Engaging with Diversity in Hospitable Spaces

A Study on Lived Experiences of Community Theatre
with Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Leeds

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Abstract

An emphasis in political debates and much print media in the United Kingdom (UK) on perceived issues with ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity has contributed to a narrative of worry and fear. Despite such hostile discourse, people find ways of living together with diversity every day.

The encounters which I am concerned with in the following degree project are taking place through community theatre with Mafwa Theatre in Leeds where women from asylum seeker, refugee, and wider communities are socialising and cooperating over fun and simple drama activities. The purpose of this thesis is to better understand the different participants' lived experiences of the theatre space, how they view their role in the group, and how they perceive diversity in the group. The research questions are explored with qualitative research methods of individual interviews with Mafwa members, the facilitators and a volunteer, participant observation during the weekly drama sessions, and document analysis of printed, online, and audio materials.

With this degree project, I aim to contribute to the discussion about everyday multiculturalism and living with diversity in the UK. The theoretical framework consists of the concept of hospitality which helps me explore how hospitable spaces are shaped and negotiated by different contributors, and conviviality which embraces the complexity of social relations without romanticising them and can help us reach a better understanding of how to live together without a fear for each other's differences.

The findings show that the different participants view the drama group as a hospitable community of acceptance and respect within a hostile environment for asylum seekers and refugees at the national level. The space offers a well-needed opportunity for the women to have fun, develop their creative skills, and escape day-to-day concerns. Moreover, the study shows that besides being proud co-producers of artistic practice, all participants are also active co-creators of shaping the hospitable space and a 'convivial culture'. Finally, despite misunderstandings and disagreements in the group, the participants express having bonded over similarities and learned from differences rather than describing diversity as something to fear.

Keywords: Refugees & asylum seekers, community theatre, applied theatre, diversity, conviviality, hospitality, United Kingdom, Leeds

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1 Introduction

Societal change is no modern phenomena. Confrontations of traditions, languages and lifestyles, demographic changes, and social improvement are rather the norm. Globalisation with its current complex, interconnected and transformative processes has defined the twentieth century and led to greater awareness by many people of living in a global rather than a local context (Jenkins 2014).

Some societal changes have received much public attention and stirred up controversy. Since the proclaimed 'war on terror' after the 9/11 attacks, the pan-European 'refugee crisis' in 2015, and up to and during the 2016 referendum campaign leading to a majority vote for the United Kingdom (UK) leaving the European Union, much negative attention and suspicion have been directed towards immigrants in the print media and political debates in the country (Goodwin et al. 2017). In times of economic stagnation and high unemployment, immigrants have often been blamed for stealing jobs and taking advantage of the benefit system (URL 1) and since the early twenty-first century, researchers argue that emphasis has been on the perceived issues with immigration and the threat people's 'differences' bring to society's moral order. Negative media representations contribute to unfavourable public opinions and amplifying concerns with societal diversity (Polgár 2006, Pijpers 2006).

Processes of movement bring changes into the local setting, and how migrant populations and host societies can live together in a diverse society has been widely debated. Moreover, recent policies in the UK have focused on ensuring 'social cohesion' in the sense of 'togetherness', trust, and solidarity (URL 2) rather than division and segregation in communities (see for example URL 3)[1]. Meanwhile, groups and individuals, both newly arrived and established populations, interact through regular encounters with each other. This study is broadly interested in how people at the local level engage and live with diversity in a UK setting and how they make sense of encounters with strangers.

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[1] Researchers such as Vertovec et al. (2005) argue that a "cultural-diversity sceptical turn", i.e., a concern with lacking cross-cultural contact between people who are perceived to live 'parallel lives', have dominated public and political debates about cultural difference and ethnic diversity in the UK. Especially since the 2001 rallies in the three Northern English towns Bradford, Burnley, and Oldham where racial tensions and social inequality led to riots between white and Asian populations (Neal et al. 2013:309-10) and the London bombings of transport networks in 2005, policies have been more concerned with potential issues with lacking 'community cohesion' (Jeffers 2012:118).

1.1 Aim & Research Questions

Up until the 1970s most migrants came to the UK from former colonies and Commonwealth countries, mainly in the Caribbean and South Asia. Nowadays people come from almost every country of the world, also countries with no historical link with the UK, which has led to what can now be called a 'super-diverse' nation (Vertovec 2007b:1029). A greater diversity can be found when it comes to for example country of origin, ethnic belonging, immigration status, education level, labour market experience, and religious affiliation, and the interplay between such variables has shaped and is shaping the nature of communities in the contemporary UK (ibid).

Many former studies have been concerned with how host members address the sociocultural diversity of immigrants, whether they accept or even welcome it into their communities (Hugo 2015) or act with fear, exclusion and in extreme cases harassment (Amin 2002).

The following study is explored through the frame of Communication for Development (ComDev) to gain an understanding of how participatory theatre-making can be used as a communication tool for interacting with strangers and living with diversity. ComDev emerged along with the growing field of development as a strategic tool for enhancing development processes, but it was not until the 1950s that participatory communication focusing on dialogue and the involvement of the people in question started to be viewed as important for processes of social change. With roots in among others Paulo Freire's work in adult education in Latin America and growing out of a critique of Western domination in development work and debates, participation along with questions of empowerment and voice are nowadays essential in much international development practice and theory (Tufte et al. 2009:1-3).

In this degree project, I am interested in examining the experiences and learnings of women from refugee, asylum seeker, and wider communities coming together around participatory community theatre. The female-only drama sessions are organised by Mafwa Theatre, and the study is situated in the diverse city of Leeds in England. Through in-depth individual interviews with Mafwa members, the two facilitators and a volunteer and participant observation carried out during online and physical theatre sessions, I seek to understand the participants' lived experiences of theatre-making with a diverse group of women.

Therefore, the research questions are as follows:

- What does the Mafwa Theatre space mean to the different participating women?
- How do the participants perceive their role in the theatre group?
- How do the participants view diversity in the theatre group?

To address the research questions, previous literature on theatre for development and community theatre with refugees and asylum seekers create a foundation, and two main theoretical approaches have been identified for the analysis. First, the concept of hospitality is applied to understand how the participants view the theatre space and perceive their roles in the group. Second, I employ the concept of conviviality for living together with diversity and embracing the complexity in human relations. This second theoretical approach helps me explore the participants' perceptions of each other and experiences of diversity in the group.

1.2 Limitations

A conscious decision was made to focus on the interaction between the participants in the group. As the theatre company's current focus is on strengthening the group bonds and interacting over drama practice more than setting up public performances, this limitation felt relevant. To also include the interaction with or response from the audience lies beyond the scope of this project.

Having to carry out the research online due to the Covid-19 pandemic meant a limitation to the interaction with my informants. Six out of the eight individual interviews were carried out online and participant observation mainly took place online allowing few opportunities to informally converse with the participants before and during the sessions. Doing research online affected the data selected and the low number of interviewees in my qualitative study. Therefore, I do not attempt to draw general conclusions about the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers doing participatory community theatre or the theatre form's potential for social change.

2 Background

2.1 Refugees & Asylum Seekers

'Refugee' and 'asylum seeker' are often mistakenly used interchangeably, but it is important to distinguish between the terms for the sake of this degree paper. According to the UNHCR, refugees are "people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country" (URL 4), whereas an asylum seeker is someone who has formally applied for protection in a recipient country but "whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed" (URL 5).[2] Behind these definitions are actual people which the terms say little about, and it is among other these persons that this degree project is concerned with.

2.2 Immigration to the UK

With the British National Act in 1948, people from the Empire and Commonwealth were given the possibility to immigrate to the UK. Though, the unexpected arrival of many non-white immigrants led to a political focus in the 1960s and early 1970s on racialised restrictions to limit immigration of non-whites (Ashcroft et al. 2017:4-6).[3]

The UK is nowadays known for its notoriously strict immigration system which has become particularly punitive since the 21st century (Griffiths et al. 2021:4). The Labour government in the 1990s paved the way for creating a more 'uncomfortable environment' for undocumented migrants and since the implementation of the 'hostile environment' policies[4] in 2012 and the increase in far-right political parties, it has become more difficult to migrate to and stay in the UK (ibid:5, Berelson et al. 2019:69). Such policies targeting undocumented migrants attempt to make life difficult for people lacking the right paperwork and have been criticised for encouraging to discrimination and suspicion

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[2] Terms such as 'immigrants' and 'migrants' are used to talk about people on the move. Lacking internationally accepted legal definitions, 'immigrants' are often understood to be people "who are or intend to be settled in their new country" and a 'migrant' viewed as someone "temporarily resident" in a country (URL 6). Importantly, both are free to return home.

[3] Scholars such as Ashcroft et al. (2007) and Gilroy (2004) have been critical to the downplay of Britain's imperial past and have emphasised how remaking the nation's identity since the decolonialisation have led to a search for 'Britishness' and meant that immigration and race have become intertwined.

[4] The term covers not one document, but more immigration acts and regulations introduced under Home Secretary Theresa May to move some of the responsibility from the national borders to state officials for cutting 'illegal' immigration to the country. 'Hostile environment' is also increasingly used within academia and media discourses to talk about the general hostility towards migrants (Griffiths et al. 2021).

against newcomers[5] but also for ignoring postcolonial links and long-term residency in the country[6] (Kaptani et al. 2021).

Moreover, 35,737 asylum applications were made in the UK in 2019 (URL 7) and while people wait months or years for a decision, the majority of asylum-seekers are not allowed to work and instead rely on low state support and live in poor-quality housing (URL 8). This means a barrier to settling and leaves many feeling isolated and struggling with mental health (Berelson et al. 2019:70). 48% of the applications made in 2019 were rejected (URL 9) and with the fear of deportation naturally follows struggles with people's psychological and physical health. At the same time, cuts have been made in the support to refugees for example to English language classes making it harder for people to settle in society (Berelson et al. 2019:70-71).

Most migrants coming to the UK end up in bigger cities in England. The Metropolitan county West Yorkshire where the following study takes place is located inland in northern England and like the rest of the UK, the region has a long history of migration. Whereas many migrants used to come to the region from Ireland and former Commonwealth colonies, since 2000 the region has seen an increase in Central and Eastern Europeans and asylum seekers with diverse backgrounds (URL 10).

