail'. He detailed instances where people had offered him help when he was in need; a kind teacher, classmates in his new college, Kurdish restaurant workers who gave him cash and free food; and then told me about the times he had helped people too. Muhammad described encountering a newly arrived Kurdish teenager ("an underage") who could not speak English, who was being asked for his ID by the police:

> They were saying 'give us your ID'. He confused the two sentences 'I don't have' and 'I don't give you'. He was shouting 'I don't give you!' I went over and asked 'what is going on?' He told me him the ID was in his hostel and I told him 'you're saying it wrong - you mean *I don't have it'*. I told the police he's new in this country, so he didn't understand what they're asking. He didn't mean to tell them that.

When I asked Muhammad what moved him to intervene here, his words echoed those of Tewodros' that I cited in Chapter One. He said:

> I knew he was Kurdish from his face - I just knew. And it was his clothes - my heart told me he was new. I could just feel it that he was new. You won't understand, but I just knew (Muhammad 2021).

As I tried to understand, I wondered how Muhammad might reimagine some of these memories through the structure of a story, and how this might enable him to pay

tribute to the experiences that had clearly been formative. I introduced Muhammad to retelling some of the stories in the third person; a technique adopted in the past by Phosphoros, positioning 'the boy' as the driving force of the narrative. Through this technique, he was able to navigate the distance between his selves as a storyteller, testimonial voice and individual. It was the version of teenage Muhammad that he chose to illuminate, constructed through the eyes of the slightly older Muhammad who knows more now than he did then. In *The Trail,* which we created collaboratively, Muhammad takes the role of the storyteller and this dramaturgical structure allows him to reframe moments he felt disempowered in reflective ways, as he shifts from remembering to analysing:

> *There was a boy who came to this country for a safer life. His home was very far away - he didn't know how many miles away but it was a lot. He made a long journey that will stay in his heart forever, and remain in his bones, because it made him who he is today.*
>
> *When he arrived, he wasn't sure what his future would be like. Every way his head turned was something new and different. A strange language he had only heard in American movies - he couldn't say the words right. Funny clothes and even funnier food. He discovered that he was being born new and needed to learn how to live again.*
>
> *In his country he helped his family, even when he was small, working as a shepherd, but here, he had a little card, a piece of plastic that made the rules, and it said he could not work. Instead, and because he was young, the government paid people to look after him and they made sure he had enough money to eat.*
> (Muhammad 2021)

Muhammad's poignant reflection on the disempowering structures of the state asylum system made me think about how this process of speaking out and narrating this story of self-care and solidarity also became an act of resistance to the uncaring processes he was encountering. Sara Ahmed's theorising of self-care as subversive is helpful here, and I draw on her notion of self-care as 'warfare' to highlight the radical and political potential in forming solidarities with the self (and others). She argues that in queer, feminist and anti-racist work:

> Self-care is about the creation of community; fragile communities, assembled out of the experiences of being shattered. We reassemble ourselves through the ordinary, everyday and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves; looking after each other. This is why we have to insist, I matter, we matter, we are transforming what matters (Ahmed, 2014).

The concept of reassembling a shattered self resonates with the stories created in *Stories for Sleeping*, as the storytellers adopted creative strategies to reconstruct forms of life narratives that became hard to grasp onto for refugees whose experiences become confined to bureaucratic forms of testimony. Several of the stories created, including Muhammad's, illustrate this process of re-assemblement, as well as paying tributes to those who had helped. In doing so, stories of struggle took on a new and powerful sense of audibility. As Muhammad turns instances of solidarity into stories of the boy on his trail, he arrives at the learning he wishes to share, before ending his piece by closing the distance between the boy and himself, and making himself known.

> *People need us to give them a hand and a chance, said the boy. He hoped they understood… that they were part of the trail now, and their hearts had to be open for others to find them.*
>
> *The boy had learnt from people before him to help others. If they hadn't helped him then, he wouldn't be able to help now. They taught him not to forget his last story.*
>
> *Do you recognise the boy? Maybe you have felt like him, or helped someone like him.*
>
> *The boy is me.*
>
> (Muhammad 2021)

In Chapter Two I drew attention to the notion of radical care established as an 'otherwise', despite structural inequality (see Hobart and Kneese 2020, p.3). Here, Muhammad reimagines moments from his own lived experience that were disempowering, precarious or, in the context of the 'strangers' he later helped, perhaps unremarkable. The concept of the 'otherwise' is mobilised here as

Muhammad encapsulates the reparative potential of recognising and paying tribute to moments of care that sustained him and others. This moment in *Stories for Sleeping* then revealed an important insight into the ways refugee performance can re-imagine care-giving. For in this moment, care emerged not as something given to Muhammad by an external agency, but instead performance exposed how care is *already* present within this community. The practice then revealed how care can activate modes of solidarity which disrupt the regular binaries of care-giving and care-receiving in the context of refugee youth.

Listen to *The Trail* on page 19 of my documentation. To hear *Recipe for Sleep* and *The Wolf*, please go to page 22.

Fini

The final storyteller I would like to discuss in this section on self-authorship is Fini, a nineteen year old young woman from Sierra Leone who had recently arrived in the UK, during the COVID-19 pandemic. My analysis looks at how the themes of self-care in the *Stories for Sleeping* project led to Fini generating gestures of solidarity beyond herself as she began to find new ways to create meaning from her experience of isolation in a city in Scotland. Her piece is called *My Mirror* and was developed over several consecutive online workshops. In the piece, Fini brings her bedroom mirror to life as a companion that helps her to feel strong, reflecting the loneliness and isolation often critical for unaccompanied minors, exacerbated during the global pandemic. Further, being on the brink of adulthood made her feel too old for 'youth' activities but too young for women's projects which often consisted of mothers and children. Without many friends as company, Fini relies on her mirror for comfort. Whilst the device of the mirror may at first imply damaging rhetoric of negative body

image for young women, Fini's mirror is gentle and talkative: a friend. After Fini drafted her piece, I worked with her to add an element of interaction, so the listener is invited to find their own mirror and discover words of encouragement:

> *Do you have a mirror in your room? Can you find it? I'll wait…*
>
> *[Pause]*
>
> *Look at the person staring back: how amazing you are. What do they need to hear? You might feel funny, but I talk to myself in the mirror.*
>
> *[Laughter]*
>
> *I say: 'You are strong, you are bold, you are beautiful. Nothing will bring you down.' What will you say?*
>
> *[Pause]*
>
> *That's great! What else?*
>
> *[Pause]*
>
> (Fini 2021)

Here, Fini's words take on dimensions of care. She becomes a companion to the listener, guiding them through her piece and imagining their responses, thereby implicating them as agents of their own self-repair. In doing so, she also positions herself as driving her own narrative, exploring an interesting engagement with feminist politics I hadn't witnessed in other pieces developed in the course of the project. Fini's gestures of friendship and attempts to elevate others represent interdependent care through performance in action. She speaks about the personal in a way that maps it onto the universal: assuming collective identification and a joint possibility for change. To return to discourses of hope, I would argue that in her performance, Fini enacts a mode of radical hope, as she talks not of linear markers of resettlement that are familiar in discourses of migration, but instead re-imagines hope and care for the future through enacting embodied feelings of strength.

Fini’s piece also brings intersectionality to the fore, drawing on contemporary culture to reference her Blackness through an anti-racist lens. She knew she wanted to include some music or singing in her piece, and told me how inspired she felt by American singer Beyoncé’s pride as a Black woman. She decided to include an extract from Beyoncé’s track *Brown Skin Girl,* which appears in *The Lion King: The Gift*, and features her then seven-year-old daughter Blue Ivy Carter, amongst others. Fini chose a section from the end of the song, where Blue Ivy sings the chorus alone, tenderly - almost enchantingly - in parallel with the magnitude of her mother’s voice. The moment is quiet and affecting, striking an important tribute to Black women and girls’ self-esteem and ongoing struggle against White supremacy:

> *Brown skin girl*
> *Ya skin just like pearls*
> *Your back against the world*
> *I never trade you for anybody else, say*
> *Brown skin girl*
> *Ya skin just like pearls*
> *The best thing in all the world*
> *I never trade you for anybody else, say* (Beyoncé et al 2019).

The inclusion of contemporary culture within Fini’s piece is significant as it roots her words in time and place, as a contestation to the universalism of refugees. I argue this indicates how popular media, feminist politics and care of the self might coalesce as she navigates resettlement. Positioning the personal as political in this way opens up new ways of thinking about how the processes of self-narration within the *Stories for Sleeping* project led to interesting and dynamic moments of care between the storyteller and the imagined listener. Scholarship examining youth networks have observed how these kinds of collectives have the potential of self care extending outwards beyond the group and into youth networks. For example, Jacquelyn Arcy and Laurie Ouellette analyse how self-writing within the US teen website *Rookie* developed non-hierarchical and relational spaces, where care of the self came to be seen as a ‘collaborative ethical project’ (2015, p.97). They frame

these writing practices as 'strategies for survival', observing how they resist authoritative or institutionalised knowledge and expertise, arguing that processes of self-knowledge and self-reflection can expand how others care for themselves too. I imported these ideas into my own practice, applying strategies of self-authorship to a group routinely narrated by others, as a way of rewriting the scripts assigned to them by statutory services. As I return to the theme of resilience, and how it is rethought through a collaborative practice, these moments from Fini's performance reveal the power of care and self-care emerging and being held by young people themselves, rather than being encountered through an engagement with a professional. The intimate engagement Fini establishes with her audience is very effective and poignant here; when she invites her listener to respond, is felt in different ways in other stories in the collection. Language reconfigures the concept of authority and positions the storytellers less as the recipients of charity or care but rather, perhaps, as 'Knowledge Holders' (Lenette 2019), or, more dynamically in the case of this research, potential friends: 'trust me'; 'I know how you feel'; 'believe me'; 'I was in your position'. In the following section I examine my second theme, and look more closely at the affective quality of the aesthetics of friendship and how it emerged as a form of solidarity through *Stories for Sleeping*.

Listen to *My Mirror* on page 19 of my documentation.

The stranger as audience

In an early workshop, a participant started his piece of writing, a letter, with 'Hello *habibi,* I'm so glad you're here'. *Habibi* (masculine) and *habibti* (feminine) are Arabic terms of endearment for friends, strangers and one's beloved. This address struck a chord with several other contributors to the *Stories for Sleeping* project, who incorporated it into their own writing. The dramaturgical device of a composite

character is one I have frequently used in my work with Phosphoros, as a way of workshop participants directing stories, thoughts or messages that represent or illuminate multiple and overlapping lived experience from varying degrees of distance. Usually I would invite a group to name the character, and represent them using clothing. In *Stories for Sleeping* however, the imaginary listener is simultaneously less familiar in its conceptualisation, and also exists in the future as a real young person engaging with the stories on social media. In so doing, *habibi* becomes a conduit for the storytellers to frame their engagement with the project, shaping their responses in ways that incorporate kinship, respect, solidarity and openness in its familiarity. Beyond this, it engenders a sense of hope that someone will emerge as a listener to their story and that this may become a form of help.

The figure of the *potential friend* is critical to how collective and interdependent care emerges in this research, as the storytellers use performances of selfhood to care for the other they cannot know, yet care for deeply. I am reminded of the *Letters Home* project, a a documentary play made with refugee youth in Berlin, which used the construction and filming of letters to explore personal and autobiographical themes. Wilmer analyses this framing device, referencing a young person who did not want to write a letter to his family due to the private subject matter, but 'discovered that he could transmit what he wanted to say by composing a letter to a friend instead' (2018, p.86). Within *Stories for Sleeping,* it was through the dramaturgical approach I developed that meaningful forms of life-writing and performances of selfhood emerged, which were distinct from other forms of performance I had engaged with previously and which harnessed the affective potential of encounters between refugee performers and non-refugee audiences. In interrupting these dynamics of spectatorship the practice moved towards a mode of

the reparative, where new forms of solidarity were generated, based on collective (yet distinct) experience, rather than a politics of pity (see Boltanski 1999).

Solidarity plays a key role in facilitating this dynamic encounter between storyteller and listener, and, as I would argue, emerges in significant ways when focus is placed on refugees as audience. One way this can be demonstrated is through the border politics embedded in *Stories for Sleeping*. Notably absent from the pieces is the tendency to reassert the humanity of refugees that often features in broader forms of representation. Looking back on *All the beds I have slept in* and the discussions I had with my collaborators (outlined in the previous chapter) I observe that a lot of performance work with refugees comes from a desire to share the message with the audience that 'refugees are human too', a statement which is bound up with the routine dehumanisation wrought of the asylum experience. At the crux of this statements, which I have encountered many times in my work in the field, is a reflection of how slow violence resulting from bureaucratic border enforcement that makes those caught within it lacking in personhood. Stripped from political, social or historical specificity, the inability to assert one's own humanity embodies the ramifications of Agamben's 'bare life' (1995) in its crudest sense. In other words, mere existence is the absolute minimum in this version of the refugee imaginary. In the workshops I delivered with refugee young people, however, these discussions did not emerge, which indicates to me that those taking part were engaging with the practice to serve an alternative need beyond restoring their own dignity. Further, this might also suggest that the notion of refugees lacking a sense of self is not always one that resonates with refugees themselves. Accordingly, questions around rights were not raised in in the context of this practice research, and it was only later, when reflecting on the practice that this absence became visible to me. As I have suggested elsewhere in this thesis, many of the thematic ideas explored in

Stories for Sleeping and other projects undertaken in the course of this research, were reliant on a shared set of understandings amongst the storytellers and listeners, of what *goes without saying.* At times I was witness to these connections being established, and other times I was reminded that 'solidarities are being forged beyond my gaze' (Rosen 2023, p.34). Thus, meaning was being created by my collaborators within as well as beyond the parameters of my research inquiry: it exceeded me.