The largest and most populous city of the region, Leeds, had a total population of 798,786 in 2020, and around 99,000 of the inhabitants, i.e., 12.5%, were born outside the UK and two-thirds of those outside the EU. The migrant population consists of both international students, economic migrants, and asylum seekers, and the people living in Leeds are of around 170 different nationalities, speak more than 70 languages, and 18.9% belong to ethnic minority groups[7] (ibid). Diversity can be found in every area of Leeds[8].

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[5] For example, must landlords, employers, and doctors perform immigration status checks before offering housing, work, and healthcare to people or consequently pay high fines (Kaptani et al. 2021:69).

[6] An example is the so-called 'Windrush Scandal' in 2018 concerned with a generation of mainly Black British citizens coming from Commonwealth countries to the UK between the 1940s to 1970s. As many never claimed the British passports which they had the right to, they were later mis-recognised as 'undocumented migrants' due to lacking papers proving their right to remain in the UK. Many were denied access to public services and threatened with deportation. The controversial scandal is an example of the racial effects the hostile environment policies have had on different people in the UK (Kaptani et al. 2021).

[7] The majority are of Asian background (mostly coming from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) and from Black minority groups (Piekut et al. 2016).

[8] The city's diversity is among other reflected in its cuisine from all over the world and wide range of yearly cultural events celebrating diversity, traditions, and people's skills such as the oldest West Indian Carnival in Europe (1967) and Refugee Week celebrating the creativity and contributions of refugees.

2.3 Theatre Company Mafwa Theatre

There are over 120 organisations and charities in Leeds offering support to refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrant communities. One such actor is the community theatre company Mafwa Theatre striving to bring together women from refugee, asylum seeker and wider Leeds communities[9] with the help of drama and arts.

The community-based theatre company welcomes all women from different backgrounds which is reflected in the diversity of its more than 80 members in terms of among other country of origin, ethnicity, age, first language, educational level, and life experiences. Many of the women are unemployed and several are current or refused asylum seekers (Berelson et al. 2019:70).

Mafwa Theatre was founded in February 2018 by the co-artistic directors Keziah Berelson and Tamsin Cook with the aim to through weekly, participant-led drama sessions build community and create a feeling of solidarity while enabling the participants to develop their English and creative skills. The company also supports members experiencing social isolation and mental health struggles to build their confidence and self-expression (ibid:68).

The weekly workshops were carried out via Zoom during the pandemic but are once again taking place in person[10] and are open to all women wanting to meet others, have fun, and work creatively (URL 11).

Keziah and Tamsin strive to create a culture of welcome and strengthen the system of support for newly arrived women in the city. With the help of theatre-making and arts, people's similarities and differences and the power of diverse communities are highlighted and celebrated (URL 12).

Besides the weekly drama sessions, the company works with wider societal obstacles and breaking down barriers that can hinder people from engaging with arts. Therefore, they have worked to get financial support for among others bus tickets to the sessions and

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[9] The broad term 'wider communities' covers both British-born and migrant women. Some have migrated more recently to the UK whereas others are children of parents who migrated and were maybe even born in the country. As the group is open to all women, some participants from 'wider communities' live in deprived areas of Leeds whereas others live in areas which are better off in socio-economic terms, and while some are unemployed others are employed and/or students.

[10] Before the pandemic, the drama sessions took place at the refugee-led organisation Leeds Refugee Forum in Lincoln Green in Leeds, but the participants are currently meeting up in a studio space at the arts organisation Patrick Studios in Mabgate in the inner-city area of the city.

performances, and food vouchers for the participants. They also take part in campaigns advocating for migrant rights and have been actively involved in the Asylum Matter's 'Lift the Ban' campaign for the right of all asylum seekers to work (ibid).

3 Literature Review

3.1 Theatre for Development (TfD)

Previous definitions of development were mainly concerned with economic development, but as scholars like John Clammer (2012) have pointed out, it is important to not only understand development as growth or fulfilling basic needs, but also as the potential of thriving and enjoying a high quality of life. He argues for a holistic view of development appreciating the potential of the arts and creativity for social transformation and wellbeing. One such cultural manifestation is theatre.

Development practitioners already started recognising theatre as a valuable tool for development in the 1950s[11] (Flynn et al. 2015:11), and in the 1970s, Theatre for Development (TfD) became a strategy for education in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Indian subcontinent and has over the last four decades grown in importance and spread worldwide (Epskamp 2006:xiv). Two important influencers of the developmental intervention tool were Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire and Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal who in the 1960s and 1970s experimented with participatory learning methods and emphasised the potential of theatre as a tool for social intervention through placing the participant rather than the facilitator at the centre of the learning process (ibid, Nicholson 2014). Dialogical communication and collective participation in theatre practice, Freire (1970) argued, could enable individuals and communities to become aware of problems and together find solutions, rather than outsiders offering solutions to pre-defined problems.

Within TfD, theatre is seen as a communication tool for development and a potential vehicle to support processes of social change (Chukwu-Okoronkwo 2020). Drama as a participatory tool is used to encourage people to become aware of and express concerns about their lives, consider the causes of such issues, and how to take steps towards possible solutions. Moreover, taking part in dynamic, creative play and expressing oneself through collective activity and performance has the potential to create a milieu for cooperation and strong social bonds (Epskamp 2006, Kerr 2014).

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[11] Though at the time it was used mainly to disseminate development ideas about among other sanitation and immunisation.

The participatory methodology has become popular with both NGOs, governmental and multilateral organisations, especially with projects concerned with behaviour change and conflict resolution, as it requires limited resources, involves local people as performers, and can be used even with illiterate participants. Participatory theatre performance has the potential to bring about radical new understandings of the self and lead to change within a community (Epskamp 2006, Flynn et al. 2015), though, while participation is essential, we must keep in mind that it is not the magic bullet to solving problems. Epskamp (2006) reminds us that for participatory projects to be successful, the micro-practices of theatre at the local level must be seen in the context of wider structures at the macro-level hindering development and freedom.

Whereas many theatre development projects in the past took a top-down approach, showed little concern with local people's needs, and focused on economic growth rather than long-term social change, TfD projects nowadays tend to emphasise a horizontal approach of two-way communication where the beneficiaries are more involved in the planning and implementation and simultaneously placed at the centre of their own development. People's personal creative potential, their backgrounds, and experiences are valued to a greater extend, and people's active participation seen as necessary in the process towards empowerment and social change (Epskamp 2006, Chukwu-Okoronkwo 2020, Kerr 2014).

3.2 Community Theatre with Refugees & Asylum Seekers

The terms 'applied drama' and 'applied theatre' are often used interchangeably to describe "forms of dramatic activity that are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies" (Nicholson 2014:3). Though, 'applied drama' is frequently used to talk about a more process-based form, whereas 'applied theatre' is described as more performance-based (Taylor in Nicholson 2014:5). Both forms are often participatory by nature and marked by an intention to strengthen the participants' creative agency and capacities, encourage to personal and social changes, and challenge hierarchies (Jeffers 2012, Epskamp 2006).

The type of applied drama which I am concerned with in this degree project is community theatre, which Nicholson (2014) describes as "characterised by the participation of community members in creating a piece of theatre which has special resonance for that

community" (12). It is often viewed as "a tool which offers the possibility to concretely foster intercultural dialogue, community cohesion and mutual understanding" (URL 13:3), and the themes are usually problem-oriented and of direct relevance to the community (Epskamp 2006:11).

Projects around community theatre often include groups of refugees and asylum seekers with little or no previous experience of doing drama working together with professional artists (Jeffers 2012) around different theatre techniques such as improvisation and role-play (URL 13:4). Community theatre is nowadays widely used to bring together established communities and newly arrived refugees or asylum seekers, to challenge prejudices, create a feeling of belonging, and celebrate the positive impacts that people with different backgrounds and life experiences can bring to a community (ibid, URL 14).

As Jeffers (2012) points out, a lot has already been written within academia on the topics of theatre, migration, and refugees. Much literature has been concerned with theatre-making with refugees in camps around the world[12], and scholars have also been studying applied theatre with migrants in recipient countries[13].

Moreover, many former studies challenge the notion of theatre-making being inherently empowering and encourage researchers to distinguish between performance practices which are transformative and leading to permanent changes and those which are transportive and temporarily taking the participant somewhere (Schechner in Nicholson 2014:14-16). Crucial to studying the transformative potentials of participatory theatre is taking into account wider societal, political, and cultural structures and how such affect the micro-dramaturgy, i.e., the dramaturgy around the concrete production (Berelson et al. 2019, Kaptani et al. 2021). For example, do de Smet et al. (2018) with their study of a Berlin-based theatre project point out how the broader socio-political climate of stigmatisation and polarisation in Europe surround the micro-dramaturgy and affect the potentials for participant agency and empowerment.

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[12] See, for example, Borisenko (2016) who has studied a theatre project with refugee youth in a camp in Kenya where sharing their stories and traumas led to long-term effects of building confidence and forming friendships, or Ong et al. (2019) who examined a co-production between European actors and refugee performers in 'The Jungle' in Calais to study how it enabled the participants to use their agency and cultivated a sense of 'togetherness-in-difference'.

[13] See Horghagen et al. (2010) who examined the use of community theatre to foster feelings of collaboration and belonging for asylum seekers in a detention centre in Norway, or Turner-King (2018) who studied what access and being welcomed to two youth theatres in the UK meant for young people and their sense of belonging and agency.

3.3 Situating my Study

Living together in super-diverse cities has been discussed and problematised in political, public, and scholarly debates, though, how relations are formed and what meaningful interchanges in urban environments look like have not been researched enough, according to Vertovec (2007b). We still know very little about how social initiatives impact the people involved.

Moreover, while much former research in the UK on living with diversity in urban spaces has focused on the London area (see for example Wessendorf 2013, Back et al. 2016), I seek to contribute with my small qualitative study to the work on theatre-making, hospitality, and conviviality by examining lived experiences of community theatre with Mafwa Theatre within the super-diverse city of Leeds.