In the pieces created through *Stories for Sleeping* the tone was distinct to the ambivalence sometimes found in creative work that fights for recognition of fundamental human rights or amplification of structural and material violences enacted against refugees and asylum seekers face. The overlapping representations of the refugee as both non-threatening victim and threatening bogus asylum seeker are examined in *Refugee Imaginaries* (2019), where the editors argue that:

> It is vital that we distinguish between the imaginaries of refugees themselves, shaped by their hopes and despairs, their fear and bravery, their losses and their desires, and the imaginaries generated in and by the Global North about refugees, shaped by xenophobia, fear and anxiety as well as by humanitarian concern (Cox et al 2020 , p.5).

Amidst these competing discourses the refugee becomes passive, and the space for lived experience perspectives comes to be radically limited (p.5). This quote by Cox et al also reminds me of the different functions of making art with refugees and how different audiences necessitate these shifts in focus and tone. In my project, the storytellers were not required to justify their suffering, nor did they have to argue for the rights of refugees. Unlike some other spaces of audibility, the notion of rights operated as a shared value that did not need to be stated, and so the results are perhaps gentler and entering into a mode of repair and re-assemblement. Without compromising on the portrayal of the self, the stories, I would argue, produced an

alternative refugee imaginary oriented towards those with communal experience. While the stories were not without struggle, references to this appeared more obliquely. There was, in other words, a shared understanding of *what 'we' have been through*. The narratological demand of a bedtime story also shaped the dramaturgy of the story. The need to be soothing in tone meant that the storytellers often reverted to childhood feelings and used proverbs to display meaning or included vivid language to pay respect to journeys survived. These can be seen in the examples below, taken from a range of contributors:

> *When we learn English we make mistakes and get things wrong. You might feel you are a child again, but let me tell you this: every mistake you make is a reminder of your mother tongue (*Tahir 2021*)*
>
> *I know what it's like to feel cross and tired, and to feel lost in the wild desert, my tummy hungry and my eyes sleepy. When all you can do is breathe. I know you had no choice but the deadly sea. But you're here - you arrived. I know you were lost in the waves, and it was hard, so hard. But* habibti*, 'nothing is impossible under the sun'. You made it* (An-Nur 2021)
>
> *Habibi, you might not feel like a mountain today, and that's ok. You can find others to help you, until you do. Be a mountain, or lean on one* (Beekan 2021)

A close identification between storyteller and listener emerges in these extracts and produces highly tender exchanges. In An-Nur's extract, for example, she applied her own embodied knowledge to an evocative description of a sea crossing, revealing dynamic interconnections between her own identity and her memories. An-Nur imagines the listener, as newly arrived to the UK, someone who is like her her past self, and in her address to this imagined person, she performed a text that became a performance of the self, which might also be described as reparative. Elsewhere in her piece, An-Nur also speaks with empathy and compassion to her listener, saying: 'I know what it's like to wake up scared, when all you want to do is listen to the gentle voice of your mum singing a lullaby'. Her words become a form of comfort for the listener, who may also share her experience of living without family. In this way,

through her performance, An-Nur constructs an audience that could be made up of refugees, like her, rather than creating an audience of listeners who do not share her history of displacement. An-Nur's piece, like others in the collection, echoes with the fluidity of time and liminality, reflecting both slumber and stagnant limbo. The ways the storytellers explore momentary and moments of fleeting and lasting loss that emerged in An-Nur's piece was also reflected in some of the other performances and led me to think about how this approach to performance could generate new engagements with concepts of hope and solidarity.

Key to public engagement with this project was an understanding that the primary audience for these performances was refugee young people. By shifting focus away from the general public, whereby dramaturgical decision-making may become informed by desires to raise awareness, change perspectives or educate, here the work had the potential to enter into a reparative register and to generate collective spaces of care. Whilst the individuals involved did not necessarily have shared identity characteristics such as language, nationality or religion, they were joined together through temporal circumstances of forced migration. Yet, the restorative potential of creating and sharing together remains. Taking these ideas further as I apply them to the collaborative practice, I argue the storytelling and performance approaches adopted in the performance take on a reparative function in relation to the slow violence encountered by refugees. The stories, then, provide space for past and present selves to meet, disrupting temporalities in radically caring ways and establishing modes of solidarity that evoke a sense of hope.

Listening and the aesthetics of solidarity

In this final section I consider how the act of act of listening in the *Stories for Sleeping* project made visible the networks of friendship and care that sustain

communities of refugee youth and enable strangers to rely on each other. My argument focuses on how peer-to-peer connection in moments of sharing practice enabled an aesthetic of solidarity to emerge that illuminated the potential of self-sustaining forms of care as a form of resistance. I incorporate story extracts and reflections from contributors and import scholarship in order to deepen my analysis. In doing so, I explore how my methodological approach led me to new insights about performing life narratives with refugee youth and their potential to generate and make visible important forms of interconnected care. In stark contrast to institutional encounters where refugee youth often occupy deficit positions, the stories explored in my practice take on qualities of validation and recognition, and so the invitation to listen is attentive, even when the listener moves in and out of focus of the speaker. Scholarship emerging in sonic theory argues for the emancipatory potential of sound and listening as being conducive to empathy and compassion, 'as well as the means to break the borders of particular regimes of violence with its interruptive potential' (LaBelle 2020, p.4). In this sense, listening is reconfigured as a force for solidarity.

The decision-making I engaged with when adopting my methodological approach enabled me to consider how refugees' self-authorship can rethink identity constructions that have been ascribed somewhat uncritically in institutional settings. The following section from Anna's story 'Spring' demonstrates the nuance of her own self-representation:

> *Sometimes we can't see the future because the dark clouds are blocking our view. But every morning the sun comes up, every morning I get up, and I decide to change* (2021).

Here, Anna repositions herself as an agent of change, speaking obliquely to the complex mental health issues facing many refugee young people. Through asserting her own agency and ownership over her relationship with her own mental health, her

comments here counter dominant knowledge production about unaccompanied minors that position young refugees only as the receivers of care. I suggest that in this moment Anna's practice of self-care might also recognise a sense of subjectivity for those routinely excluded from discourse around citizenship and belonging. In this way, I would argue that through the invitation to listen and the intimate address to another, *Stories for Sleeping* staged what I would describe as an aesthetics of solidarity. Here, the performances created an encounter that was both equitable and empowering and opened up potential forms of connection between the refugee community. The interaction and invitation to connect was directed through the creative practice, and when successful, I suggest, facilitated an encounter that was reparative. The impact of these stories emerging through an aesthetics of solidarity is evident in Fini's piece, particularly in the following section which seems to echo a love letter to the self and the other:

> *I look at my reflection: all the corners of my body, from head to toe, and I say: 'I'm cool, I'm all good'*
>
> *So tomorrow when you wake up - after your dreams have been full of Beyoncé and your favourite jams*[36] *- I want you to do the same.*
>
> *From head to toe, you're cool, you're smart, you're beautiful, you're all good. You deserve joy.*
>
> *From head to toe you deserve joy.*
>
> *You deserve joy.*
>
> *You deserve joy*
>
> (2021)

I played Fini's recording to three of the contributors who had assisted me in delivering the workshops, and they shared helpful insights into how the pieces might engage the listener. An-Nur and Eren were particularly moved by Fini's words and

[36] She uses 'jams' to refer to songs

identified strongly with the theme of looking after oneself in moments of loneliness. The response that struck me was Eren's. He was a twenty-year-old university student who had been conscientious and precise as an advisor and assistant facilitator, yet his responses had been less open and forthcoming as An-Nur's and he demonstrated some reticence when it came to reflecting on his own emotional responses to the project. However, he described his reaction to Fini's piece as being one based on 'solidarity', and said:

> When I listen it feels like we have the same limbs. She makes a picture with the audio and I feel like I am there. She's taking us to her own home. It feels like solidarity. When we go through hard times, we feel like we're in the same body, the same bones, the same liver. We combine our bodies. I'm not a dictionary but this is what solidarity means to me (Eren 2021).

Eren's description of bodily connection felt so intimate and unlocked a reflective quality I had not experienced from him before, prompted by the experience of listening. Returning to ideas developed in sonic theory, the experience of listening creates an experience of affective sharing, through which LaBelle argues 'it becomes possible to nurture modes of engaged attention, for listening is often relating us to the depths of others' (2020, p.4). I suggest that the sustenance Eren took from listening to Fini's piece resembles caring as a mode of repair. According to LaBelle, 'Listening is never purely passive, rather it performs as an affective and intelligent labour by which recognition is nurtured and relations are continually remodelled' (2020, p.145). Whilst I am cautious not to collapse difference to sameness and suggest uncritical identification between people with diverse life experiences, I argue the stories hold reparative potential, which is only made possible by shifting focus away from the general public (I refer specifically here to people without experience of displacement). Through these observations I was reminded of the possibilities of quiet, expansive connections being created, positioning the refugee experience as simultaneously deeply personal and individual as well as knowable, and

thus validating. These encounters that are based on recognition open up connections of compassion, and emerge as an aesthetics of solidarity. In this sense, An-Nur observed the way the unsaid can speak to the often tense relationship individuals have with the label of "refugee":

> Sometimes people feel… "less" when they say they're a refugee. But in the creative writing we are happy to share and express our feelings. It feels really special. We don't often need to say we are refugees because we have a connection with the young people listening. It doesn't even need to be said (An-Nur 2021).

Unlike many institutional sites of hospitality and sanctuary, in *Stories for Sleeping* the 'hosts' are not framed as 'citizens' or 'others', but as peers: a community of strangers who are also potential friends. Through the methodology I have enacted which is responsive, flexible and influenced by trauma-informed practice, the encounters between listener and storyteller simultaneously recognise shared and collective struggle whilst also propelling notions of hope and this, I suggest, is generative of an aesthetics of solidarity. Within the practice the precarity of waiting is momentarily ruptured as a network of care opened up between performer and listener, generating a moment of compassion and mutually sustained caring. An-Nur's reflections on listening to the stories relay the multiple ways she was forming meaning:

> They're not telling a depressing story, but you can tell there have been sad parts. I think new people would feel less alone in their situation when they listen. When you hear it's not just you that is going through this your sadness goes down (An-Nur 2021).

I interpret An-Nur's response here as demonstrating how performance of the self elicited certain forms of listening and enabled allyship to form, prompting a dynamic reimagining of some of the fixed identity positions that otherwise dominate representations of unaccompanied minors as perpetual victims. Instead of producing an 'erotics of suffering' (Salverson 2001), these performances demonstrate the powerful possibility of witnessing between refugee peers. By creating, telling and

listening to the stories, refugee youth were finding new ways to navigate precarious circumstances, thereby experiencing anew a capacity to care and be cared for.

Aesthetics of solidarity as an emergent practice (and a coda)

In *Stories for Sleeping* I developed a new approach to refugee performance that re-centred refugees as narrators of their own experience and generated forms of performance that enacted an aesthetics of solidarity. These practices, I have argued, allowed for forms of recognition that also supported the building of a virtual community while also making visible the forms of intersubjective care that is self-sustaining and are constructed upon legacies or trails of friendship and compassion, which are so often overlooked and ultimately devalued by institutional approaches to refugee care. In suggesting that these performance encounters enter, at times, into reparative modes of engagement I have created a practice that attends to interdependent modes of care that can be a source of support and hope for refugee youth. The creative practice developed through *Stories for Sleeping* generated opportunities for strangers with similar lived experiences to connect with each other in ways that felt distinct to other locations of refugee representation or engagement.

Reflecting on what I have learned as a practitioner I realise that some of the most significant moments of discovery in the *Stories for Sleeping* project occurred when my role shifted and I watched on as the practice unfolded in front of me. One way t his happened when multiple languages were used, and the practice was decentred. Part of the intention of *Stories for Sleeping* was that each piece would be translated by the storyteller into their home language/s, and both versions would be shared online. Where possible, I wanted the listeners to have the option to connect with storytellers who spoke their tongue, believing this would be powerful, particularly for those isolated and living apart from diaspora communities. An early decision I

made was that the stories in home languages would be optional and only recorded by the storyteller, rather than enlisting professional translators to recreate word-for-word versions for me. The latter option, I felt, would overly 'formalise' the stories and fix them, and I felt this would reproduce notions of 'speaking for' that my practice research intended to resist. For Catrin Evans, getting rid of the 'burden of language' from creative spaces with refugees makes possible a rich 'move away from the hegemony of an imposed monolingual culture' (2019, p.49).

I didn't require the stories to be direct translations, and so some pieces are loose echoes of each other rather than copies. This put me in an interesting position as a researcher as I no longer had a grasp on everything being shared and discussed. Though I had assistant facilitators joining me at different times who speak Arabic, Dari and Pashto it would not have been conducive to a youth-centred collaborative space to have multiple interpreters meeting all language requirements (particularly when working online), so I relied on the reciprocal trust and openness established early on to generate a creative and inclusive environment. These issues of translation are complex. According to Fadi Skeiker and Myla Morris-Skeiker, 'liminal citizenship' (2010) occurs through social disconnectedness experienced by refugees. They argue that language acquisition of the dominant tongue leads to an overemphasis of language as a 'central point of integration [and] embraces a deficit model' (2020, p.27). In their proposal for applied theatre as a bridge to language equity, language is connected to belonging, as illustrated in their case study of Syrian refugees in Germany who, they argue, connect Arabic language with a sense of being (p.29). Taking this stance into account, I balanced the use of English as a shared language amongst groups of multiple languages, whilst also being attentive to the importance of home languages and their capacity to convey distance, allyship and identity. I therefore suggest the sites of storytelling I developed through the

Stories for Sleeping project took on important new dimensions of validation and solidarity.