3.3 Situating my Study

4 Conceptual Framework

In the following chapter, I present the two theoretical concepts which inform my analysis. Applying hospitality can help us better understand how social relations are negotiated in a mobile world between 'self' and 'other' and open up debates about how to live with diversity. In addition, conviviality can help us embrace the complexity of social relations without romanticising them and reach a better understanding of how to live together in society without fearing each other's differences. Combining the two concepts will help me analyse the participants' lived experiences and learnings from doing drama with the diverse group.

4.1 Hospitality

4.1.1 Welcoming Others

The global movement of people or the idea of granting hospitality to the 'stranger' are nothing new. Though, questions of how to welcome others, who can perform the roles of host and guest, and what kinds of spaces hospitality produces are still highly topical in today's mobile world (Molz et al. 2016:1-3) where life increasingly consists of 'stranger encounters' for both travellers and those who stay at home (Ahmed 2000).

Hospitality has its roots in the Latin terms 'hospitalia' and 'hospitia' meaning "dwellings specifically for the lodging of foreigners" (Chamberlain 2020:61). The important contributor to the philosophy of hospitality, Jacques Derrida (2000a), described the complex concept as a welcome and invitation of the 'stranger', such 'foreigner' being defined, first of all, as someone born elsewhere (14). The invitation can take place at a state level where tourists, visitors, or migrants are permitted to cross borders or at a personal level when inviting someone into one's home.

Inspired by the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida (2000b) encourages us to imagine an unconditional hospitality without restrictions or expectations of returns from strangers. Though, he simultaneously points out that such absolute hospitality is an impossibility because the host through welcoming the guest reaffirms his position of power and sovereignty over the 'home': "'make yourself at home' but on condition that

you observe the rules of hospitality by respecting the being-at-home of my home"
(Derrida 2000a: 14). There is thus an inherent tension to hospitality as welcoming others
predicates upon having a 'home' and thus the power to define the conditions for
hospitality and choose who to give it to (Derrida 2000b, O'Gorman 2006).

The concept of hospitality has been applied in academic and political discourses on
migration and multiculturalism in Europe, often to debate the tension pointed out by
Derrida between a universal, unconditional right to hospitality and the right of the nation-
state to control its borders through granting conditional hospitality (Molz et al. 2016).
Researching the UK, Sarah Gibson (2016) argues that the nation takes pride in imagining
itself as tolerant and welcoming, at the same time as there is a moral panic about the risk
of newcomers misusing the nation's generosity. Such fear is visible in anti-immigration
discourses where asylum seekers, refugees, and economic migrants are often socially
constructed as unwanted parasites threatening the nation's hospitality (Rosello 2001), and
negative media narratives describing Britain as having to 'defend vulnerable frontiers'
against 'illegal' migrants (Jeffers 2012:26-28) arriving to misuse "the benevolence of
their host nation" (URL 15).

This resonates with Derrida's (2000b) argument that for the host not to treat the 'other'
with hostility but instead as a desirable guest, he or she must be viewed as non-threatening
and as having the 'right' to hospitality. Anti-immigration rhetoric describing British
hospitality as under threat implies that the British host needs to take back control of its
borders and be protective of its generosity. Thus, hospitality is invoked to legitimise more
restrictive policies and fortify border controls to keep out those perceived as undeserving,
threatening 'strangers' while welcoming deserving, grateful 'guests' willing to contribute
to the nation rather than abusing it (Gibson 2016, Ahmed 2000). Hospitality offered by
the nation-state to strangers is thus strictly limited and far from the unconditional
hospitality which Derrida (2000b) encouraged us to imagine, though such tension should
inspire us to strive for a more respectful humanitarian model for living with diversity not
entirely driven by the interests of states, Derrida (1999) argued.

4.1.2 Hosts & Guests
Many scholars discussing hospitality and migration have argued for the need to question
closures between the roles of host and guest and challenge the notion of home as static

and identity as rooted in territory. Researching hospitality and nationalism, Mireille Rosello (2001) argues that many host nations construct immigrants as forever guests to maintain their own power and fix others in a position of dispossession. Though, there is a need to destabilise such an imagined binary between host and guest. Movement to and from 'home' means that it is a mobile, challenged, and reasserted space made up of complex networks of people rather than being associated with fixity and nostalgia. Moreover, the fact that people constantly move into, out of and are between social roles as they negotiate their social belonging means that it is inadequate associating the host with a fixed and bounded home and the guest with mobility and un-belonging (Molz et al. 2016, Ahmed 2000). Hospitality is not about a duality between a dominating, native host and a subjecting guest passively receiving hospitality, Mustafa Dikeç (2002) agrees, but the relation should be understood as an active, social exchange requiring as much engagement from the guests as the hosts, Rachel Turner-King (2018) argues.

Thus, hospitality does not only mean mobilisation for the guest but also for the host as it gives the latter an opportunity to question the self and one's role in the world through the meeting with others (Molz et al. 2016, Ong et al. 2019). As Rosello (2001) argued: "the very precondition of hospitality may require that, in some ways, both the host and the guest accept, in different ways, the uncomfortable and sometimes painful possibility of being changed by the other" (176).

4.1.3 Theatre as a Welcoming Space
Whereas restrictive policies focusing on managing immigration in the UK together with a general hostile environment have made life difficult for refugees and asylum seekers at the national level, many organisations and charities at the local level have taken on the role as welcoming and supporting immigrants. Most contemporary refugee theatre in Europe is concerned with challenging suspicion and mistrust against asylum seekers and refugees and have therefore opened up hospitable spaces to take more ethical actions towards people and raise awareness about the hostile conditions they encounter (Jeffers 2012).

According to Dikeç (2002), hospitality is more than a generous welcome or tolerance of the 'stranger', it is about "*giving spaces* to the stranger where recognition on both sides would be possible" (229, emphasis in original). Rather than reducing the 'stranger' to an

'other', hospitality is about opening up spaces where we can engage in acts of solidarity and where contestation of one-sided perspectives can take place. Applied theatre with refugees and asylum seekers have contributed to building such spaces, Helen Nicholson (2014) and Alison Jeffers (2012) argue, where self-representation and different viewpoints can be expressed. Jeffers (ibid) stresses that theatre offers a possibility of alternative narratives to the stories of victimhood and trauma which asylum seekers have to perform to authorities to fit the category of helpless and deserving 'refugee', and instead share complex experiences of refugees and positive stories of personal agency (Jeffers 2008). It resonates with Nicholson (2014:174) who argues that the power of participatory theatre-making lies in the possibility it offers to create a space where questions can be asked about whose stories and truths are told and accepted, new insights be generated, and fixed binaries between self and other and identity and difference can be challenged and deconstructed.

4.1.4 Facilitators & Participants

In contemporary theatre, the roles between who is acting host and guest and what it means to be theatre participant, artist, producer, and audience have increasingly been blurred (Nicholson 2014:3). As Turner-King (2018) argues, the participant in applied theatre is never just passively receiving hospitality from the facilitator-as-host, because the former's active engagement and cooperation is crucial to the theatre form.

The facilitator is important in making the cooperation possible in the first place and in nurturing a positive environment over time (Turner-King 2018), but as Nicholson (2014) emphasises, the facilitator's role is "not to *give* participants a voice – with all the hierarchical and authoritarian implications that phrase invokes – but to create spaces and places which enable the participants' voices to be heard" (169, emphasis in original).
The intention, facilitation, and resources of the facilitators are thus crucial for creating a space where participants can make themselves heard and issues of inequalities can be addressed (Kaptani et al. 2021), but this must not lead to a dependency on professionals, Anne Smith (2014) emphasises. It is important to foster what she calls a 'culture of agency' for a more balanced relationship between participants and facilitators and for long-term impacts beyond the duration of the theatre project. Whereas many participants might feel disempowered by their immigration status or lacking language skills,

creatively collaborating, using one's skills and the power to act and make choices is often linked to improved mental health and a stronger sense of emotional belonging to a group.

4.2 Conviviality

4.2.1 Living with Diversity

In light of the current multiplication of diversity in the UK, it is important to understand the often contradictory and complex nature of lived encounter and "the ways people live together successfully, how they envision a modus of co-vivendi and what strategies they create in order to practice it" (Nowicka et al. 2014:342). To do this, more social scientists are now using the concept of conviviality to explore the ways people live together in diverse urban spaces (see for example Tyler 2017, Wise et al. 2014, Erickson 2011, Wessendorf 2016). Such researchers across disciplines are increasingly concerned with empirically grounded research (Vertovec 2007a) which shifts attention to people's lived experiences and the everyday "making of *competent* multicultural populations" (Neal et al. 2013:315, emphasis in original).

The concept of conviviality used in this study derives from the Latin verb *convivere* (Morawska 2014:357) and Spanish verb *convivir* which means "to live together/to share the same life" (Overing et al. 2000:xiii). The important contributor to the discussion, Paul Gilroy (2004), describes conviviality as a process of cohabitation and interaction embedded in social practice not free from tensions and conflicts. Conviviality is "a social pattern in which different metropolitan groups dwell in close proximity, but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not" (…) "add up to the discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication" (2006:40).

Conviviality is a practical and dynamic process of human interacting through which cultural identities, differences, and belonging are constantly being negotiated in real time (Gilroy 2006, Neal et al. 2013). Contrary to the controversial concept of multiculturalism, scholars such as Duru (2020) and Back et al. (2016) emphasise how conviviality does not assume fixed boundaries between homogenous groups forever defined and distinguished from the rest of society according to their culture, ethnicity, or religion, but acknowledges

that solidarities and social ties are formed beyond the border of the group[14]. As Gilroy (2014) argues: "the radical openness that brings conviviality alive makes a nonsense of closed, fixed, and reified identity and turns attention toward the always-unpredictable mechanisms of identification" (xi).

Moreover, a strength with conviviality is that it comprehends the ambivalence to diversity through not only acknowledging the positives from living together, but also that misunderstandings, disagreements, and tensions are natural parts of social encounters (Gilroy 2004). Through avoiding romanticising complex human relationships and focusing on the positive outcomes alone, conviviality does not paint a superficial picture of human interaction, which cosmopolitanism has often been criticised for[15] (Valentine 2008, Amin 2002). A great emphasis is instead placed on meetings between people and embracing rather than avoiding messy aspects of diversity (Holdsworth 2010). Conviviality thus seeks to find shared ways of living together with both similarities and differences, including factors such as ethnicity, place of origin, language, gender, likes, and dislikes. It is about acknowledging that we can learn from encounters with others and build a sense of belonging across such heterogenous relationships, rather than it is a strive for homogeneity and sameness (Valentine 2008, Rzepnikowska 2016).

4.2.2 Beyond Fleeting Meetings

Scholarly debates have focused on "whether conviviality can be achieved (socially engineered) at all, or whether it is just going to happen" (Nowicka et al. 2015:13). Moreover, a substantial amount of research has been concerned with discussing whether simple contact between people automatically move us towards a cosmopolitan society with fewer prejudices or whether super-diversity will naturally increase conflict (see for example Askins 2016, Valentine 2008, Dixon et al. 2003, Rzepnikowska 2016, Isike 2017).

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[14] More scholars have among other criticised the concept of 'multiculturalism' because they argue that it assumes that members of an ethnic minority community build their identity mainly on an imported "cultural agenda" (Vertovec et al. 2005:10). In accordance with cultural essentialism, a multi-cultural society is understood to consist of many bounded and fixed sub-cultures where people are forever divided due to their different cultures, and what unites people beyond such group belonging, for example what they have in common as parents, co-workers and neighbours, is undermined. Conviviality, on the contrary, allows for transition, ambivalence and overlapping with communities and cultures (ibid, Duru 2020).

[15] 'Cosmopolitanism' is commonly interpreted as a detachment from communities and loyalties, where human selves are viewed as being in lasting fluidity (Morawska 2014:360). Along with the criticism above, scholars such as Noble (2013) have criticised cosmopolitanism for being a moral ideal concerned with an individual ability of self-reflexivity rather than with the achievement of capacities through social relations.

Advocates of contact hypothesis claim that people's natural concern with difference can be diminished and prejudices and stereotypes weakened through regular contact with others. The city is often viewed as a cosmopolitan site where strangers meet, for example through mixed housing or at workplaces, and where cultural difference dissolve naturally to change negative attitudes towards others (Valentine 2008).

Crucially, much recent research has emphasised the complex dynamics in social relations and that there is no straightforward correlation between proximity, multi-ethnic mixes, and meaningful relations leading to social transformation. Studying mixed housing, Ash Amin (2002) suggests that a certain "colour composition of an area" (968) say little about the level of segregation and community cohesion, as mixed estates can experience issues with interethnic tension and cultural isolation, while neighbourhoods with little ethno-cultural diversity not necessarily are spaces of trouble. Therefore, we must distinguish between contact leading to tolerance and contact leading to actual meaningful encounters characterised by respect for others.

4.2.3 Meaningful Encounters with Diversity through Theatre

The theoretical concept of conviviality has been used in research on migration and race, but not yet been applied widely as an analytical lens to study the connection between conviviality and the arts (Ong et al. 2019). Following Gilroy's (2006:43) view that convivial socialities can flourish in creative, bottom-up and unruly modes of social interaction and co-production, Turner-King (2018) argues that community theatres are "potential sites of everyday multiculturalism and hospitality – spaces where the messiness of different social, cultural, and ethnic identities collide and coalesce" (424), therefore making them excellent for studying meaningful encounters and living with diversity.

Holdsworth (2010) connects Gilroy's (2014) notion of a 'convivial culture' as "cultivated when mundane encounters with difference become rewarding" (75) with theatre. Whereas much ethnographic research on conviviality in multicultural cities has been concerned with fleeting meetings taking place in public spaces such as parks, cafes, or mixed housing estates (Tyler 2017:1900), creative collaboration and sustained contact over participatory theatre-making has greater potential to foster meaningful and rewarding encounters. Theatre-making usually relies on intimate interaction and collaboration between participants contributing with their different skills and experiences and engaging

in and cooperating over a range of theatre practices such as listening, looking, responding, movement, and interaction over a longer period of time (Holdsworth 2010).

Meaningful collaborations are believed to not only have personal benefits for the individual participants, but it can also potentially build dialogue and enable strong emotional bonds between the contributors (Jeffers 2012, Nicholson 2014). Importantly, we must not assume that participatory theatre practice is always inherently transformative and empowering. Despite the beneficent intentions behind, relationships are not always trusting between the participants and facilitators, the degree of participation and interaction between the involved parts varies, and the socio-political climate surrounding the theatre group can affect the participants' abilities to use their voice and be listened to in life outside the group (Nicholson 2014, de Smet et al. 2018).

Furthermore, building meaningful convivial modes of sociality between theatre participants takes time and requires some strengthening and directionality from the facilitator's side to foster a sense of common goal (Ong et al. 2019, Turner-King 2018). Moreover, such collaborations do not entail an absence of tensions and disagreement. Creating inclusive spaces and collaborating over participatory theatre with diverse groups of people are unpredictable and messy practices. Birgitte Ravn Olesen (2020) argues that contradictions, frustrations, and ambiguous power dynamics are always at play in participatory theatre-making no matter someone's intentions. Tensions are a natural part of knowledge production with people of different positions of power, but they can also be a source of creativity and learning to communicate better across differences.

5 Methodology

5.1 Finding my Informants

I reached out to Mafwa Theatre after coming across the company during the online preparations for Refugee Week 2021, and the two co-producers Keziah Berelson and Tamsin Cook became my gatekeepers to the field and the participants.

Though, finding informants to interview turned out to be challenging. Whereas my initial focus was entirely on the Mawfa members' experiences, a low number of interviewees meant that I had to broaden my focus to include the experiences of the facilitators and a volunteer.

5.2 Qualitative Methods of Data Collection

To answer my research questions, I have chosen to use qualitative research methods and take an ethnographic approach. Ethnography is suitable for this study as I am concerned with getting rich and deep data about the women's experiences and feelings through a proximity to my informants and the field site (Brockington et al. 2003, O´Reilly 2012).[16]

5.2.1 Semi-structured Interviews

My primary method for collecting data was through individual semi-structured interviews carried out synchronously online via the conference tool Zoom with five Mafwa members and one of the Mafwa co-producers, and in person with the other co-producer and a volunteer[17]. I interviewed everyone individually for them to be able to talk openly about their experiences from the group.

Since my research questions demanded an insight into the informants' thoughts and experiences, I chose to focus on fewer and deeper interviews where I asked many

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[16] Throughout the degree project, I have been governed by a constructivist ontology i.e., a belief that social life and meanings are constructed by the interactions between social actors and are in constant negotiation and revision (Bryman 2012:33). It means that I, for example, view the interviews with my informants as conversations in which we together co-construct and co-produce knowledge. Furthermore, I have taken the epistemological position of interpretivism as I strive to gain access to the informants' thoughts and understand their lived experiences of participatory theatre practice. Important to keep in mind when doing constructivist qualitative research is that a double interpretation is going on as I, the researcher, make my own interpretations of the participants' interpretations and thus present my specific version of the social reality rather than a neutral, objective conception of reality (ibid).

[17] The interviews lasted between 40-75 minutes depending on how much the informants had to say.

questions and let the informants talk freely about topics which they found relevant (Bryman 2012).

A semi-structured form of interviewing was chosen to enable a more conversational dialogue[18]. While closed questions led to fixed answers needed for the research, open questions allowed the informants to bring up topics they found interesting[19]. Moreover, I was concerned with formulating straight-forward questions with a simple language to avoid misunderstanding as four of the Mafwa members' mother tongues were not English.

5.2.2 Participant Observation

My second method for collecting data was participant observation, a multimethod which gave me the opportunity to gain first-hand experience from participating in drama activities while directly observing the participants' behaviour and group dynamics and informally conversing with the women (McKechnie 2008). Between March and August 2021, I carried out participant observations during 6 online and 3 physical theatre sessions lasting 1-1,5 hours.

I adopted a role that best fits what Bryman (2012:442) calls 'participating observer' and McKechnie (2008:2) calls the 'observer-as-participant' as I participated more in the different activities and conversations than I observed[20].

As the participant observations mainly took place online, the research was characterised by limited face-to-face communication and possibilities to informally converse with the participants which is usually a strength of participant observation. Nevertheless, participant observation enabled observing group interaction and individual behaviour, and cross-checking my interpretations from the individual interviews and drama sessions.

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[18] See the interview guide in appendix 2.

[19] Such flexible approach admittedly meant the interviews going off-topic at times and lasting longer, but it also enabled a conversational flow where I could naturally ask follow-up questions for clarification and more detail.

[20] My role changed throughout the participant observation. During the online sessions I would regularly present my project and at times take notes while participating which made my role as researcher more visual, whereas I during the face-to-face workshops would fully participate.

5.2.3 Document Analysis

Besides individual interviews and participant observation, I analysed both online and written materials which helped me get a better picture of the work and the projects which the theatre company and drama group have been involved with. Materials such as the Mafwa website and an academic article written by Keziah and Tamsin (Berelson et al. 2019) together with a podcast (URL 16) and recipe book created by the members for the project 'Cooking with Parveen' were studied.

5.3 Analysing the data

I am neither able to nor interested in trying to replicate or generalise from the data collected during my small qualitative study[21], but am instead concerned with validity and confidence in my research findings. I chose to use triangulation[22] for my research which enabled me to compare my findings from the individual interviews with those from the participant observation and the different written, audial, and visual materials for a richer dataset to analyse.

Moreover, I chose an inductive approach to guide the analysis of my data which meant that I started analysing my findings from the interviews and participant observation already during the process of collection, making it an ongoing interplay. In going back and forward between collecting and analysing data, I also kept formulating and sharpening my research questions and developing my theoretical framework.[23]

5.4 Ethical Considerations & Reflexivity

In the project presentations and the consent form signed by the interviewees, I informed about the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntarily and anonymous[24], and the information shared confidential and used for this study only. In accordance with

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[21] The unique interactions taking place between the Mafwa members and I happened in a specific context at a specific time. Another researcher conducting a similar study by replicating my choice of research methods, asking the same questions, and picking similar informants would, therefore, never end up with the exact same study.