However, in retrospect this highlighted one of the limitations of the practice in relation to the representational aesthetics within the story collection, and what my practice did not adequately achieve. A misstep I made was in the choices of music I used to accompany the narratives contributed by the young people. Instead of including original compositions reflective of the cultural backgrounds of the storytellers, I relied on stock music I could access for free, which was mainly classical instrumental and electronic ambient music. My music choices were partly driven by practical constraints, primarily that the limited scope and budget of the research did not allow for the commissioning of original compositions, and I had not allocated time to discuss with each contributor their chosen music style. However, the decision I made overlooked the critical role of auditory semiotics in narrative construction, and missed an opportunity to carry further cultural signifiers that would likely resonate with the communities listening. If I were to repeat this project and expand its scope with more resources I would explore alternatives such as sourcing culturally relevant music, collaborating with community musicians or partnering with a music based organisation to enhance this aspect of the work. This would ensure the auditory elements of the project were as meaningful and representative as the stories themselves.

As I move towards the final chapter of this thesis I reflect on what *Stories for Sleeping* as a piece of practice research reveals about performance making with refugee youth. This was a project developed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdowns; a crisis of unique and urgent precarity which, as argued by Hamington, ‘highlighted the need and value of care in society over and

above other interests' (2021, p.287). The conditions the research took place in started as unusual and then became referred to as a 'new normal'; engaging in workshops over headphones and mobile phones and with frequent interruptions of intermittent WiFi, housemates and unexpected visits from social workers. Boundaries between personal and public (and personal and professional) collapsed as our homes became our virtual workspaces, granting new access into each other's lives, but as one form of 'border' lapsed, the differing positions on the digital divide limited the inclusion of some.

Whilst this turn towards the digital was determined by the pandemic, and at times receives only passing attention in my analysis, it is also necessary to reflect on the meaning and significance of online spaces for refugee youth, and what new forms of interconnected care it has facilitated. I chose social media platform Instagram, as well as Phosphoros' website, to be the online homes for the stories, which made them easily accessible and shareable through online media and printed QR codes. Nevertheless, the attempts I made, both pre-emptively and responsively, to facilitate a creative process that was hospitable, trauma-informed and accessible did not always work, and I argue this, in part, owed much to the backdrop of the hostile environment forcing so many into stagnant phases of uncertainty and limbo. Further, as I have indicated through my analysis, the young people who engaged most in depth with the workshops, and whose stories I have foregrounded in my writing, are those who I was able to work with for longer, or individuals I had established a relationship with already. I am hesitant to reduce my observation of this limitation to a critique of temporary applied theatre interventions, and suggest the impact of the more fleeting creative encounters developed their own sort of meaning in terms of having their stories listened to and validated by their peers, reflecting on their roles as potential friends of strangers, and having a space to creatively express their

relationship to sleep. Whilst it was harder to replicate the relational approach I had developed over longer periods of time (including 'offline'), along with practical challenges of inconsistent attendance and intermittent internet, I draw upon de Smet (et al)'s description of the ephemeral nature of theatre and the value of participatory refugee theatre as a 'reconstructive space of bearing witness', whereby 'the traces of their testimonies… never fully disappear' (2024).

I return again to the notion of the 'otherwise' as I reflect on the discoveries made in this project. Laine Zisman describes working through the interruption of the pandemic and the ongoing mourning it precipitated, wondering: 'In the face of grief and loss, changing modes and pace, attending to care-full methodologies can feel like not accomplishing goals, falling behind, or even quitting altogether. What would it take for those perceived "failures" to be ok?' (Zisman 2020, p.33) It is with this in mind that I end on a sort of coda to this chapter, symbolic of the practice research having many different 'endings'.

Although many of the refugee young people who contributed to the research in 2021 I did not meet again, several individuals continued (or started) to engage with Phosphoros' work more broadly. Echoing Tillmann-Healy's stance on 'friendship as method', the relationships with these individuals and the investment I have in their lives is on par with the project (2003, p.735). There are several ways I could close this chapter, but I have chosen to end with the words of Zeus, a young woman from Iraq who, despite generously offering me much feedback and reflection throughout the project, didn't contribute her own submission. Several months after this phase of my project ended, she finally had her asylum claim accepted, and was granted Refugee Status. I asked her if she felt like writing something for *Stories for Sleeping*, and she said yes.

This micro narrative indicates how, through listening to refugee stories slowly, carefully and unconditionally, I have experienced a mode of witnessing that contributes to quiet resistance to the slow violence of the asylum system, and in reimagining these forms of witnessing and speaking through *Stories for Sleeping* I have seen this recreated with exciting consequence on a larger scale. Ultimately, however, I reiterate the importance of justice for asylum seekers as the key factor in exploding temporalities of hope. As I have argued within this chapter, with this utopian suggestion out of reach within a system of border enforcement that is racist, xenophobic, colonial and unfit for purpose, refugees regaining control over their own narratives through performance can enact a liberatory act of resistance.

It is night again. Silence and dark.
This time should be for sleeping,
But you are not sleeping.
Now you are thinking about everything.
So let me tell you these words from my heart.
Maybe you are looking at the roof of the room when you are listening to me.
The roof that is holding you and protecting you from rain, wind and the danger outside.
I know it may not be like the house you grew up in.
Try to close your eyes.
You will realise that you still have the same eyelids as the last time you slept safely.
It is not as strange as the roof,
Because your home is inside of you.

All the places you have been to,
All the people you have met,
All the songs you have heard,
They affect and change you.
They make you feel safe or even unsafe sometimes.
But now in this night no one and nothing is around you.
It is only you and your home.
It is time to feel safe.
It is time to love yourself and be kind to it.
It is night and silence is covering you.
I know it feels scary, but have a moment of listening to your heartbeat and your breath.
They are confirming to you that you are alive.
It is your right to be safe in your home,
Wherever you are.

(Zeus 2021)

Chapter Five

The performer and the performed: staging interdependence and friendship

I refer to two different practical projects in this chapter. *Connected Hearts* is documented on pages 20-23 of my collection of practice, and *A bed for the night* is documented on pages 24-28. I suggest when to interact with the practice.

In the first two creative projects this thesis examines, I have advanced my overall inquiry and established new approaches for creating performances of life narratives with and for refugee youth. Through my analysis and discussion of the practice I have developed a new understanding of how theatre can make visible forms of interdependent care and collective solidarity that already exist within refugee youth communities, and how participatory performance can further enhance and expand these modes of care and amplify and share this with audiences. Performances of lived experience emerging in *All the beds I have slept in* began to extend my thinking, which was then deepened and complicated by the *Stories for Sleeping* project, in which peer-to-peer storytelling evoked collective and interdependent care and reassembled notions of hope. Underpinning this approach to practice was an intention to develop interventions that resist forms of slow violence inherent in the daily lived experience of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK, in particular unaccompanied minors, and their misrepresentation. In so doing, these two practical projects have reframed who had agency to narrate refugee stories and enabled a foregrounding and exploration of care within this community in order to better understand how to develop performance with refugees.

In this final chapter, I draw conclusions to my argument and extrapolate ways it can be applied more broadly beyond these projects. To arrive at these conclusions I examine two additional examples of practice which enabled me to gain new insight into my research inquiry, and provided opportunities to engage with my research questions in ways beyond the scope of my project thus far. Whilst returning to methodological inquiry may appear out of place as I wrap up my findings, interrupting the linearity of the research is deliberately symbolic of the often fragmented process I have undertaken. Thus, the practice introduced in this chapter moves me further to articulating how this research develops original knowledge and new insight around performing work with refugee youth. Thus, in this context, the performance of life narratives and the reconceptualising of collective forms of care open up new ways of thinking about interdependence and friendship within refugee engaged theatre as a catalyst for disrupting hegemonic representations of unaccompanied minors.

The first example of practice I want to discuss was the development of a thirty-minute film called *Connected Hearts*, documenting and consolidating the research findings. The second was two short performances I was commissioned to write (with Phosphoros) by the Royal Opera House as part of Good Chance Theatre's international large scale public art project *The Walk,* which also represents a significant cultural representation of unaccompanied minors in Britain. As I explain, this project led me to interrogate and revisit the modes of spectatorship I have critiqued within the research, raising important challenges for me around staging refugeehood. Whilst neither of these examples of practice were built into my original project design, both opened up new points of contemplation about performances of life narratives and their problematics, thus advancing my argument. I return once

again to Melissa Trimingham's notion of the research spiral to foreground how a 'disorderliness' to research design can be beneficial. She proposes:

> We do not have to pretend that the process is more orderly than it really is: only that the planning is orderly. The 'disorderliness' of the creative process must be incorporated into the methodology. The paradigm model of progress that allows for this is the 'hermeneutic-interpretive' spiral model where progress is not linear but circular; a spiral which constantly returns us to our original point of entry but with renewed understanding (Trimingham 2002, p.56).

The thematic of sleep initially emerged as I developed *All the beds I have slept in* as a dramaturgical device intended to anchor disparate stories in space and place, exploring how gestures of care might propel youth on the move from one bed to the next, ending with a temporary bedsit in London. As the whole research project progressed, sleep, or, more accurately, sleeplessness, became more relevant as a conduit through which to start creative conversations about collective spaces of care, allyship and friendship based on recognition of shared experience. The conditions of the global pandemic meant reconfiguring shared spaces that could be experienced virtually, and this led to original insight into the relationship between refugee strangers as both storyteller and audience. Thus, engaging with Trimingham's practice research spiral in action, I was repeatedly being pulled back to the thematic of sleep, yet each time with 'renewed understanding'.

Throughout the *Stories for Sleeping* project I gathered a substantial amount of creative material from refugee young people as well as my own feedback and observations. By developing reflective practice, following a routine of documenting and writing about the research in between sessions whilst it was 'live', I tried to maintain a critical perspective on my own practice. In this way, I was able to follow my *hunches* as a practitioner and look inwardly when there were moments of discomfort or resistance, aware of caution heeded by others using qualitative

research methods, when '''participants'' statements can be uncritically taken to correspond to reality, and research often blurs the boundary between research and advocacy' (Hughes, Kidd, McNamara, 2011, p.192). Nonetheless, there were ethical and practical dimensions to address when considering how to further my analysis which relate to the careful handling of other people's stories. For example, there were questions I wanted to ask, themes underexplored and ideas I wanted to experiment with that had emerged for me throughout the research. Navigating my inquiry whilst also being acutely aware of a dynamic emerging of me as the non-refugee researcher wanting *more and more* from youth participants meant I was compelled to find ways to keep exploring my questions without replicating bordering practices in my methodology.

To contest the researcher/researched model I centred my thinking around developing a dialogic practice. As I will go on to discuss, involving Muhammad and Syed at this stage in a flexible way, at this early stage, made possible moments of interpretation that produced a new vantage point for me through which to read the research. Later, when developing moments of performance for *The Walk* with Syed and Tewodros, I was then able to draw on discussions we had had two years prior during the development of *All the beds I have slept in*, as well as share candidly share my reflections and unanswered questions from the *Stories for Sleeping* project with them. Together, these two additional performance outputs represent ways of embodying praxis by restaging and stretching the research inquiry through the exploration of new modes of collaboratively created practice. Accordingly, in this final chapter, I analyse two new examples of practice as a method of reaching overall conclusions to my research project as a whole.

‘Connected Hearts’: encountering each other through performance

I suggest watching *Connected Hearts* before reading the next section. It can be found on page 19 of my documentation and lasts for thirty minutes.

In this section, I discuss the development of *Connected Hearts*. This thirty-minute film developed out of the exploratory work undertaken for *Stories for Sleeping*, which I examined in the previous chapter, and was created in collaboration with collaborator-facilitator Syed Haleem Najibi, and collaborator Muhammad, both of whom have featured in this thesis thus far. Together we explored the central themes that structure my research inquiry: care, solidarity and hope, through the anchor of sleep. Within this small group and without the practical constraints of working with a larger group of people I was able to lead a flexible, changeable collaborative process that opened up new and important insights about this type of practice. What had struck me about Muhammad’s story, as first emerged earlier in my research, was the clarity with which he spoke about the *trail of kindness* he was on, having benefited from the support of others he couldn’t repay, so now wanted to help those younger than him. After initial doubts about the potential efficacy of *Stories for Sleeping*, Muhammad’s contribution had been poignant. In Muhammad’s story, the limbo of waiting in the asylum system became a ‘prison’ for him, but concepts of his own agency and ability to forge connections with others emerged as a source of hope, a renewed sense of selfhood and a potent desire to care *for* others.

Before analysing this piece in more detail, I examine how I used the concept of an aesthetic of care, as discussed in Chapter One, to determine what sorts of images we explored in the devising process and how these stories were told. By inviting my collaborators to repeat everyday actions onscreen, such as casual conversation and

playing in a water fountain, I sought to make visible the aesthetic potential of care. An example of where my dramaturgical choices emphasise this aesthetic is in the section where Syed visits his barber. As Syed leans his head back to have his beard shaved, he remembers his early days in the UK as a child refugee and the connection he forged with his foster brother who became his best friend. We watch as the barber works with precision and care, patiently working around Syed as he tells his story. The representation of the well-trodden relationship between a man and his barber is deepened when there is a pull back and reveal; it is, after all, his foster brother Waheed. Thus, the relationship between Syed and Waheed made present in the barber shop chair emphasises an aesthetics of care that balances technical skill, trust, intimacy and awareness of the other's self-perception. In this way, we collectively sought out a performance that made manifest an aesthetics of care (and perhaps repair and restoration), which reveals itself as echoing their first meeting many years prior, and therefore imbues itself with personal meaning. This association between past and present reminds me of Saito's theorisation of visible repair (2022), as aesthetics of repair and restoration are mobilised. Whilst this component of the film is perhaps the most visceral display of interconnected care, I am most interested in this chapter in how Muhammad's exploration of self and collective care took place alongside Syed's. As I elaborate further, I facilitated space for Muhammad to experiment with different performance styles as he engaged with his own testimonial material, stimuli I had gathered, and his personal reflections. Rather than limit my attention to the structured performance outputs, I embraced documenting the intimate and experiential aspects of our collaboration as a methodological mode of revealing what a care-filled mode of practice might look like.