[22] 'Triangulation' is the inclusion of more than one method or data source in a study (Bryman 2012:392).

[23] During this process, the interview transcripts and field notes were coded manually to identify and organise the main themes which I found relevant for the analysis.

[24] The participants have all been given pseudonyms and no personal information which can be traced back to them is revealed.

O'Reilly (2012) and Bryman (2012), I believe this contributed to the informants feeling better informed and confident with me interviewing them.[25]

As Scheyvens et al. (2003) point out, it is important to consider what we can give back to our informants. Gift giving can be a delicate issue[26], though, I decided to offer the Mafwa members a £5 food voucher for their time as this form of compensation had been used with external researchers before. The participants shared both positives and negatives from the theatre sessions and seemed little motivated by the voucher which makes me think that it had a minimal effect on our conversations. Nevertheless, as a researcher I must be aware of the possibility the compensation could have had on the answers given by the interviewees.

Furthermore, my position as a privileged, white university student from northern Europe mastering English is very different from that of some of the informants. To downplay my position as researcher and be sensitive to power relations between me and the informants, I strived for an informal and relaxed interview climate where the interviewees could talk freely without me interrupting. I also kept the informants' past experiences in mind and respectfully approached any sensitive areas with care.[27]

Doing research online during a global pandemic gave the study a different nature and posed some challenges. Like many researchers working digitally, I struggled to build rapport and find interviewees (UTS 2020) which I believe was affected by factors such as little in-person interaction with the Mafwa members, a sense of 'Zoom fatigue' expressed by many of the participants, and more of the women struggling with their mental health. Also, it is possible that I excluded people being less digitally capable, as the interviewees needed sufficient computer skills to answer emails, use Zoom, and sign the online consent form.[28]

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[25] All interviews were recorded giving me the possibility to focus all my attention on the interview. If anyone would have expressed discomfort with recording the interviews, I would have taken notes instead.
[26] As it, for example, runs the risk of reiterating socio-economic inequalities or the informants providing the researcher with certain responses.
[27] However, I also enjoyed a positional advantage as a female researcher. Being a woman was crucial for entering the female-only space and for the women feeling comfortable and open with me interviewing and observing them.
[28] Nevertheless, some advantages with doing research online were that no travel time or expenses were needed, and the participants could thus speak from the comfort of their homes.

Finally, I chose not to use an interpreter for the study as an interpreter's presence is likely to affect the interview and adds uncertainty to whether the conversation is being interpreted correctly and transmitted in the right way[29] (Davies 2008). I formulated simple questions and emphasised the possibility of repeating and reformulating questions during our conversations, but I am aware that this meant excluding women with low English skills. Had it been a more comprehensive study, I would have used an interpreter.

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[29] Perhaps increasingly so when carrying out interviews online as technical issues with unstable internet connections and disturbances in sound can affect the communication.

6 Analysis

6.1. A Welcoming Community

6.1.1 Hospitality at the Local Level

Unlike the border controls of Britain, there are no prerequisites needed to gain access to the Mafwa Theatre group. Besides from being a woman, the theatre space is open to people with diverse backgrounds, from different age groups and whose past experiences and skills vary. It is thus a hospitable space where all women are perceived as desirable guests no matter their ethnic, cultural, social, or linguistic background.

Maya and Yasmina[30] stress how they have found a space where they feel welcome and accepted, and the warmth and respect from the theatre group has meant a lot to them since the life changing challenge of starting over in a new country. Isa too emphasises how hard it has been for her to come to the UK and meet people in a place where she has not always felt welcome. However, the theatre group gives her the possibility to laugh and forgot the outside world for a while.

One of the main motivations for the co-producers Keziah Berelson and Tamsin Cook to start the theatre group was precisely to challenge the hostility which asylum seekers and refugees often meet in the UK[31]. This resonates with the point mentioned earlier by de Smet et al. (2018) that the macro dramaturgy, such as the surrounding political and social structures, often enter the micro-dramaturgical theatre space and affect the motivations and strategies for doing participatory community theatre. The two facilitators decided to set up the group for women whom they stress are often especially isolated at home and have a lot of time on their hands. During my conversation with the Mafwa volunteer and participant Aine, she emphasises how important she believes the friendly space is for newcomers within the hostile climate in the UK:

> "There are so many barriers that people who're coming to this country have to
> get through and, like…there kind of has to be things like Mafwa in order for

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people to connect with other people and the city, otherwise I think it would be really hard for many…and isolating" […] "The group is really not just about making performance or even doing drama, it's a lot more than that to people…it's just as much about community"

Such community, Tamsin explains, is all about creating connections between people who might otherwise pass each other in the street and never have conversations. Her hope has always been for the personal connections and sense of community to ripple outside the theatre sessions.

6.1.2 A Space for Fun & Relaxation

All interviewed Mafwa members mention how comfortable they feel in the group as participation happens on each person's terms and at a pace that fits one's personal needs. Maya explains how there is no pressure on anyone to be active during the initial sessions. Everyone is given the space needed until they feel comfortable and ready to join the activities. Likewise, Yasmina and Laura point out that if one has a bad day or simply do not feel like taking part in certain activities, everyone respects that the persons just wants to sit and watch. The focus is on what every person can deal with that day.

From the individual interviews and group conversations during my participant observation, I realise that the women come to the sessions for various reasons. Some have been referred from organisations for mental health reasons while others have been recommended the group by friends. And whereas most were motivated by a desire to meet people and feel less lonely, some already had a passion for the arts and theatre.

One of the main motivators for joining the theatre group mentioned by all five interviewed Mafwa members is the possibility to have fun together with others in a relaxing environment without being judged. The weekly drama sessions are precisely about experimenting together over fun activities suitable for all and being able to laugh at oneself, Keziah explains. From my participant observation, I notice how the group always starts with an easy warm-up exercise and finishes with a cool-down activity which often

cause many laughs. Moreover, the group activities are uncomplicated and cooperative, explained with simple language and visually demonstrated for everyone to understand.[32]

Images of Mafwa members engaging in movement exercises. From Twitter: @MafwaTheatre. Photo: Tom Arber.

The themes of the drama sessions, Tamsin explains, reflect the wishes of the Mafwa members:

> *"When we ask members what they want to talk about, people keep saying: 'We want to come here for fun or to have a laugh, we don't want to think about our pasts or traumatic experiences, we don't want to go over them with you', so it's just not what they want this space to be for"*

Moreover, as the Mafwa members showed little interest during the Covid-19 pandemic in working with their emotions and experiences around lockdown, Aine explains that her focus was instead on bringing selfcare and movement into the sessions. She was working on the women reconnecting with their bodies and having fun over easy physical exercises in a time where many felt lonely and found it hard to motivate themselves to leave the house. When asking her about engaging with topics not related to the participants' past experiences she says:

> *"I actually, interestingly, don't know everyone's story of immigration…But maybe, in a way, there's also something about this space …it isn't to talk about that or deal with that, because yeah…that's not their whole identity."*

Thus, whereas much participatory theatre practice with refugees and asylum seekers is concerned with telling stories of past experiences of pain, suffering and trauma, the

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[32] See a brief description of the drama sessions and different exercises and activities during which I did participant observation in appendix 3.

Mafwa women wish to work with topics of comfort and use the space for socialising and enjoyment. An advantage of such focus on a spirit of play and fun, Smith (2014) argues, is that it is hard for people to feel that they are wrong or cannot contribute which can feel especially liberating for people who struggle with feelings of shame around low language skills and coping with everyday challenges.

Images of Mafwa members engaging in creative activities and drama exercises. From Twitter: @MafwaTheatre. Photo: Tom Arber.

6.1.3 Personal Benefits from Theatre-making

As is often the case with community theatre, engaging in drama was a completely new and personally challenging experience for many of the Mafwa members. Sara explains how she felt when attending the Friday sessions for the first time and the instant lift it gave her:

> *"I didn't feel shy or embarrassed...I loved performing in a funny way and had so much fun with the other woman I had to do it with. If you met me before Mafwa Theatre, I would say no to everything. I never think I would be able to do all this…now I tell myself: You can do it!"*

She continues talking about the personal transformation she has experienced and how supported she feels by the other group members and facilitators:

> "*Cooking, cleaning, being stressed with the family…you start becoming a robot...you don't have any feeling, any target actually. You always do things for people, not for yourself…but finally I find a place who can listen to me and where I can develop" […] "I feel like I'll never give up these people and this place now. I feel like I've found myself after all. I have a target now and I'm finally doing this for myself because it's something I love…not something for others or*

to please others. If you have the right group around you, the right people, you feel the energy and love...they can make you fly"

Maya explains how she during the years prior to joining Mafwa Theatre felt isolated and lonely, but that participating in the group is now gets her out of the house to meet others. She describes performing on stage with Mafwa Theatre for the first time in the following way:

"I never imagined myself I would be performing, or be on a stage – ever!...I think of myself as a very shy person...it really made my confident level like...okay, I can do this!"

She too feels a transformation in self-confidence from her participation and the wide support from the Mafwa members and professionals:

"Sometimes, you know, there are a lot of talent and a lot of skills in you but you don't know what to do and where to go with it...and we all have different problems and different stress, and you can feel, like, helpless and hopeless...but when someone out of somewhere is coming and supporting you...when it feels like you have something on your back, supporting you, you think: 'Okay, I will do it, I'll stand straight'"

Even Aine explains how the Zoom sessions and the relationship she has built with the facilitators and the participants helped her during lockdown:

"Sometimes I would go to the sessions and be like: 'Oh yeah, I didn't realise how much I just needed to, you know, dance a bit and laugh with people and share a moment to feel better...and to connect with these women who I otherwise wouldn't have met but who live in nearby communities"

6.1.4 A Community of Care

To more of the interviewed Mafwa members, the weekly drama sessions are a needed opportunity to socialise. With exception of Isa, the other four interviewed members talk about their connection with other theatre participants, something which at times even extends to outside the Friday sessions. Friendships have blossomed in the group, for example have Laura, who is British and one of the youngest Mafwa members, made friends with Mariam[33] one of the oldest participants in the group coming from a very

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[33] 'Mariam' is also a pseudonym.

different background. Laura describes how comfortable she feels around her friend and how Mariam has even been to visit Laura's home. They walk together to the sessions to keep each other company but also to help Mariam find her way to external workshops. Laura says:

> "I look at [name] like a sister…if she's not well I'll stay in contact with her [relative] and if it's a Friday, I can tell Tamsin and Keziah how she is and why she's not there"

Yasmina has also made friends and explains how she stays in touch with other members over the phone for support and comfort:

> "On the phone we talk about different women's groups or organisations…we ask how we are, talk news…and we call each other…'Hey, we can go together?' and she will say: 'Yeah, come, let's go together'"

During the participant observation, I notice how comfortable the women are around each other, how they chat and make jokes in the group. People have gone from being strangers to at minimum interacting with the other members, and some have even made friends. Nicholson (2014) argues that showing compassion and care for other members, in this case through caring for each other's wellbeing, sharing one's knowledge of the city or stopping for a spontaneous chat in the street, can be psychologically and socially beneficial, and according to Smith (2014), staying in touch over the phone and being able to support each other in various ways outside the theatre sessions can increase the feeling of belonging and connection with the other group members.

In summary, both the members, facilitators and the volunteer describe Mafwa Theatre as a welcoming space where everyone is accepted and respected within a hostile environment at the national level making life difficult for more of the Mafwa members. Instead of utilising the group to process the members' past experiences, it is a place where all women can come to laugh together and forget everyday concerns for a while. For more of the Mafwa members the group is a well-needed space to socialise and connect with others as well as a space for personal growth and improved self-confidence.

I will thus argue that in the context of the reluctance of the British state to offer hospitality to newcomers, Mafwa Theatre tries to do justice to the unconditional hospitality which Derrida encouraged us to imagine. All women are invited to participate without having

to necessarily share their story or show gratitude, and with the only requirement of showing respect for other group members.

6.2 A Cooperation between all Participants

6.2.1 Striving for 'Horizontal relations'

When looking at the roles of the different participants, it is important to recognise that the facilitators are in the advantageous position of having the time and resources to set up the community theatre group, and thus making the cooperation possible in the first place.

The co-producers recognise the social capital and privilege they bring into the theatre, among other as British citizens with a university education. They view their facilitating roles as what they describe as being 'redistributors' of privilege (Berelson et al. 2019) meaning that their focus is on making sure that the women's voices are recognised whilst working to redistribute power and social capital. They are aware of their privileged backgrounds and its effects on the power dynamics in the room while they simultaneously acknowledge that their skills and experiences can be used positively to facilitate the sessions, ensure that the members have access to opportunities, and as Keziah describes it: *"are able to tell their own stories on their own terms"*.

Working to redistribute privilege, Tamsin and Keziah have been experimenting with the different projects being anything from completely participant-led to more structured facilitator-run online sessions during the pandemic. Tamsin describes how they have found a balance in their role as offering and shaping sustainable frameworks around which the women can play and express themselves:

> *"As much as we want to create a space free of power structures and hierarchy...I don't think it's useful at all to just ask people: 'what do you want to do?' without any kind of reference point. We've tried that and it doesn't work" [...] "I think a lot of practitioners often talk about participation like a bit of a gold standard, to work towards being completely participant led...but because this is such a diverse group without any shared cultural reference point, it's important to offer a structure and...I think I've learned that it's okay to bring a bit of myself and a bit of a final vision into it as long as you're responsive and you can restructure things as and when you go"*

The roles which the Mafwa co-producers take thus resonate with how Turner-King (2018) views her role as facilitator as being able to offer the participants a clear structure around which they can feel inspired to experiment, play, and make mistakes.

The two co-producers emphasise how they seek to disrupt hierarchy and strive for 'horizontal relations' in the group (Berelson et al. 2019). How this plays out in practice becomes clear during my participant observation. The Mafwa members are actively involved in making decisions for the group, for example do they work together over a couple of online sessions to come up with a group name. All members are encouraged to think about words such as 'strong', 'powerful', together' and 'sisters' in their mother tongues. The suggestions coming from among other Yoruba, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Afrikaans are written down and the women eventually vote for their favourite name, ending up with 'Kuluhenna Drama'[34].

I also notice during my participant observation that focus is on the participants contributing in their preferred way and expressing themselves with their own words. Everyone is listened to and different ways of expression is respected, whether through speaking, singing, using body language, or dancing. The women's strong engagement and freedom to self-expression was also obvious during the previous project 'Cooking with Parveen'[35] taking place from October 2019 to September 2020 and being centred around drama, food, and femininity (URL 17). The group made a podcast, 'With our Hands' (URL 16), where it was entirely the Mafwa women's voices we heard when singing and talking on the topic 'imagine a world where food would be free', and in the small recipe book 'Cooking with Parveen - Stories from our Kitchens', the food recipes and poems were written with the women's own words, without anyone perfecting their English.

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[34] 'Kuluhenna' means "all of them [women]" in Arabic.
[35] The project 'Cooking with Parveen' involved workshops where the participants cooked, ate, made theatre together, and talked about how food can bring people together. The group had planned a performance in June 2020 during which food was going to be made, but it was cancelled due to the global pandemic. Nevertheless, the Mafwa group kept the project going through chatting online about food and sharing photographs of food, and in between the lockdowns, the participants managed to meet up for a picnic in the park which was documented and later turned into a short film.

Photos showing a recipe and personal story from the 'Cooking with Parveen' recipe book. From Twitter: @MafwaTheatre. Photo: Tom Amber.

As Tamsin explains:

> *"We set up the form, the framework, which was making a cookery book but the content, the formulations, drawings and so…it was all up to the participants."*

Such joyful celebration of the women's different skill sets and strengths means that no one has to feel that they cannot contribute to the group. Moreover, highlighting the member's individual capacities and voices mean that they are celebrated for their individuality instead of once again falling into the anonymous category of 'refugee women' which is often the case in public discourse and social policies.

6.2.2 Active Co-Creators of the Space

When asking the Mafwa women directly about if they wish to have more control over the sessions, both Maya and Yasmina stress that they want the facilitators to take the lead while continuing to ask the participants for feedback and ideas for potential themes or activities. They were both involved in some of the earlier more participant-led projects and emphasise how the lacking structure and guidance made it difficult to accomplish anything. They feel much more relaxed and comfortable with Tamsin and Keziah leading the participants and supporting them in defining a common goal to work towards.

Just as Nicholson (2014) and Kaptani et al. (2021) point out, both the participants and facilitators stress that the co-producers' intention and facilitation play an important role in fostering a welcoming space where the participants can creatively cooperate, experiment, and express themselves in their preferred way. Though, a clear emphasis is on building what Smith (2014) calls a 'culture of agency' rather than a dependency on professionals. Yasmina, Sara, and Maya enthusiastically talk about recording personal 'soundwalks'[36] of emotional importance to them for the art installation 'Sit With Us'[37] (URL 18) for Refugee Week 2021. They all three stress the excitement of later editing the sound in a studio with a professional who listened carefully to their wishes.

Photos from the art installation 'Sit With Us' showing headphones for listening to the 'soundwalks' and an example of a text by a Mafwa member. From Twitter: @MafwaTheatre. Photos: Tom Arber.

During the individual interviews, I realise how active the Mafwa members are in welcoming and supporting newcomers into the group. Both Maya and Yasmina explain that it can be challenging doing theatre with a diverse group of people because of language barriers, and they have helped interpret for new members in their mother tongues to make them feel welcome and help them understand activities and conversations. The participants thus get to use their unique language skills to help out in languages which the facilitators do not speak. The Mafwa women thus not only receive hospitality and support from the facilitators and other Mafwa members when joining the theatre group, but they also offer hospitality to newcomers.

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[36] For the project, four Mafwa members recorded a 'soundwalk' inviting the audience to listen to their story or the surrounding environment during a walk. One Mafwa member, for example, talked about a touching and traumatising story from a UK detention centre, whereas someone else described her feelings and the sounds of walking in snow, partly in Kurdish and in English.

[37] 'Sit With Us' was centred around the themes 'home' and 'comfort' and an interactive art installation was set up in Leeds for Refugee Week (14-21 June 2021). For the installation, the women had made printed textiles to decorate the room, the audience could via earphones listen to recorded 'soundwalks', a short film on movement and creative group activities was shown on a big screen, and comfy seats invited the audience to pick a book on topics such as race and diversity from the shelf and sit down.

Moreover, Yasmina who has plenty of previous acting experience from her home country describes how she has been able to use and share that knowledge with the rest of the group during different projects. As she does not need as much acting guidance from the facilitators, she can instead draw on her experience to come with suggestions and act as co-host through supporting the other women.

Both Maya and Yasmina describe how their participation in building what they describe as a community and the mark they have left on the different projects is something they feel very proud of. They point out how supportive the other participants and the two co-producers are and how comforting it is to feel part of the group where everyone's skills are valued, and opinions listened to. This resonates with Nicholson (2014) who argues that for participants to feel a sense of belonging they need to be recognised as important by others in producing that space.

The strength and determination which many of the women show through participating in and making a real effort for the sake of the group despite struggles in life, is something Keziah finds admirable. Though, both facilitators also emphasise that despite the women being vulnerable to different extends, it does not mean that they are passive, voiceless, or powerless. For example, do many of the women with Mafwa Theatre participate in other creative groups, volunteer, and are active in their communities (Berelson et al. 2019) and one of the informants have done a PhD at a university in England. Maya, Yasmina and Sara are all volunteering with migrants in their communities and both Maya, Isa, and Yasmina are active in choirs, dance, or theatre groups in Leeds. Maya explains how she has used her improved self-confidence to volunteer with and support other female refugees and asylum seekers. She constantly encourages these women to socialise, challenge themselves and try new things like she has done and shares her story of engaging in community theatre and the arts which has given her a better life quality and brought more joy into her life.

To sum it up, the facilitators attempt to use their past experiences and skills to offer sustainable frameworks around which the participants can play and be creative and encourage to 'horizontal relations' where the women actively contribute to shaping the sessions and using their voices. Despite the members expressing that they prefer the facilitators to lead the sessions, my findings show that they are active and proud

contributors to the space, for example, through welcoming newcomers, collectively coming up with a group name, and coming with feedback during the sessions. From the individual interviews as well as the participant observation, I notice a fluidity in the roles of hosts and guests. Rather than the facilitators acting dominating hosts and the members being passive guests, an active engagement is taking place between all participants where different ideas and opinions are listened to.