The theme of sleep resonated deeply for Muhammad, and the following extract demonstrates how he harnessed his own ideas about sleeping in response to prompts I

had given. It also offers a glimpse at how religion often shapes the lived experience of forced migration, which edges towards a subject that is largely beyond the scope of this research, but became a frequent backdrop. Muhammad, who is Muslim, mentioning the Quran's comfort in the extract below symbolises how religion helps him deal with the challenges he is facing, in the context of spiritual needs - 'hope, meaning, relatedness, forgiveness or acceptance, and transcendence' being threatened in the asylum seeking process (see Gozdziak 2002, p.144)[37]. His story begins with an account of seeking escape, but switches to reflections on change and how to find optimism amidst sorrow:

> *Sleep is where we go to run away from our problems. I lay my head down and I feel calm. These are the ingredients you need for a night of sweet sleep.*
>
> …
>
> *A spoonful of plans for tomorrow.*
>
> *100 peaceful thoughts, and lots of motivation.*
>
> *A bottle full of your favourite sounds; mine is the Quran.*
>
> *Two drops of optimism*
>
> *Mix that with memories of your village, hopes for your future, and the day you will return home.*
>
> *Leave to rest for 7 or 8 hours*
> …
>
> *If you only think about before, you will lose your future. We can still move forward even if part of our heart is in the past. Look at you: you are 15 or 16 or 17 or 18. You have a long future ahead of you, but there is hard work before you get there. For now, sleep well: there are dreams waiting for you* (Muhammad 2021).

Here, Muhammad's words speak to one of the central paradoxes of displacement: moving forward whilst looking back. These coexisting states of feeling reflect James

[37] See Marcus Herz's 2021 study on the everyday and emotional aspects of religion for unaccompanied minors (in the Swedish context) for more discussion

Clifford’s description of ‘diaspora consciousness’, which ‘lives loss and hope as a defining tension’ (1994, p.312); a useful framing for the analysis I present here.

Central to my discussion on the creation of *Connected Hearts* are the material conditions that structured the time I spent with Muhammad and Syed over four consecutive days in August 2021. This was a period that occurred mid-pandemic, when national lockdown measures had eased to an extent, meaning I could meet small groups in person whilst adhering to safety precautions. I was provided with rehearsal space at my university, which I considered a luxury after many theatres and buildings had been closed to the public. Encouraged by myself and my colleagues from Phosphoros, Muhammad had enrolled in a performing arts course at college starting the following month and was keen to develop his performance and devising skills before his term started. I had also observed the trusting relationship between Muhammad and Syed, who he had known as a youth worker for around twelve months. I was interested in how this dynamic could be explored through creative practice, and how they might bring their embodied knowledge and reflections on care, solidarity and hope to our discussions. Crucially, engaging in this part of the practice in person (rather than online) opened up time and space to listen in different ways, being attentive to *the stuff around the edges* and being able to shape the direction of the practice as we went, without needing to adhere to a format or structure designed to engage larger numbers in the digital space (as was the case with *Stories for Sleeping)*.

Over four days we spent time playing games, sharing stories, listening to each other perform written stories, mind mapping, experimenting with self-filmed techniques, interviewing each other and listening to music. We also went to McDonalds each day, talked about Muhammad’s housing situation, reflected on the recent news of the

Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan and played around in a water fountain opposite the university. Occasionally it became clear (whether in the moment or afterwards) that elements of these conversations with Muhammad were not *for the research*, but just for us as we developed our relationship as collaborators. Positioning friendship as an important and valid facet of my approach made these moments of omission comfortable, holding back Muhammad's personal anecdotes about family or childhood even if, as Tillmann-Healy attests, 'they would add compelling twists to our research report or narrative' (2003, p.735). In this sense, the flexibility of the creative space where experimentation was prioritised over recounting exact details was a deliberate point of resistance to the demands within institutional settings for unaccompanied minors' lives and life stories to be excavated and laid bare.

In my writing in this thesis and elsewhere I embrace the entanglement of researcher, artist and person at play in my project, but in reality, my role is less tangible. Collaborating with Muhammad and Syed allowed me to articulate how the work has moved *me* too, as well as look at how, when and why aspects of my identity emerge at different points. This can be seen in moments of the film where Muhammad is filming me and Syed in conversation, and asks me questions about my own relationship to my research, and I share how the encounter in my own childhood, mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, instigated my interest in refugee justice. Muhammad asks:

> Ok Kate. What's made you to help the refugee young people - all of the refugees in England, when you were born like an English lady and you didn't have any refugee cousins? What's made you to become this Kate?

I laugh at his suggestion of me helping all the refugees in England, and respond:

> When I was the same as … probably you when you came here - when you were - when I was about sixteen, I became really interested in working with refugees. I met somebody who had come from Eritrea

> on his own when he was a teenager, and it felt like when I met him a door opened that gave me this interest and that door has never shut… and that door has stayed open for more than ten years now.
>
> (2021)

Weaving in these moments of my personal narrative reveals the sense of reciprocity present in this creative process, and I reconfigure my researcher role to incorporate my own self, whose relationship to the research is ever-mobile rather than static. Paradoxically, it was through making myself more present in the practice as a co-author rather than a distant observer, and not writing myself out, that I was also able to articulate more clearly what was beyond the reach of my understanding, generating new insight about the relationship between the performer and the performed.

In *Connected Hearts,* there is a short interlude in Muhammad and Syed's conversation which provides space for me to reflect on these ideas. Muhammad was telling us a story about some of the different beds he remembered, including the first time he slept on a raised bed frame (rather than the floor mattress he was used to in Kurdistan, similar to Syed's experience of an Afghan *toshak*). As he talks, Syed films him, and merely as a point of reference Muhammad checks: 'You've been to prison, right?' Syed responds: 'Yeah, yeah, yeah'[38]. Moments like this catch me off guard as they are swept over and the conversation keeps moving forward. The image Muhammad has presented, however, is haunting: of refugee children imprisoned in juvenile prisons and adult detention centres. It is an experience they share. I notice my lack of surprise, and observe how the creative setting operated as a container for traumatic narratives. On the voiceover, I reflect further about the impact of this

[38] Syed has talked at length in his performance work and at conferences about his experience being imprisoned in Greece as a teenager. Lengthy sentences in detention centres and juvenile prisons is a common risk factor for unaccompanied minors, and IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF are calling for countries to halt these practices (UNHCR 2022).

exchange and the capacity of refugee performance to recognise others with similar experiences: ‘without the burden of proof, stories emerge that not everyone will understand, but that will validate many’. Within this encounter, I argue, an aesthetics of solidarity emerges.

At other points, we experimented with different modes of telling and listening to each other, and Muhammad and Syed tried filming each other as they asked each other questions and shared stories on the overall themes of caring for and with. Whilst this technique did not capture the visual dynamism we were hoping for (so didn’t include the shots in the final cut), it did evoke a type of encounter that we had not yet experienced, where Muhammad listened to his own narrative repeated back to him. Already told at a distance, through the third person, Muhammad’s piece *The Trail* explores the gestures of kindness that supported him in his early days in the UK, and the subsequent acts of solidarity he has offered fellow travellers on their own way. As Syed performed Muhammad’s story, Muhammad listened:

> *The boy wasn’t alone in this new country. He followed a trail of voices that sounded like home and found himself in a restaurant with people whose tongue he could understand. They fed him rice, lamb, okra and bread as soft as pillows. They poured him tea and spoke about family. They put money in his hand and even though he tried to give it back they put their hands up and told him he would eat there for free (*Muhammad 2021*).*

In relocating the narrative voice to a peer, in this case Syed, I observed a creative practice of friendship, collectivity and interdependent care was emerging. In *Performing the Testimonial,* Amanda Stuart Fisher categorises modes of testimonial performance, and her notion of ‘witnessing as resistance’ has interesting resonance here. Drawing on the Latin American practice of ‘testimonio’, Stuart Fisher describes a mode of performance in which plural identities are shared, rather than being ‘tied to a singular biography’, and in doing so evokes ‘collective testimonial truths that

demand to be heard' (2020, p.140). In this form of performance, she explains, 'truth telling is driven not by individual or biographical veracity, but by collective truth-telling processes' (p.133). The 'story-weaving' methodological approach Stuart Fisher describes provides a helpful parallel when considering the intimate and local moments Muhammad and Syed describe. Through experimenting with different forms of witnessing and speaking, and adopting a collective approach to storytelling, the stories function as echoes of the many others before them: the trail of kindness that quietly sustains communities of refugee youth as they come of age in extreme circumstances. As can be seen to be explored in Muhammad's piece below, 'the boy' shifts from receiver to giver of care. The story focuses on a moment encountered by Muhammad when he happens upon some Kurdish *strangers* in the street, somewhat reminiscent of the experience of Tewodros as described in Chapter Three:

> *The strangers hadn't eaten their traditional food for three or four months, so the boy took them to his home and made them okra, lamb chops and the most delicious rice. The rice was delicious because it had been brought from Kurdistan, and was nothing like the rice in the new place. The boy gave the strangers some uncooked rice to take home and told them to visit him whenever they wanted. They weren't strangers anymore - they were friends (Muhammad 2021).*

Muhammad told me that listening to Syed read these words made him feel proud, and his descriptions of the affective quality of listening resonated with an aesthetics of care. He said it was like when your mum gives you a head massage to help you sleep; you know how to do it yourself, how to move your fingers up and down your scalp, but it doesn't feel as nice if you do it yourself. That's what listening to the stories is like, he said, speaking about the *Stories for Sleeping* collection more broadly: 'someone else is telling our story and we can just listen'. Unlike so much discussion about refugee performance, implicitly or clearly positioning audiences as 'hosts', Muhammad's reflections refer to a different intersubjective relationship formed between listener and speaker. The intimate and fleeting experiences

Muhammad describes here are, I argue, indicative of how performance enabled him to embody the experience of caring and being cared for in meaningful ways that reject structural silencing.

One of the most significant outcomes of this phase of the research was the unearthing of a way of articulating the interdependent and collective forms of care I had been thinking about throughout the project’s entirety which now took on a new sense of clarity. On the fourth day we spent together, Muhammad, Syed and I went to Peckham in South London to film some moments of performance in Syed’s friend Waheed’s barber shop. Whilst we waited for Waheed to close up the shop, we sat in the park and I filmed Muhammad and Syed reflecting on some of the themes that had arisen during our week together. For Muhammad, the opportunity to talk about his own life unconditionally and outside of bureaucratic confines had, I suggest, restored some of his agency, and through listening to Syed talk about his own life through an activist lens I believe Muhammad also felt empowered to do the same. There is a moment in the film where Syed introduces a phrase in his mother tongue, Dari: دل به دل راه دارد. ‘Our hearts are on the same path’, he says, and Muhammad repeats the same phrase in Kurdish: دڵه ئاوێنەی دڵ. In Afghanistan, Syed explained, the phrase is used affectionately between loved ones to tell them you are thinking about them and that you are connected.

As I witnessed Syed and Muhammad connect over the words - with different sounds but the same meaning - it occurred to me that *del be del rah dare* evoked a lot of the ideas that we had been exploring. My creative approach, I realised, was not only generative of new forms of care but was also beginning to amplify those existing yet unacknowledged. The shared vocabulary of connection that had emerged was emblematic of the quiet, undisclosed and intimate forms of friendship, allyship and

solidarity that had been instrumental in establishing alternative narration processes about refugees' storied lives. Embracing friendship within my methodology meant there were times, like this, where connections and ideas were formed outside the realm of my own understanding, and I reflect on how the introduction of this phrase to our collaboration resonates with my own experience as a researcher. Syed and Muhammad can explain to me the meaning of their words, and teach me how to form their sounds, but the encapsulation of loss, love and (re)connection is beyond reach to me as a researcher. Muhammad explains:

> It means even if you don't talk, maybe I understand what's in your heart, because it's happening to me as well. Like, for example, when you're trying to ask me something I just cut your question and I say 'oh I know what you mean' (Muhammad).

Syed agrees: 'You don't have to speak to know what the other person is thinking or what they're feeling'. When they explain, I understand; the feeling of an instinctive connection and a sense of knowing. Yet I am reminded that there are parts of the refugee youth experience that will remain unknowable to me, and perhaps unsayable in the context of a research project, and I acknowledge the liberatory potential of keeping secrets.

Like many other contributors to the *Stories for Sleeping* project, Muhammad's involvement was framed by the liminality of waiting, and the navigation of teenage years stolen by insecurity and transiency. In returning to the project multiple times, I argue Muhammad was reimagining himself through a lens of hope and futurity. There is a coda to Muhammad's story as I have told it throughout this thesis. Several months after we worked together in the summer, then immersed in his performing arts course at college, Muhammad received his Refugee Status - his Leave to Remain in the UK. 'Isn't it crazy how a piece of paper changes everything?' he said to me, an echo of the many, many times I had heard that phrase before. The surge of emotion

when I hear this news never wanes, and, for a moment, hope feels a little less fragile.

'A bed for the night': complicating spectatorship and the construction of the separated child refugee

A bed for the night is documented on pages 24-28 of my collection of practice, which can be found using this link: https://www.canva.com/design/DAGAOeJtviQ/Cs9_czoifPOSnMQxU8y0Cw/view?utm_content=DAGAOeJtviQ&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=editor. I suggest watching the recorded performances at the end of this section.