6.3 Embracing Similarities & Differences

6.3.1 Realising Commonalities & Negotiating Differences

Just like the co-producers emphasise that both differences and similarities are embraced in the group and seen as a natural part of living with diversity (Berelson et al. 2019), the interviewees express many positives coming from doing theatre with a diverse group. Both Maya and Yasmina highlight how they have learned about different cultures, celebrations, and traditions from other group members and how they, for example, during the project 'Cooking with Parveen' had opportunities to talk about and compare traditions of cooking and eating together in different countries.

Simultaneously with learning from differences within the group, more of the informants also mention having realised commonalities with other group members. Maya mentions how talking to other women from similar backgrounds who share experiences of being restricted within a certain culture or religion has made it easy for her to bond with them. Such a connection makes her feel understood and less lonely. Yasmina emphasises how important it is for her to be able to connect with other women and describes the sense of comfort the female-only space offers her in the following way**:**

> *"It is different when man is there too. I like it's only for women. We are ladies and can talk about some things just for women, support each other…And for example, we move our body and…do different movements and dancing. And for me, if the man is coming, I can't do like that! You know?...I'm shy, it's not comfortable when the man is there".*

According to Tamsin, single gender-spaces are important for more of the women and enable conversations which would have been impossible to have otherwise. A desire to make all women feel relaxed and not having to worry about jumping around, clothes

moving or looking silly, Keziah explains, was the idea behind making the group for women only.

Rather than bonding over a shared past or former experiences, Laura describes how her close connection with Mariam who comes from a very different background has to do with their similar personalities and shared sense of humour. She does not know much about her friend´s migration journey or life before coming to the UK, but they have become friends due to similar personality traits, because they can laugh together, and she feels comfortable and relaxed around Mariam.

6.3.2 Tensions & Misunderstandings

The interviews also reveal that the messiness of personalities and identities meet during the sessions which at times causes disagreements and tensions in the group.

Tamsin explains how setting up performances for an audience is not the focus of the group. Due to the chaotic nature of some of the women's lives, they cannot commit to attending sessions regularly and as the facilitators do not want to leave anyone feeling unprepared and vulnerable on stage, focus is instead on strengthening the group bonds. Though, the more ambitious in the group have felt annoyed with those who do not want to or have the energy to put equally much time into rehearsing and working towards public performances, Keziah explains. Therefore, the facilitators decided to create the Associate Artist Program (URL 19), which gives the ones who are willing and capable of spending more time on doing drama and performing or working creatively with writing or singing a space to do that together with a mentor.

The financial situation of more of the women meant challenges when the Theatre company started out and attempted to touch upon sensitive topics of everyday struggles, Tamsin explains:

> *"When we were trying to talk to people about experiences, to get out of them what was really difficult in life and what they would want to say to powerful people…we would then have people saying: 'it's really hard living of £37 a week' and somebody else would say: 'well, I don't even get that!'…it can be really hard when someone says they don't have enough food to last the week…some of the women are really just trying to survive"*

Tensions around money also appeared when the facilitators used to pay the participants' travel expenses back in cash. Some members would accuse others of dishonesty and showing their tickets twice to the facilitators for an extra cash payment. This eventually led the co-producers to instead providing all Mafwa members with a free bus ticket for every attended session.

Misunderstandings between the women have also taken place as some have felt insecure about the other group members' intentions, Tamsin explains. Laura expresses how she sometimes feels ignored by some of the other women who only talk to people they already know and worries about others talking behind her back when they speak a language she does not understand while looking in her direction. It makes her nervous, even though she explains that it might just be a feeling she has. This interestingly does not apply to her good friend Mariam whom she emphasises she trusts, even when Mariam speaks her mother tongue with other people.

Disagreements and discussions will naturally happen in a group, Keziah explains. Her impression is that the Mafwa members work most things out between themselves, but otherwise the facilitators try to face misunderstandings or prejudices by bringing them up during the group sessions. Maya too has noticed how some women get upset at times but also says that it naturally happens in bigger groups. To her it has never changed the friendly and welcoming atmosphere, and she loves coming to the sessions because of the good bond between the participants.

Thus, more of the interviewees express learnings from the encounters with the women and most of them a sense of connection and togetherness with the group, despite the sessions not being free from tensions or misunderstandings. Maya and Yasmina describe a strong bond with the other participants and how the positives by far outweigh what they perceive as minor misunderstandings in the group, whereas Laura enjoys the possibility to get out of the house, challenge herself through drama exercises, and the strong bond she feels with Mariam, but expresses feelings of being ignored and not fully trusting all group members. The strong personal connection with Mariam does thus not mean that she looks at everyone else with the same eyes.

This resonates with Noble's (2009) argument that complex convivial relations should not be simplified, because they can both foster understanding for diversity, the achievement of new capacities and learnings while simultaneous be marked by ambiguity and conflicts. My findings show that the diverse group of women have learned and bonded with each other despite tensions and misunderstandings naturally taking place, but as scholars such as Amin (2002) has pointed out, spaces of super-diversity do not necessarily cause greater conflicts and issues due to diversity. Most of the disagreements and irritations mentioned above by the facilitators and members have more to do with financial struggles, societal inequalities, and ambitions than with ethnic or cultural differences. At the same time, the study shows that simple contact between people of different backgrounds does not automatically lead to an experience of overall trust towards everyone, which was the case for Laura.

The participants bring their different pasts, personalities, and personal struggles into the theatre space, and this will naturally affect their perception of others, and outcomes from the sessions. Rosello (2001) argues that a complete absence of tension and friction would mean fixed roles, but the theatre group is not a bounded, homogenous entity with set roles. The Mafwa members from different backgrounds collaborate over personally challenging artistic practice, interact with the co-producers, volunteers and different professional artists at the same time as new members regularly join which all naturally affects the group dynamic. The space given for people to express their opinions in the group also enables contestation and negotiation of the social roles between all participants.

In summary, more of the participants express having learned from the women's differences, for example in terms of cultures and traditions, at the same time as they have bonded over anything from being women and sharing past societal and cultural experiences to having similar senses of humour and personalities. The findings show that the theatre group is not a space free from misunderstandings and tensions, though, how the interviewees view disagreements and the other members varies. The interviewees describe the sessions as personally and socially rewarding and all express that the negatives do not outweigh the positive outcomes or personal benefits coming from participating in the group.

7 Conclusion

The first research question was concerned with the meaning of the Mafwa Theatre space to the different participating women. My findings from the individual interviews reveal that the interviewees perceive it as a meaningful and welcoming space where all women can feel accepted and respected for who they are, no matter where they come from, and what skills they bring to the group. Moreover, most of the participants express a sense of belonging to the group and a feeling of a community which has been strengthened over time between the participants and facilitators.

Socialising, having fun, and cooperating over creative practice on a weekly basis offers the Mafwa members an opportunity to escape day-to-day struggles. Also, being able to express themselves as individuals means that they are not defined solely by their past experiences and official status as refugees and asylum seekers. The group is indeed a place where hospitality is shown on a small scale to challenge the hostile environment which refugees and asylum seekers encounter on a national level.

The focus of the group is less on mobilising the participants or audiences towards public and political action and more on strengthening the group bonds and enhancing personal capacities and agency through participatory theatre-making. Even though many of the benefits and transformations described by the participants are at a personal level, such improved social and English skills, increased self-confidence, and improvements in mental health are likely to affect their families and society too. For example, did Maya describe how she uses her confidence and past experiences to support other female asylum seekers and refugees living in Leeds.

Second, I was concerned with how the participants perceive their role in the theatre group. Examining the participants' perceptions via interviews and participant observation, encourages me to interpret the relationship between hosts and guests as dynamic. Whereas the sessions are enabled and facilitated by the co-producers, and occasionally by the volunteer, acting as initial hosts, the participants are invited to not only be active co-producers in artistic practice but also to be co-creators of shaping a hospitable space and a 'convivial culture' where members can feel welcome, supported, and respected. For example, do the interviewees explain how the facilitators and Mafwa members share the responsibility for welcoming new members into the group and during my participant observation, the participants were actively involved with coming up with a group name.

Moreover, a 'culture of agency' is prevalent where the professionals are there to encourage the women and support their ideas rather than telling them what to do. An example was given about the Mafwa members active engagement in shaping the content for the 'Cooking with Parveen' recipe book and recording and editing the 'soundwalks' for the project 'Sit With Us'. In general, all forms of expression are welcome, and the participants' individual skills and abilities valued.

The participants are thus actively engaged in a social exchange where the roles between the facilitator as the classic host and the participants as guests are in fluidity. The study shows that the Mafwa members are active contributors to the theatre group with a desire to socialise and improve their life situations, rather than fitting the popular image in print media and political discourses of the voiceless and disempowered asylum seeker and refugee women.

Finally, I was concerned with how the participants perceive diversity in the theatre group. The convivial experience described by the interviewees allows for the women's different personalities, language skills, cultural and religious backgrounds to come together. More of the participants mention an increased understanding for other cultures and traditions and having bonded over similar personalities or a sense humour, a desire to belong or shared experiences as women. The theatre group thus offers the women an opportunity to go beyond the first impression of others and get to know women from diverse backgrounds.

The findings showed that cooperating over theatre-making and engaging in complex human relationships clearly do not happen without misunderstandings and tensions. Disagreements or moments of irritation among other took place over finances and lacking ambitions but interestingly not due to cultural or ethnic diversities. The interviews also showed differences in perceptions of the other members and their intentions which proofs that theatre-making does not take place in a vacuum, but rather people bring their personal experiences, struggles, and prejudices into the space. In general, the diversity in the group is not described as something problematic for the hospitable and supporting atmosphere in the group or something to fear by the different participants, but when mentioned by the interviewees it is rather embraced as something to learn from.