> SYED: Are you Amal?
>
> My name is Syed. Syed. We haven't met yet, but I can see a glimpse of myself in your eyes. I left my own mummy and daddy when I was a boy. They stayed in Afghanistan and I came here, to London, for a safer life.
>
> Back home, we have a saying that goes del be del rah dare. There is a path between our hearts
>
> (Phosphoros Theatre 2021)

Syed forms a heart with his hands and gestures towards the refugee girl standing in front of him. Echoing the encounters between refugee youth made through the *Stories for Sleeping* project discussed in Chapter Four, they are strangers, and Syed is tasked with helping her get to sleep. Amal, however, is not a teenager listening to an audio recording on Instagram, but a puppet three and a half metres tall, towering over Syed in the grand Paul Hamlyn Hall of the Royal Opera House in London. I discuss in this section how the figure of Little Amal and her narrative met that of my research, and position her as a conduit for revealing what my project has done differently. The work I describe sits adjacent to the rest of my practice research, and contributes to the originality of how I have brought new ways of conceptualising unaccompanied minor experience, with a particular focus on interdependent care,

through performance. As I will elaborate on, the project also presented me with conflict in terms of how I was aligning my research and practice with a heavily mediatised event, which has attracted both celebration and scrutiny for its role in bringing refugee issues to the mass public. Furthermore, the project constructed what I contend was a problematic and inaccurate representation of an unaccompanied minor refugee, thereby circumventing the contentious issue of unaccompanied minor identity, which, as I have outlined in this thesis, is often entangled with moral panic. In keeping with my approach to practice research, I adopt a dual perspective as both a critical observer *and* a participant artist, which also opens up pertinent questions around the stickiness of collaboration.

Little Amal represents a Syrian child refugee aged nine, and her story was told by Good Chance Theatre in collaboration with Handspring Puppet Company through *The Walk*, an international large-scale public art project taking place between 2021-22. The project involved Little Amal travelling from the Turkish border of Syria through Greece, Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and the UK, and being greeted by celebrities, public figures, local communities and refugee groups on her way. The event I describe here was called *A Bed for the Night,* a late-night evening of dance, opera and performance programmed by the Royal Opera House in October 2021, in which Phosphoros took part. With the UK as her final destination and her tenth birthday the next day, Little Amal arrived at the Royal Opera House in search of a bed for the night and was greeted by an invite-only audience of Royal Opera House patrons, representatives from cultural institutions, and stakeholders from Phosphoros, and Citizens of the World choir, another refugee and migrant arts organisation invited to perform.

Before I discuss how my practice research encountered *The Walk*, I want to engage with a critique of the project, to contextualise how my collaborators and I took an

opportunity to intervene. While the figure of Little Amal was highly affecting, there are central problematics which need addressing, which mobilise my earlier thinking around how unaccompanied minors are represented. Predominantly, it was the lack of politicisation within *the Walk* that I argue was a significant flaw in terms of theatre engaging with border politics. I return to RISE's manifesto '10 THINGS YOU NEED TO CONSIDER IF YOU ARE AN ARTIST NOT OF THE REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER COMMUNITY - LOOKING TO WORK WITH OUR COMMUNITY' (2015) that I referenced in Chapter Two. The list's author, Tania Cañas, ends by asserting that: 'Our community has been politicised and any art work done with/by us is inherently political. If you wish to build with our community know that your artistic practice cannot be neutral' (RISE 2015). I suggest that the dramaturgy in *The Walk* was shaped to evoke an emotional response rooted in sympathy and a vague sense of welcome, which arguably lacked political agency.

These ideas were felt most viscerally by myself and my collaborators from Phosphoros when reflecting on the issue of identity politics. The character of Little Amal originally appeared in Good Chance's production *The Jungle*, written by Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson , and the characterisation of a nine-year-old girl bears stark contrast with the figure of the unaccompanied minor young man who has featured heavily in this research. Considering this juxtaposition, I am reminded of Silvija Jestrovic's question 'what is it that makes the performance of asylum more powerful than the reality of its subjects?' (2008, p.169). In 2020, 88% of EU asylum applications from unaccompanied minors were boys, 67% were aged 16-17, 22% were aged 14-15 and 11% were under 14 (Eurostat 2021). The disconnect between representation and reality becomes more pertinent as I analyse the aesthetics of this project in hindsight, given the cataclysmic ramifications of the UK's Illegal Migration Act, introduced in 2023, which increase the villainisation of unaccompanied minors

further by limiting protective factors and threatening immediate detention on arrival, thereby undermining cornerstones of child protection (see Refugee Council 2023).

I discussed in detail the complex gendered politics of male refugee youth in Chapter One, and it therefore felt somewhat ironic when Little Amal, a young girl, became emblematic of the plight of separated children on an international stage. In an article about *The Walk* in *The Guardian*, Amelia Gentleman observes that ‘producers have not attempted to portray the bleaker end of the child migrant experience - trips beneath the undercarriages of lorries, dangerous boat trips, hostility from border guards’ (2021). Producer David Lan adds that the journey Little Amal actually took is far from this reality: ‘We’ve got to be really clear about that. The route we’re taking is a route which refugees have taken but we stay in hotels, we have passports’ (2021). I argue that this lack of recognition within the production of the material conditions of displacement contributed to an overall missed opportunity to invoke change. This was highlighted to me when using *The Walk* as a case study in an undergraduate lecture; on showing an image of Little Amal to my students, one said they had followed her in London and taken videos and only realised her relationship to border politics when later looking at social media coverage of the event. Another student had encountered Little Amal and shared photos and videos with their family, but it was only through hearing my description of the project that they began to understand how the puppet was meant to be representative of a refugee child. I was struck by these two responses. My own research inquiry had originated from the problematic moral panic surrounding the mere existence of lone refugee teenagers, reflecting the ‘panoply of stereotyped ‘devils’ that jostle continually for public attention’ (Good 2020, p.104). *The Walk*, on the other hand, seemed to direct the audience’s gaze very much towards the aesthetics of a crafted representation of a

refugee child. I have reflected elsewhere about the stark comparison between Little Amal and the stories of self-harm, suicide, mental health crises and loneliness facing unaccompanied minors more broadly, and the way their community has been brutalised, criminalised and hypersexualised. I felt the absence of these narratives loudly and considered: 'I wonder how the audience would react if Little Amal spoke. What would she say and to whom? In what language would she speak?' (Duffy-Syedi 2022, p.224)

Despite these relevant criticisms of *The Walk* and the problematics I have identified with its politics, when Phosphoros was commissioned by the Royal Opera House to take part I saw it as an opportunity to produce research led performance interventions that could form micro resistances and alternative displays of an aesthetics of solidarity. To what extent can forms of resistance take place when one is actively taking part in a project, is a valid question to present in relation to the decision to take part and presents an example in action of my dual roles of researcher and artist in tension with each other. However, with a team keen to share work with international reach and clear support for the event from the public and cultural institutions, alongside assurance that we had creative control over our contributions, we went ahead. After weighing up the opportunities and challenges of being involved with this potentially problematic project, I decided to participate, and sought to develop an intervention that would subvert the uncritically ascribed power dynamics and romanticised imagery that I felt *The Walk* communicated, whilst also inputting Phosphoros into an important social moment in British arts and culture. Phosphoros was commissioned to contribute two solo pieces, which I wrote in close collaboration with the two actors who would perform them, Syed Najibi and Tewodros Aregawe (who have featured elsewhere in this thesis), directed by Esther Dix. The pieces sat alongside ballet and opera performances, traditional oud

instrumental music by Syrian musician Rihab Azar and songs from the choir, contributing to an evening of varied performances that showcased refugee creatives and built on the concept of welcome that had inspired the many performance encounters centred around the character of Little Amal.

In the two solo pieces I developed with Phosphoros, Syed and Tewodros took to the centre of the stage, surrounded by an audience on three sides. Little Amal was operated by three puppeteers, who moved her around the space during Syed's piece, and operated her sleeping throughout Tewodros'. The conceit I played with was that the two men had been requested by the Royal Opera House to come and help Little Amal get to sleep after her long journey, given their own lived experience of travelling alone as separated children. In these metatheatrical pieces, they are performing as themselves: them-but-not-them. Former unaccompanied minors, now adult men. The task they have been given is somewhat impossible; they know how it feels to be lying awake unable to sleep, for, as Syed says: 'how can we sleep when our homes are burning?'. Their unfamiliarity with the experiences of the young girl in front of them is a reminder that there is no singular refugee narrative: Syed sheepishly presents Little Amal with some pyjamas with an 'A' on the front, realising they're far too small, and Tewodros attempts to make a joke about his nickname 'Teddy'. Later he says: 'I hope your dreams are the good kind. Our paths are so different, I can't imagine what the bad ones might be'. Though Little Amal does not respond, Syed and Tewodros continue to share reflections, encouragement and advice with the little girl embarking on her own journey to resettlement.

The encounters between refugee figures in these performances, I argue, disrupted the refugee as spectacle, as we developed a performance of the self that sought a sense of resistance and pulled into focus the spectatorship of suffering. As Tewodros

and Syed shared stage space with Little Amal, the audience was confronted with the figure of the refugee young man, which I argue subverted the original narrative focus on Little Amal as the characteristic image of a refugee other in need of sanctuary. The contrast between the two can be observed when Syed shares his hope for Little Amal to regain her childhood and *be small again*, which I have described elsewhere as 'reflect[ing] his own memories of having to grow up too fast through a process of becoming and re-becoming', which I observe as 'shapeshifting'. Conversely, I argue that Little Amal 'brings little of the fear provoked by her human counterparts; the teenage boys deteriorating in detention centres whilst waiting to be age assessed, living in inadequate housing provisions or not being able to enrol in college to learn English' (Duffy-Syedi 2022, p.224). My decision to construct a tender interaction between Little Amal and otherwise stereotypically threatening refugee young men represented a micro contestation to the dynamics the project was communicating, and invited a more nuanced form of listening from the audience, when faced with real people instead of the exceptional and spectacle. Despite my criticisms, what the fictional device of Little Amal did do was productively open up new dramaturgical possibilities for my inquiry, including staging an encounter with a character *already asleep*. I wondered: what could be shared when the intended listener won't hear? Exploring some of these themes further through encountering Little Amal deepened my engagement with how I was conceptualising modes of performance that elicit care in ways that usefully resonated with the insight I had synthesised through my practice research.

The character of Little Amal enabled me to reimagine her as a member of an audience my research wishes to speak to and this enabled me to grapple with some of the larger, existential questions my project had left me with. What became powerful in the representation of Little Amal was the dialogic interventions she

enabled and facilitated, precisely because of her celebrated status. In this sense, her silent and ambivalent presence made possible the performances of textured, hard to read, multi-dimensional figures of Syed-but-not-Syed and Tewodros-but-not-Tewodros. In Syed's piece, for example, when he engages with Little Amal, after he presents her with the pair of tiny pyjamas, he shares hopes that she will once more experience childhood. As Little Amal towers over him, he addresses her with care and clarity and, I suggest, she loses some of her mythic status through being grounded by real voices of those who have been separated children:

> *I was like you once. I seemed big, because I had left my family, travelled on my own, crossed border after border, each time losing a piece of my home and a piece of my heart. I wasn't treated like a boy, I was treated like a big man. And sometimes not treated like a man at all, but I don't need to explain.*
>
> *I hope you can be small again. Not so small you feel invisible, or so your nose is with your toes and you're folded up like a telescope. Trying not to be seen or heard, even though your breath sounds like thunder. I don't mean like that.*
>
> *Being small means you can make mistakes. You can be silly and play and be naughty and even get into trouble sometimes. And you can be loud! So loud. I hope you will find new ways to be brave. I know that you learnt too soon that the world isn't kind. (Phosphoros 2021).*

There was a secondary audience beyond Little Amal, in Syed's peripheral vision, and as the night went on and the puppet was put to bed, the in-person public as well as those streaming online were the sole listeners by the time Tewodros arrived at almost midnight. He and I had discussed the tension between the message he wanted to give the little girl, innocent and hopeful and perhaps unaware of the reality of what lay ahead, and the words he felt needed to be heard more widely, particularly by the non-refugee audience. We explored ideas around solidarity, and who is perceived to be deserving of it, and I reflected on the parallel between Little Amal's narrative and those who had shared their stories with me throughout my earlier research. The theme of interdependent care had emerged in part as a way of

reframing the frustration and ambivalence of not feeling cared for by 'the system', whether in terms of state protection or adequate local service provision. Exploring, revealing and performing care through my research had informed a set of strategies for refugee youth to self-author their lived experience outside of the 'burden of proof', and to document the quiet gestures of care that contribute to keeping a community on the margins afloat. Little Amal, on the other hand, rarely walks alone on her journey and is accompanied by a host of many offering uncomplicated welcome. Her hypervisibility is not only invited but celebrated by individuals, communities, celebrities, and institutions, in this instance the iconic Royal Opera House, in what I observed as a painful contrast to the reality of separated children in the UK. In the following extract I sought to examine this problematic comparison and draw attention to the troubling reality under the surface of sweeping solidarity which Little Amal was met with throughout her travels. Considering the precarity of public sympathy, Tewodros wonders for how long hospitality may be unconditional:

> *I want to tell her that people will be good, that all the people with kind eyes who have walked alongside her and listened to her story will be louder than those who wish she wasn't here. That they'll keep walking, even though it's tiring and the trail doesn't end. I really want to believe it.*

By now, Little Amal is asleep, and so Tewodros speaks directly to the public who are bystanders to the plight of refugee youth, and shares what he would tell her, inviting them to listen instead. This encounter signals an important moment in my research that reiterates the value of practice as the production of knowledge. On multiple levels the risky category of 'unaccompanied minor' and the moral panic associated with it is reimagined, as Syed and Tewodros stood face to face the girl silently looming over them, who now sleeps and is still apart from the puppeteers making her breathe. The shift in gaze that occurred when Little Amal is asleep provoked moving reflections from Syed and Tewodros as their expressions of hope for her childhood

became nostalgic for their own. In this metatheatrical moment the audience was confronted with the performers' dual subjectivities as actors *and* refugees, and I was able to see vividly the enactment of care move through the self to a host of others. The question remains however, of whether the narrative surrounding Little Amal would have been as compelling and amenable had it been teenagers like the younger versions of Syed and Tewodros, and the thousands in their shoes now. Though some scholars have argued for Little Amal's plurality, such as Suhaila Meera's description of her strategic performance resisting an 'adoptive gaze' that would appropriate refugee experience (see Meera 2023), I argue that the narratives absent in Little Amal's presence warrant the project's central criticism I have laid out here.

I am not sure to what extent Phosphoros' involvement in *A bed for the night* as part of *The Walk* staged a full critique of the problematics I have identified here and elsewhere (see Duffy-Syedi 2022). I have also considered whether it compromised on the principles I have outlined earlier in this thesis. Through evaluating and reflecting on the work, influenced again by Afolabi's 'ethical questioning' strategy (2021), I question whether the intentions of my research were put under pressure when engaging in such a large-scale collaboration. Paradoxically, if Phosphoros had not been involved in The Walk, its omission from this thesis would be noticeable, given its significance as an example of refugee performance. Critically interrogating the work from my vantage point as an observer and contributor has enabled me to develop critique whilst also, alongside my collaborators, staging a mode of resistance, however micro. Taking these considerations into account, the performances open up a productive framework for my conclusion. Through performances of care towards the refugee stranger, Syed and Tewodros skilfully and in dialogue with their own lived experience interrupted displays of sympathetic and top-down hospitality with a critical, complex and collective aesthetics of solidarity.

As a companion piece to the work developed in *Stories for Sleeping,* the dialogic exchange with Little Amal as part of *The Walk* expanded my engagement with the performance of life narratives beyond the scope of my participatory practice with young people. Thinking back to Chapter Three, where Tewodros and Syed first discussed with me their desire to speak beyond their own lived experience, this final practical exploration also bears the imprint of an ongoing interrogation of how narrated lives can generate wider solidarity.

I suggest referring to page 26 of my documentation to watch the recordings of *A bed for the night*, and/or reading the scripts on page 27 and 28.

Unlearning secure knowledge and pausing my research spiral

As my research inquiry has shifted and evolved, the decisions I have made in relation to the development of my practice and the research methodology itself have become interwoven with the ethics of care, which has become a means with which to address and trouble the biopolitics of forced migration. Having practice as my methodological approach has required responsivity beyond what I initially expected as a researcher, having undertaken the majority of this project during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as I have discussed in this chapter, particularly with the examples of practice that emerged when I thought I was “finished”, an iterative research process has allowed me to build on what has come out of my inquiry and establish new ways of thinking and directions of travel.

Through the development and analysis of my four practice research projects, I have advanced an approach to performance making with refugees that draws on collective modes of authorship and practices of solidarity. In so doing, this research rethinks how applied and social theatre with refugees operates. Rather than macro

suggestions of a liberatory practice I offer a radical suggestion in the everyday. I have identified interdependent care as a source of strength to refugee youth communities, exposed this through performance, and created conditions to expand and nourish these networks of care. These acts of interdependent care, I argue, form important and potent counter-narratives to the brutalising asylum processes and politics of distrust that the UK's hostile environment for refugees precipitates. Further, the practice I have developed enables a rethinking of what care means in the context of refugee performance and disrupts power structures to offer an alternative model to the external theatre maker enacting care.

Basing my approach on the performance of life narratives meant that refugee youth identities, which, as I have examined earlier in this thesis, are always complex, fluid, messy, heterogeneous and often misunderstood, were reconceptualised outside of conventional ethnographic frames. Thus, the forms of translation and interpretation of ideas that might fail to be realised in other modes of research shift. Embedding a stance of friendship within my approach to this project has led to discoveries made possible by meaningful short and long-term collaborations with refugee youth and young adults. Guided by values of friendship and reciprocity, the project develops new methodologies for care-led arts engagement with refugees. These can be transmissible across disciplines and become a means of disentangling how unaccompanied minors' representation and mere existence is framed through an exposing of slow violence.

As an artist actively creating and engaging in performance-making with refugees concurrently with completing my PhD project it is important to recognise that what I articulate in this thesis tells one of multiple possible stories. My project is made up of parallel narratives that may or may not one day be shared, at a conference or in

further scholarship, in a classroom, in a training session or privately with members of Phosphoros' community. Further, my work with Phosphoros has continued throughout the duration of my PhD research, including nearly a hundred performances, over four hundred workshop sessions and much more strategic and creative work that is involved in running a theatre company. Whilst this work has been separate from my research, influence and inspiration has rippled between the two. The notion of an incomplete story not confined by borders or boundaries is central to how I have generated practice-based knowledge. The nature of my inquiry is that it does not have a tangible endpoint; but through developing deeper insight into my creative practice and asking new questions I have brought about original ways of thinking about, understanding and making performance with refugees, which I hope will inform other practice in the fields of applied and social theatre that engages with refugees. A task for me as a practice researcher has been to position the frame around my work and decide the point at which I pause in line with the parameters of my inquiry, which is by nature iterative and follows a spiral model. So, instead of an ending, proposals of findings are shared, new questions are raised, global and local conditions keep shifting and my practice continues to evolve.

Concluding the research: moving forward and looking back

In this final part of my thesis, I conclude my findings. It is not my intention to provide comprehensive answers to my research questions, as my response has already been documented through practice thus far, and through this writing and my other writing documented and published elsewhere. I have developed original insight into how collaborative performance and storytelling practices can enable refugee youth to experience care-filled practices anew and be cared for in ways that resist their perceived vulnerability and victimhood.

The new knowledge this research proposes is that the performance of life narratives enables a reconceptualisation of care as a collective commitment that intervenes in the misrepresentation of unaccompanied minors, thereby restoring agency and a sense of selfhood. This approach to practice creates conditions that nourish care and enable an aesthetics of solidarity to flourish. The ethical standpoint of care that has driven my inquiry, alongside my thematic focus on unaccompanied minors, represents the scholarly gap this research addresses, which is both relevant and original. Drawing on concepts of care to develop new forms of self-narration with refugees has underscored a process of participatory, practice based research with young people and young adults frequently overlooked and spoken for. My methodological approach is woven through this thesis as well as the design of the accompanying documentation, representing the experiences and creative labour of refugee artists and participants and amplifying their voices. Building on the existing work of Phosphoros, I have also developed a new collaborative approach to refugee engaged performance which pays attention to refugee audiences and positions refugees as artists and performers in their own right. This approach, which I articulate in Chapter Three, has generated original and new knowledge relevant to applied and social theatre around the relationship between the performer and the performed, and how performance can provide conditions for creative resistance to everyday bordering practices. Its impact has been lasting and fleeting in different ways, and the potency of young refugees having their voices amplified through a shared and collaborative practice has seen the emergence of new temporalities of hope as well as the reassembling of shattered selves. As I ‘pause’ my research spiral, I outline the following findings:

1. The modes of performance developed collaboratively through the research have opened up new temporalities for unaccompanied minors where interdependent care,

hope, futurity and friendship have been exposed and reimagined outside of institutional power structures. Thus, I argue that the performance of life narratives that centre refugee experience can stage a form of resistance to hostile processes of border enforcement.

2. Unlike some forms of socially engaged practice, in this research unaccompanied minors did not ‘speak to power’, rather they imagined and constructed a new audience ready to listen: their peer group. The dramaturgical structures utilised within the shared practice developed through this research invite a form of engagement that is equitable and holds the potential for establishing an aesthetics of solidarity and a collective commitment to care. I argue this is based on both the shared understanding of the sets of circumstances each other might be in, as well as recognition of the bravery it has taken to speak about them.

3. Positioning refugee communities as audiences to refugee engaged work can form the basis for radical encounters that rupture forms of misrepresentation and (in)visibility that further marginalise lived experience.

4. Practice research as a methodological approach with refugee youth can enable visibility and multi-vocalness that contributes to critical resistance against the perpetual violence of the asylum system. Such an approach can generate responsive and iterative insight whilst upholding ethical values to engaging with other people’s stories.

5. Positioning an ethic of friendship at the heart of research processes with refugees can forge collaboration that critiques borders between researcher/subject and prioritises mutual and collective knowledge exchange and knowledge production.

6. Digital formats can challenge the politics of visibility and rethink modes of connection between refugee youth. Encountering performances exploring lived experience do not require liveness or physical proximity to be generative of restorative modes of listening, and the performance of the self has the potency to disrupt and challenge fixed ideas of refugeehood.

The conclusion of my research project has coincided with significant policy change in the UK, with the implementation of the Illegal Migration Act which is the most oppressive, life-threatening and inhumane form of border enforcement Britain has seen since the enshrinement of the Refugee Convention in 1951. This calls into question the potential efficacy of work like mine and organisations like Phosphoros. These new immigration rules do not afford unaccompanied minors special protection, so, like adults, any claim to asylum through 'illegal' routes would be 'permanently inadmissible' (Refugee Council 2023), leaving them in 'irresolvable states of limbo' (NRPF 2023). The Illegal Migration Act's radical overhaul of the UK's entire asylum system leads me to urgently question the role refugee engaged theatre can or should have. Developing this research beyond my PhD will see me question how performance practice with refugee youth can respond to increasingly punitive immigration policy. How might it function in the context of the Illegal Migration Act where the justice, rights and visibility of refugee youth are under severe threat? What forms of rupture can personal testimony and life narratives make in these new circumstances?

There is more work to be done, which I will do in collaboration, dialogue and solidarity with asylum seekers and refugees.

Holding onto these final questions, I end on the words of one of the storytellers who contributed to this research, Usman:

> *Dear future,*
>
> *You are unpredictable but I know you have a little bit of a friendship with the present. When you come, don't resemble the past.*
>
> *Don't bring the moments that have problems, restlessness and struggle. Meet me with mammoth strength, hope and faith. A ladder upwards.*
>
> *When you come, bring with you a light that will brighten me as never before. A spark which will encourage me to be the best I can be from the depth of my core.*
>
> *Bring me the words that I really want in my life, words that will help me live with joy and without violence.*

Bibliography

Adshead, K. (2001). *The bogus woman.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Aeschylus and Greig, D. (2017). *The suppliant women.* London: Faber & Faber.

Afolabi, T. (2021) 'From writing ethics to doing ethics: ethical questioning of a practitioner'. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 26(2), pp. 352–357. doi:10.1080/13569783.2021.1880317.

Agamben, G. (1995). 'We refugees'. *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 49(2), pp.114–119. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/00397709.1995.10733798.

Ahmed, S. (2000). *Strange encounters: embodied others in post-coloniality*. London; New York: Routledge.

Ahmed, S. (2004). 'Affective economies'. *Social text*, 22(2), 117-139.

Ahmed, S. (2014). 'Selfcare as warfare. feminist killjoys'. Available at: https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/ [Accessed 2 Mar. 2024].

Ahmed, S. and Fortier, A.-M. (2003). 'Re-imagining communities'. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(3), pp.251–259. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/13678779030063001.

Arcy, J. & Ouellette, L. and (May 2015) '"Live through this": Feminist Care of the Self 2.0.'. *Frame: Journal of Literary Studies* 28(1).

Astolfo, G. and Boano, C. (2020). 'Notes around hospitality as inhabitation'. *Migration and Society*, 3(1), pp.222–232. doi:https://doi.org/10.3167/arms.2020.030118.

Back, L. (2020) 'Hope's work'. *Antipode*, 53(1), pp. 3–20. doi:10.1111/anti.12644.

Baker, S. & Inchley, M. (2020) 'Verbatim practice as research with care-experienced young people: an "aesthetics of care" through aural attention', in Stuart-Fisher, A. & Thompson, J. (eds) *Performing care: new perspectives on socially engaged performance* (Manchester University Press

Bal, M. (2002) *Travelling concepts in the humanities: a rough guide*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Balfour, M., (2013). Refugee performance: encounters with alterity. In: M. Balfour, ed. *Refugee performance*. Bristol: Intellect, pp. 176-188.

Barnes, S. and Education, I. (2009). ‘Participatory arts with young refugees: six essays collected and published by Oval House Theatre 2009’. *London: Arts In Education*, Oval House Theatre.

Bayley, C. (2012). *Container*. Nick Hern Books.

BBC News (2021). Essex lorry deaths: men jailed for killing 39 migrants in trailer. BBC News. [online] 22 Jan. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-55765213.

Berggren, K. (2014). ‘Sticky masculinity’. *Men and Masculinities*, 17(3), pp.231–252. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x14539510.

Beyoncé, Blue Ivy Carter, Saint Jhn and Wizkid (2019). *Brown skin girl*. Parkwood Columbia.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.

Bogart, A. (2007). *And then, you act*. Routledge.

Boltanski, L. (1999). *Distant suffering: morality, media, and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bronstein, I. and Montgomery, P. 2013. ‘Sleeping patterns of Afghan unaccompanied asylum-seeking adolescents: a large observational study’. *PLoS ONE* [online]. 8(2): e56156. Available from: doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0056156

Burke, S. (2015). Holy hotline: why refugees in distress call this priest. [online] Available at: https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/europes-border-crisis/father-abba-mussie-zerai-why-refugees-distress-call-priest-n436901 [Accessed 2 Mar. 2024].

Cañas, Tania. (2016) “10 things you need to consider if you are an artist - not of the refugee and asylum seeker community - looking to work with our community.” [Available: https://aktiontanz.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/RISE-statement-on-working-with-the-refugee-community.pdf]

Cargo. Tess Berry-Hart. (2016). Directed by David Mercatali. [Arcola Theatre, London. 20 July)

Carr, H., Hatzidimitriadou, E. and Sango, P. 2017. ‘Evaluation of the Sleep Project for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Kent’. *European Journal of Public Health* [online]. 28(1). Available from: doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/cky047.150

Cavendish, D. (2018). The Jungle review, Playhouse Theatre – the most important play in the West End. The Telegraph. [online] 8 Jul. Available at:

https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/jungle-review-playhouse-theatre-important-play-west-end/ [Accessed 1 Mar. 2024].

Chase, E. and Allsopp, J. (2021). *Youth migration and the politics of wellbeing: stories of life in transition*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Chin E (2003) 'Children out of bounds in globalizing times'. *Postcolonial Studies* 6(3): 309–325.

Chouliaraki, L. (2006). *The spectatorship of suffering*. London: Sage Publications.

Chouliaraki, L. (2013) *The ironic spectator: solidarity in the age of post-humanitarianism*. Cambridge, Polity Press

Chuang, J, A. (2015) 'Giving as governance? Philanthrocapitalism and modern-day slavery abolitionism' in *UCLA Law Review,* 62. Available: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2702615

Clayton, S. (2019) 'Narrating the young migrant journey: themes of self-representation', in Clayton, S., Gupta, A., and Willis, K. (eds) *Unaccompanied young migrants: identity, care and justice*. Bristol University Press, pp. 115–134. doi: 10.46692/9781447331872.007.

Clayton, S., Gupta, A. and Willis, K. (2019). *Unaccompanied young migrants : identity, care and justice*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Clifford, J. (1994). 'Diasporas'. *Cultural Anthropology*, 9(3), 302–338. http://www.jstor.org/stable/656365

Convention relating to the atatus of refugees (189 U.N.T.S. 150, entered into force April 22, 1954). United Nations. 1951.

Coram Migrant Children's Project (2017) The age assessment process, Coram children's legal centre. Available at: https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Age-assessment-process.march_.2017.pdf (Accessed: 18 February 2024).

Cowbury, T. (2017). *The claim*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Cox, E. (2012). 'Victimhood, hope and the refugee narrative: affective dialectics in Magnet Theatre's Every year, every day, I am walking'. *Theatre Research International*, 37(2), pp.118–133. doi:https://doi.org/10.1017/s030788331200003x.

Cox, E, Durrant, S, Farrier, D, Stonebridge, L and Woolley, A (2019) *Refugee imaginaries: research across the humanities*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Cox, E. (2023). ‘To come between: refugees at sea, from representation to direct action’ in Meerzon, Y. and Wilmer, S.E. (eds) (2023). *The Palgrave handbook of theatre and migration.* Palgrave Macmillan

Cull, L.(2014). ‘Performance philosophy – staging a new Field.’ In Cull, L. and Lagaay, A. *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, pp.15-38. Basingtoke GB: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dalmiya, V. (2021). Vulnerability, precarity, and the ambivalent interventions of empathic care . In: Hamington, M. and Flower, M.A. (2021). *Care ethics in the age of precarity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Davies, D. (2020). Crossing borders, bridging boundaries: reconstructing the rights of the refugee in comics. In: Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (ed) (2020) *Refuge in a moving world.* UCL press.

De Coninck, D. (2022). ‘The refugee paradox during wartime in Europe: how Ukrainian and Afghan refugees are (not) alike’. *International Migration Review*, 57(2). doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183221116874.

de Smet, S. et al. (2024) ‘The ephemerality of bearing witness: participatory refugee theatre with Syrian young adults in exile’, Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, pp. 1–17. doi: 10.1080/13569783.2024.2318218.

Drammeh, L. (2019). Six: spaces of belonging and social care. In Gupta, A., & Clayton, S. (2019). *Unaccompanied young migrants*, Bristol University Press

Duffy-Syedi (2022) ‘Refugee as spectacle: Good Chance Theatre’s The walk and the politics of performing ‘unaccompanied minor’’. in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 32:2, 221-226, DOI: 10.1080/10486801.2022.2066352

Duffy-Syedi, K. & Najibi S H (2023) ‘Disruptive narratives: interconnected care and co-responsibility in theatre-making processes with refugee performers’. In Rosen, R., Chase, E., Crafter, S., Glockner, V. and Mitra, S. (2023). *Crisis for whom?* (pp. 20-36). UCL Press

El-Enany, N. (2016). ‘Aylan Kurdi: the human refugee’. *Law and Critique*, 27(1), pp.13–15. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10978-015-9175-7.

El Khoury, T. (n.d.). As far as my fingertips take me. [online] Tania El Khoury. Available at: https://taniaelkhoury.com/portfolio/as-far-as-my-fingertips-take-me/.

Ellis, C. (2007). ‘Telling secrets, revealing lives’. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(1), pp.3–29. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406294947.

Empathy Museum. (2021). A mile in my shoes. [online] Available at: https://www.empathymuseum.com/a-mile-in-my-shoes/.

Eurostat, 13600 unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in the EU in 2020, April 23, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/euro stat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210423-1 (accessed November 26, 2021).

Evans, C. (2019). 'The practice of solidarity through the arts: inter-relations and shared moments of creation in Share My Table'. *Scottish Journal of Performance*, 6(1), pp.31–53. doi:https://doi.org/10.14439/sjop.2019.0601.03.

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2017). Representations of displacement series. *Refugee Hosts*. Available at: https://refugeehosts.org/representations-of-displacement-series/ [Accessed Mar. 1BC].

Fine, M. (1994) 'Working the hyphens: reinventing the self and other in qualitative research'. In: In N. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 70-82). California: Sage.

Finlay, R., Hopkins, P. and Benwell, M. (2021). ''It's like rubbing salt on the wound': the impacts of Covid-19 and lockdown on asylum seekers and refugees'. *Newcastle University and Economic and Social Research Council*. Available at: https://eprints.ncl.ac.uk/file_store/production/278292/9CA31F73-22E2-4362-B45B-1EC82308EA7E.pdf [Accessed 2 Mar. 2021].

Fisher, T. (2015). 'Thinking without authority: performance philosophy as the democracy of thought.' *Performance Philosophy Journal*. 1, pp.175-184. 10.21476/PP.2015.1123.

Garde, U. and Mumford, M. (2016). *Theatre of real people*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Gentleman, A. (2011) 'People felt threatened even by
a puppet refugee: Little Amal's epic walk through love and fear', Guardian, October 18, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/oct/18/threatened-puppet-refugee- little-amals-epic-walk. (accessed November 26, 2021).

Good Chance Theatre, Handspring Puppet Company (2021) *The Walk*

Good, A. (2019) 'Morality and law in the context of asylum claims' in Cox, E, Durrant, S, Farrier, D, Stonebridge, L and Woolley, A. *Refugee imaginaries: research across the humanities*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Gozdziak, E.M. (2002). 'Editorial introduction: religion and spirituality in forced migration'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 15(2), pp.129–135. doi:https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/15.2.129.

Gray, H. and Franck, A.K. (2019). 'Refugees as/at risk: the gendered and racialized underpinnings of securitization in British media narratives'. *Security Dialogue*, 50(3), pp.275–291. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010619830590.

Griffiths, M. (2015). '"Here, man is nothing!"'. *Men and Masculinities*, 18(4), pp. 468–488. doi:10.1177/1097184x15575111.

Griffiths, M. (2014). 'Out of time: The temporal uncertainties of refused asylum seekers and immigration detainees'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40(12), pp.1991–2009. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2014.907737.

Haene, L. (2022). 'A contextualized perspective on research participation in collaborative refugee research: A multi-site exploration of relational dynamics in collaborative research'. *Cultural Diversity ad Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 28(3), 325. doi:https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000458

Hamington, M. (2020). 'Care ethics and improvisation: can performance care?' In: Stuart Fisher, A. and Thompson, J. (eds) (2020) *Performing care*. Manchester University Press.

Hamington, M. and Flower, M.A. (2021). *Care ethics in the age of precarity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Heddon, D. (2008). *Autobiography and performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hedlund D. (2017) 'Constructions of credibility in decisions concerning naccompanied minors'. *International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care* 13(2): 157–172. 10.1108/IJMHSC-02-2016-0010

Held, V. (2006). T*he ethics of care: personal, political, and global*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

Hepplewhite, K. (2021). *The applied theatre artist*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Herz, M. (2019) ''Becoming' a possible threat: masculinity, culture and questioning among unaccompanied young men in Sweden'. *Identities*, 26:4, 431-449, DOI: 10.1080/1070289X.2018.1441692

Herz, M., & Lalander, P. (2017). 'Being alone or becoming lonely? The complexity of portraying 'unaccompanied children' as being alone in Sweden'. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 20(8), 1062–1076. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2017.1306037

Hobart, H.J.K. and Kneese, T. (2020). 'Radical care: survival strategies for uncertain times'. *Social Text*, 38(1), pp.1–16. doi:https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-7971067. Home: Aamir (2016) | IDFA Archive. [online] IDFA. Available at: https://www.idfa.nl/en/film/8fa57684-b47a-4bad-a555-75c86ae70691/home-aamir/ [Accessed 1 Mar. 2024].

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

http://dx.doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674061194

Honwana, A. (2012) *The time of youth: work, social change and politics in Africa* Kumarian Press

Hosseini, K. and Williams, D. (2018). *Sea prayer*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Hudson, D. & Morini, P. (2022). Opinion: research reveals British people feel very differently about some refugees than others. [online] UCL News. Available at: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2022/jul/opinion-research-reveals-british-people-feel-very-differently-about-some-refugees-others. (Accessed: 16 February 2024)

Hughes, G. (2019) ‘ From individual vulnerability to collective resistance: responding to the emotional impact of trauma on unaccompanied children seeking asylum,’ in Clayton, S., Gupta, A., and Willis, K. (eds) *Unaccompanied young migrants: identity, care and justice*. Bristol University Press, pp. 135–158. doi: 10.46692/9781447331872.008.

Idriss, S. (2018). *Young migrant identities*. Routledge.

Jackson, M. (2002). *The politics of storytelling : violence, transgression, and intersubjectivity*. Copenhagen Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, University Of Copenhagen.

Jeffers, A. (2008). ‘Dirty truth: personal narrative, victimhood and participatory theatre work with people seeking asylum’. R*esearch in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance,* 13(2), pp.217–221. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/13569780802054919.

Jeffers, A. (2012) *Refugees, theatre and crisis: Performing Global Identities.* Hampshire, Palgrave MacMillan

Jeffers, A. (2013) ‘Hospitable stages and civil listening: being an audience for participatory refugee theatre’. In: M. Balfour, ed. *Refugee performance*. Bristol: Intellect, pp. 240-2

Jeffers, A. &l Musiyiwa, A. (2023) ‘Theatre, migration and activism: the work of Good Chance Theatre’. In: Meerzon, Y. and Wilmer, S.E. (eds) (2023). The Palgrave handbook of theatre and migration. Palgrave Macmillan

Jestrovic, S. (2008) ‘Performing like an asylum seeker: paradoxes of hyper-authenticity’. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 13(2), pp. 159–170. doi:10.1080/13569780802054810.

Judge, R. (2010) ‘Refugee advocacy and the biopolitics of asylum in Britain: the precarious position of young male asylum seekers and refugees’. *Refugee Studies Centre working paper series* (60).

Kallio, K.P., Meier, I. and Häkli, J. (2020) ‘Radical hope in asylum seeking: Political Agency beyond linear temporality’. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(17), pp. 4006–4022. doi:10.1080/1369183x.2020.1764344.

Kaukko, M. and Wernesjö, U. (2016). ‘Belonging and participation in liminality: unaccompanied children in Finland and Sweden’. *Childhood*, 24(1), pp.7–20. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568216649104.

Kershaw, B. & Nicholson, H. (eds) *Research methods in theatre and performance*. Edinburgh University Press pp186-209

Kimmings, B. (2015) Artist FAQs. Available at: http://www.bryonykimmings.com/downloads/faq.pdf.

Kohli, R.K. and Kaukko, M. (2017) ‘The management of time and waiting by unaccompanied asylum-seeking girls in Finland’. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 31(4), pp. 488–506. doi:10.1093/jrs/fex040.

Labelle, B. (2020). *Sonic agency: sound and emergent forms of resistance*. London, Goldsmiths Press

Lather, P. (2000) ‘Against empathy voice and authenticity’, *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* , (4). doi:10.7146/kkf.v0i4.28384.

Lather, P. and Smithies, C. (1997) *Troubling the angels: women living with HIV/AIDS*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Lawrence, H. and Michelmore, O. (2019). Understanding sleep problems experienced by unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and children in care. [online] coram.org.uk. UK: Coram. Available at: https://www.coram.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Understanding-sleep-problems_rapid-review-final_29-April-2019_0.pdf [Accessed 2 Mar. 2024].

Lemn Sissay and Zephaniah, B. (2013). *Benjamin Zephaniah’s Refugee boy*. London: Methuen Drama.

Lenette, C. (2019) *Arts-based methods in refugee research*. Singapore: Springer

Linden, S. (2005). *Crocodile seeking refuge*. Aurora Metro Books.

Linden, S. (2017). *I have before me a remarkable document given to me by a young lady from Rwanda*. Aurora Metro Publications Ltd.

Little, S. (2017) ‘The witness turn in the performance of violence, trauma, and the real’. *Ethical Exchanges in Translation, Adaptation and Dramaturgy*, pp. 43–62. doi:10.1163/9789004346376_004.

Malkki, L. H. (1995). ‘Refugees and exile: from “fefugee studies” to the national order of things’. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 495–523. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2155947

Malkki, L.H. (1996) ‘Speechless emissaries: refugees, humanitarianism, and dehistoricization’. *Cultural Anthropology,* 11(3), pp. 377–404. doi:10.1525/can.1996.11.3.02a00050.
May-2021.pdf (Accessed: 16 February 2024).

Martin, C. (2013). *Theatre of the Real*. Springer.

Mayblin, L., Wake, M. and Kazemi, M. (2020). ‘Necropolitics and the slow violence of the everyday: asylum seeker welfare in the postcolonial present’. *Sociology*, 54(1), p.003803851986212. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038519862124.

Mbembé, A. (2003). ‘Necropolitics’. *Public Culture,* 15(1), pp.11–40.

McCartney, N. and Kastrati, D. (2019). *How not to drown.*

McMullin, C. (2021). ‘Migrant integration services and coping with the digital divide: challenges and opportunities of the COVID-19 pandemic’. *Voluntary Sector Review*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1332/204080520x16076177287917.

McNamara, C., Kidd, J. and Hughes, J. (2011). ‘The usefulness of mess: artistry, improvisation and decomposition in the practice of research in applied theatre’. In: B. Kershaw and H. Nicholson, eds., *Research methods in theatre and performance*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp.186–209.

Medecins Sans Frontieres (2019.). Imprisoned, exploited, abused: the horrifying reality for people trapped in Libya. [online] Available at: https://msf.org.uk/article/imprisoned-exploited-abused-horrifying-reality-people-trapped-libya [Accessed 2 Mar. 2024].

Meera, S. (2023). (Not so) minor encounters: Little Amal from The Jungle to The walk. Theatre Journal 75(3), 321-340. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/tj.2023.a917481.

Meerzon, Y. and Wilmer, S.E. (eds) (2023). *The Palgrave handbook of theatre and migration.* Palgrave Macmillan

Morales, M. (2023). ‘No safe place’: Jenin’s Freedom Theatre raided, daubed with star of David. [online] Al Jazeera. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/12/20/no-safe-place-jenins-freedom-theatre-raided-daubed-with-star-of-david [Accessed 19 Apr. 2024].

Morgan, M. (2020). Care ethics and the refugee ciisis: emotions, contestation and agency. New York: Routledge

Naylor, H. (2018). *Borders*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Nelson, R. (2013). *Practice as research in the arts: principles, protocols, pedagogies, resistances*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nicholson, H. (2005). *Applied drama: the gift of theatre*. Basingstoke England; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nield, S. (2008) 'The proteus cabinet, or "we are here but not here"'. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 13(2), pp. 137–145. doi:10.1080/13569780802054778.

Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

No Recourse to Public Funds Network (NRPF) (2023). Illegal migration bill| NRPF. [online] www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk. Available at: https://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/news/illegal-migration-bill.

Oliver, K. (2001) *Witnessing beyond recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Parry-Davies, E. (2021). 'Immigration infrastructure theatricalised in Illegalised and The claim'. *Contemporary Theatre Review,* 31(4), pp.409–421. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2021.1969557.

Patel, B. (2020). What is contextual admissions? [online] UCAS. Available at: https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/what-contextual-admissions. (Accessed: 16 February 2024)

Perrone, A. (2019). Will Italy prosecute officials for the 2013 shipwreck disaster? [online] Al Jazeera. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/6/23/will-italy-prosecute-officials-for-the-2013-shipwreck-disaster [Accessed 2 Mar. 2024].

Phosphoros Theatre (2016) *Dear Home Office*. Directed by Dawn Harrison and Rosanna Jahangard

Phosphoros Theatre (2017) *Dear Home Office: still pending*. Directed by Dawn Harrison and Rosanna Jahangard

Phosphoros Theatre (2018) *Pizza shop heroes*. Directed by Dawn Harrison and Pavlos Christodoulou

Polonyi, R. and Sadeghi-Yekta, K. (2024) ‘Performing solidarities or solidarities performed: the ‘with’’, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 29(3), pp. 415–421. doi: 10.1080/13569783.2024.2376841.

Poynting, S., G. Noble, P. Tabar and J. Collins (2004) *Bin Laden in the suburbs: criminalising the Arab other*. Sydney: Institute of Criminology.

Pupavac, V. (2008) ‘Refugee advocacy, traumatic representations and political disenchantment’. *Government and Opposition*, 43(2): 270-292.

PYSCHEdelight (2022) *Mohand and Peter*

Qasmiyeh, Y M. (2020) 'Writing the camp, writing the camp archive: The case of Baddawi refugee camp in Lebanon' in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E (ed) (2020) *Refuge in a moving world: tracing refugee and migrant journeys across disciplines*. UCL Press. pp. Accessible: https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/116728

Qasmiyeh, Y M. 2019. “To embroider the voice with its own needle.” Berghahn Books blog, January. https://berghahnbooks.com/blog/to-embroider-the-voice-with-its-own-needle.

Qasmiyeh, Y M (2019) 'Writing the camp: death, dying and dialects' in Cox, E, Durrant, S, Farrier, D, Stonebridge, L and Woolley, A (2019) *Refugee imaginaries: research across the humanities*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Refugee Council (2021) Asylum statistics annual trends, Refugee Council. Available at: https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Asylum-Statistics-Annual-Trends-

Refugee Council (2021). Thousands seeking asylum face cruel wait of years for asylum decision - fresh research shows. [online] Refugee Council. Available at: https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/thousands-seeking-asylum-face-cruel-wait-of-years-for-asylum-decision-fresh-research-shows/

Refugee Council (2023). What is the illegal migration act? [online] Refugee Council. Available at: https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/information/what-is-the-illegal-migration-

Richardson Na, Cassell, J., Head, D.R., Lanza, S., Schaefer, C., Stuart Derek Walker and Middleton, J.W. (2021). ‘Scabies outbreak management in refugee/migrant camps across Europe 2014-17: a retrospective qualitative interview study of healthcare staff experiences and perspective’s. *BMJ Open* 13 (11) doi:https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.04.28.21256211.

Richardson, D. (ed) *Contesting recognition: identity studies in the social sciences*. Palgrave Macmillan, London

Right to remain toolkit Right to Remain. Available at: https://righttoremain.org.uk/toolkit/ (Accessed: 16 February 2024).

Robinson, F. (2011). *The ethics of care: a feminist approach to human security*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Rosen, R. (2023), 'Emergent solidarities and children on the move: What's 'crisis' got to do with it?' In Rosen, R., Chase, E., Crafter, S., Glockner, V. and Mitra, S. *Crisis for Whom?* UCL Press

Rosen, R., Chase, E., Crafter, S., Glockner, V. and Mitra, S. (eds) (2023). *Crisis for whom?* UCL Press

Rotter, R. (2015). 'Waiting in the asylum determination process: Just an empty interlude?'. *Time & Society*, 25(1), pp.80–101. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463x15613654.

Said, E.W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Saito, Y. (2022) 'Aesthetics of visible repair: the challenge of kintsugi' in Berger, M. and Irvin, K. (eds) (2022) *Repair: sustainable design futures*. London, Routledge

Saito, Y. (2022). *Aesthetics of care: practice in everyday life*. London, Bloomsbury Academic

Salverson, J. (1999). 'Transgressive storytelling or an aesthetic of injury: Performance, Pedagogy and Ethics'. *Theatre Research in Canada*, 20(1), pp.35–51. doi:https://doi.org/10.3138/tric.20.1.35.

Salverson, J. (2001). Change on whose terms? Testimony and an erotics of inquiry. Theater 31(3), 119-125. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/34187.

Saunders, N. and Al-Om, T. (2022). 'Slow resistance: resisting the slow violence of asylum'. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 50(2), p.030582982110663. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298211066339.

Schaffer, K. & Smith, S. (2004) *Human rights and narrated lives: the ethics of recognition*. New York, Palgrave MacMillan

Scheibelhofer, Paul. (2019). 'Gender and intimate solidarity in refugee-sponsorships of unaccompanied young men'. In: Feischmidt/Pries/Cantat (Eds.) *Refugee protection and civil society in Europe*. (2019, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

Sedgwick, E. 2003. *Touching feeling: affect, pedagogy, performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Shemak, A. (2010). *Asylum speakers*. Fordham University Press.

Sherringham, O. (2019). ‘Sharing stories and the quiet politics of welcome’. [online] *Refugee Hosts*. Available at: https://refugeehosts.org/2019/09/16/sharing-stories-and-the-quiet-politics-of-welcome/ [Accessed 1 Mar. 2024].

Shire, W. (2009). *Home*. [online] Available at: https://www.amnesty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/home-by-warsan-shire.pdf.

Skeiker, F. (2010). ‘Performing liminal citizenship: using applied theatre techniques to civically engage international students’. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 2(2), pp.12–19. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/17581184201000010.

Skeiker, F. and Morris-Skeiker, M. (2021). ‘Language acquisition and identity-making: applied theatre as a mediating practice with Syrian refugees in Europe’. *Applied Theatre Research*, 9(1), pp.25–37. doi:https://doi.org/10.1386/atr_00046_1.

Smith, H. (2015). Shocking images of drowned Syrian boy show tragic plight of refugees. [online] the Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/shocking-image-of-drowned-syrian-boy-shows-tragic-plight-of-refugees.

Snow, T. (2020). ‘Visual politics and the ‘refugee’ crisis: The images of Alan Kurdi’, in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. Refuge in a moving world : tracing refugee and migrant journeys across disciplines. London: UCL Press pp. 166-177

Soundwalks. (n.d.). Home. [online] Available at: https://homemakersounds.org [Accessed 6 Mar. 2024].

Stuart Fisher, A. (2005). ‘Developing an ethics of practice in applied theatre: Badiou and fidelity to the truth of the event’. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 10(2), pp.247–252. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/13569780500103992.

Stuart Fisher, A. and Thompson, J. (eds) (2020) *Performing care*. Manchester University Press.

El Khoury, T. (2016). As far as my fingertips take me. [online] Available at: https://taniaelkhoury.com/portfolio/as-far-as-my-fingertips-take-me/

Taylor, H. (2013) '"You don't believe me?" Truth and testimony in Cypriot refugee narratives.' In Adler, N. and Leydesdorff, S. (eds) *Tapestry of Memory*. New Jersey, Transaction Publishers 37-54

The Family Stage. (2022). REVIEW: Mohand and Peter, PSYCHEdelight (Southwark Playhouse). [online] Available at: http://www.thefamilystage.co.uk/2022/03/12/review-mohand-and-peter-psychedelight-southwark-playhouse/ [Accessed 6 Mar. 2024].

The Jungle. Joe Robertson and Joe Murphy (2018). Directed by Stephen Daldry and Justin Martin. [Playhouse Theatre, London. 3 September]

Thompson, J. (2015). ‘Towards an aesthetics of care’. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 20(4), pp.430–441. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/13569783.2015.1068109.

Tillmann-Healy, L. M. (2001). *Between gay and straight: Understanding friendship across sexual orientation*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Tillmann-Healy, L.M. (2003) ‘Friendship as method’. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9(5), pp. 729–749. doi:10.1177/1077800403254894.

Tillmann, L.M. ‘Friendship as method.’ In In *Solidarity: Friendship, Family, and Activism Beyond Gay and Straight*, by Tillmann, L, 287-319. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Trimingham, M. (2002) ‘A methodology for practice as research’. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 22(1), pp. 54–60. doi:10.1386/stap.22.1.54.

Tronto, J.C. (1993). *Moral boundaries: a political argument for an ethics of care*. London: Routledge.

Tronto, JC & Fisher, B 1990, ‘Toward a feminist theory of caring’. in E Abel & M Nelson (eds), *Circles of care*. SUNY Press, Albany, NY, pp. 36-54.

UNHCR. 2010. Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees.

Wake, C. (2019) ‘Theatre of the real with resettled refugees: old problems and new solutions in *The Baulkham Hills African ladies troupe*’, *Performance Research*, 24(8), pp. 20–30. doi: 10.1080/13528165.2019.1718426.

Wake, C. (2023). ‘Performance and asylum seekers in Australia (2000-2020)’ in Meerzon, Y. and Wilmer, S.E. (eds) (2023). *The Palgrave handbook of theatre and migration*. Palgrave Macmillan

Wernesjö, U. (2012). ‘Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children: whose perspective?’. *Childhood*, 19(4), pp.495–507. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568211429625.

Wertenbaker, T. (2001). *Credible witness*. Faber & Faber.

Willson, S. and Jaye, P. (2017). ‘Arts-based learning for a circle of care’. *The Lancet*, 390(10095), pp.642–643. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(17)31970-0.

Wilmer, S. E. (2018) *Performing statelessness in Europe*. London and New York, Palgrave Macmillan

Wilmer, S. E. (2023) ‘Refugees and the right to have rights’ in Meerzon, Y. and Wilmer, S.E. (eds) (2023). *The Palgrave handbook of theatre and migration*. Palgrave Macmillan

Wilson, J.A. (2017). ‘Excavation and re-animation: figuring process in practice-as-research’. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 39(1), pp.3–20. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14682761.2017.1303283.

Woolley, A. (2014) *Contemporary asylum narratives: representing refugees in the twenty-first century*. UK, Palgrave MacMillan

Yuval-Davis, N. (2011). ‘Belonging and the politics of belonging’. In: McLaughlin, J., Phillimore, P., Richardson, D. (eds) *Contesting recognition: identity studies in the social sciences*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Zaroulia, M. (2018) ‘Performing that which exceeds us: aesthetics of sincerity and obscenity during ‘the refugee crisis’’. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 23:2, 179-192, DOI: 10.1080/13569783.2018.1439735

Zisman, L. (2020) ‘A manifesto for methodologies at the end of a world (and grieving the world we once knew). Doing arts research in a pandemic: a crowd-sourced document responding to the challenges arising from Covid-19’. *The Cultural Capital exchange* [Available online: https://collective-encounters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Doing-Arts-Research-in-a-Pandemic.pdf]

Zodwa Nyoni (2015). *Nine lives and Come to where I’m from*. Bloomsbury Publishing.