A combined conceptual framework of hospitality and conviviality was beneficial for the study. The concept of hospitality helped me shed light on the different forms of hospitality

which can simultaneously take place at the national and local level and how different actors are involved in the engagement of shaping hospitable spaces. Conviviality helped me draw attention to routine social interactions taking place on the ground with a group of women from socially, culturally, and ethnically diverse backgrounds and better understand how complex human relations and meaningful encounters are successfully lived and formed at the local level.

I believe that studies like this one is important for the reason pointed out by Gilroy (2004): "We need to know what sorts of insight and reflection might actually help increasingly differentiated societies and anxious individuals to cope successfully with the challenges involved in dwelling comfortably in proximity to the unfamiliar without becoming fearful and hostile" (3).

7.1 Future Research

It is important to point out that a continuation of this study and the inclusion of more data and responses from the different participants could have revealed different viewpoints and perspectives. Continuing my participant observation for a longer period of time would have given me the possibility to further interact with the participants, watch the group dynamics, possibly experience group tensions in person, and maybe even follow the group in the process of setting up a performance. Strengthened rapport and access to more key informants could also have enabled the inclusion of focus groups which might have led to discussions of relevant topics brought up by the participants which I did not think of for my individual interviews.

For future research and work with societal diversity and building welcoming spaces, I would suggest that researchers and policymakers do not underestimate the use of the arts and theatre. This study has shown that there is a demand for public spaces where people can socialise, have fun, and collaborate over creative activities in an informal and relaxing environment, and that such engagements can have multiple benefits for the people in question and society at large. Meaningful encounters via the arts can foster better understanding between people, a feeling of belonging, strengthen self-confidence, and support people in building creative and personal skills. Such strengthened capacities can enable people to actively engage in wider society and help address issues of lacking community cohesion which is the concern of much government policy.

Therefore, encouraging arts-based initiatives and continuous funding to charities and organisations such as Mafwa Theatre working towards inclusive communities is crucial. Keeping public spaces open is important to enable meaningful encounters between people who might not otherwise meet, and challenge one-sided perspectives in public discourses.

This study is also a reminder to scholars carrying out future research within the field of ComDev to pay more attention to the process of doing arts or drama and the dynamics between participants in addition to examining the outcomes of creative projects in terms of the final performances and arts installations. Paying attention to the interactions and dynamics during the weekly sessions helped me reach a nuanced understanding of what the theatre space means to the different women, the roles the participants take in the group, and how they view each other. Focusing entirely on the outcome of the sessions such a public performance would have said little about the people behind, their motivations, and the dynamics between the women.

Importantly, this study is an example of the many people who are confronted with diversity in everyday life in the UK and coexist along each other with among others ethnic and cultural differences, despite the focus in public debates on issues with segregation and hostility. I believe that more empirical studies on hospitable spaces and fostering meaningful convivial relations embracing both similarities and differences could contribute to further challenging and nuancing popular stories in the media and politics and lead public debates away from picturing people's differences as causes of crisis, panic, and conflict.

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9 Appendices

Appendix 1 - List of Interviewees

Pseudonym	Description	Engaged with Mafwa for	Interview date
Maya	Mafwa member, has lived 11 years in the UK and 5 years in Leeds, Asian background	Ca. 3 years	16/3-2021
Yasmina	Mafwa member, has lived 9 years in the UK and 6 years in Leeds, Middle Eastern background	3-4 years	19/3-2021
Sara	Mafwa member, has lived 13 years in the UK and more years in Leeds, in her 40s, Middle Eastern background	Ca. 6 months	30/4-2021
Laura	Mafwa member, lives in Leeds, in her 20s, British background	Ca. 2 years	30/07-2021
Isa	Mafwa member, has lived many years in the UK and 2 years in Leeds, in her 50s, African background	Ca. 2 years	30/07-2021
Name			
Keziah Berelson	Co-Artistic Director at Mafwa Theatre	4,5 years	22/3-2021
Tamsin Cook	Co-Artistic Director at Mafwa Theatre	4,5 years	30/7-2021
Aine	Volunteer with Mafwa Theatre. Educational background in Contemporary Dance	Ca. 1 year	19/7-2021

Appendix 2 - Interview Guides

The following interview schedules were used to guide the interviews with the Mafwa members, facilitators, and the volunteer

Mafwa Members

Community Theatre

- Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?
- How did you find out about Mafwa Theatre?
- Why did you start participating in community theatre?
- How long have you been coming to the theatre sessions for?
- Have you done theatre before?
  - If no: Is it a different experience from what you expected?
- Why do you take part in the theatre sessions? What have you learned from doing drama with others?
- What have some of the themes and topics for the workshops been?

- What would you say is the focus of the sessions? Is it socialising, having fun, learning new skills or something else?
- Who does what during the theatre sessions? Can everyone, for example, come with ideas for future topics for the workshops? Do you help each other with practical preparations for the sessions? Do different people lead the sessions?
- What is your favourite part of the workshops? What kind of activity do you enjoy the most?
- Have you performed for an audience with Mafwa Theatre?
  - If no: Would you like to?
- What is it like doing theatre online compared to face-to-face? Is it different and do you miss anything?

Mafwa Projects

- Have you taken part in any projects (for example 'Cooking with Parveen')?
  - If yes: Were you involved with making the podcast, did you take part in the picnic in the park and the short video or did you contribute to the recipe book?
- Do you have a favourite experience or memory from a project you've taken part in?
- What did you learn from the project you were involved in?
- Have you been on any trips with Mafwa Theatre or taken part in other activities besides theatre-making?

The Group

- Has it been the same group of women coming for a long time or do newcomers often join?
- How are new members welcomed into the group? What do you all do to make people feel comfortable?
- Do you help or support each other in the group?
- Do you have a WhatsApp or FB group to stay in touch?
- Are the sessions long enough? Does everyone take equally much part in the sessions?
- What do you like about the group? Is it an advantage that it's only for women?
- Have you made any friends you talk to outside the theatre group?
- Can you talk about problems in the group?
- Is it ever challenging doing theatre with the group?
- Do you feel like you have a lot in common with the other women in the group?
- Have you learned anything from the other Mafwa members?

Personal Experiences & Learnings

Mafwa members not born in the UK:
- How long have you lived in the UK for? And in Leeds?
- Is it easy to get to know people in your area?
- Has being part of the community theatre made you feel differently about living in Leeds and in the UK?

To all Mafwa members:

- Have you taken part in other community or artistic projects in Leeds?
- Would you recommend community theatre to other people? Why?

<u>Facilitators</u>

Community Theatre

- Tell me a bit about why you started Mafwa Theatre and why you're working with arts and community theatre
- Why did you decide to do participatory theatre with women from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds?
- What is your impression of the experiences people have coming to the UK?
- What is special about doing drama together?
- When you talk about building 'community' in your academic article, what does it then mean to you?
- You describe your role as 'distributors of privilege' in your article – can you tell a little about what you mean with this?
- You also mention that you, as facilitators, are there to shape and offer 'sustainable frames' for the theatre group – what do you mean with this?

Mafwa Members

- Who are the different women engaged with Mafwa Theatre?
- How do people find you at Mafwa?
- Why have you chosen to make the theatre company and the sessions entirely for women?
- How many different projects are you running at Mafwa? Do they all include drama of some kind?
- Why do you call the participating women 'members' and not 'participants', 'clients' etc?

Drama Group

- Has it been the same group of women coming for a long time or are there often newcomers joining?
- How are new members welcomed into the group? Are the women good at making each other feel welcome and supporting new people?

- I've seen you working with themes like 'home' and 'comfort'. Do you ever work with more serious topics of, for example, fleeing a country, loneliness, seeking a new home, searching for a sense of belonging or similar? Or is it a conscious choice not to do so?
- How involved are the women in the process of making theatre? Do they ever come up with ideas for the workshops or help with the practical preparations for the sessions?

- Does everyone take equally much part in the sessions? What would you do if someone said, "I don't feel like taking part today, I just want to watch"?

- Are there any challenges with doing theatre with a diverse group?
- Have you noticed changes in any of the participants over time?
- Would you say that you have personally learned anything from working with this group of women?

Audiences & Performing

- What are the benefits of doing performances for audiences compared to doing drama with the group during the weekly sessions?
- What have the themes of the performances been? Are they the same as during the weekly sessions?
- Is it important to have an audience?
- When doing performances, what are the messages you're trying to get through to the audience?
- Where have you performed? Is there an interest from the public in the performances?
- What have the audiences' reactions and feedback been?

The Project 'Cooking with Parveen'

- How did you come up with the idea for the project?
- On the website it says: "Challenging stereotypes of sanctuary seekers by exploring food and femininity" – what does this mean in praxis? Why did you choose to combine cooking and theatre? What was the idea behind?
- Who or what is 'Parveen'? Who came up with the name?
- Can you tell me a bit about the idea behind the play which you were supposed to perform for the project before lockdown?
- Did the women have the possibility to act different roles in the play? (both the British female and migrant female) Did you talk about the women's thoughts and feedback afterwards?
- Who came up with the idea for the recipe book and the podcast? Who took part in the planning, talking, and recording? Did the women write the recipes and poems?
- In the recipe book and podcast, it's only the women's voices we hear and words we read – can you tell a bit about your thoughts and reasons behind entirely showing their voices and words?
- What changes did you have to make when going online? How did it affect the project?
- Who did you send the creative packs to during lockdown?

Advocacy

- What kind of campaigning and advocacy work do you do?
- Who are the community and creative partners you work with?
- How do you work to "break down barriers" that can hinder people from engaging in the arts?

Funding

- Is it difficult to get funding for an arts-focused project?
- Is funding short term or long term? Does it come with certain requirements from your side?

Refugee Week

- Why is Mafwa Theatre involved in Refugee Week?
- Will you participate in Refugee Week 2021 too? What are you planning on doing?

Volunteer

Volunteering

- Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself and your background?
- How long have you been volunteering with Mafwa Theatre for?
- How often do you volunteer?
- Why did you decide to volunteer with Mafwa Theatre? Do you have a particular interest in theatre, volunteering with women, or people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds?
- Do you volunteer with other charities or organisations?

Learnings & Experiences

- What have you personally learned from volunteering with this group of women?
- Have you gained new perspectives and insights due to volunteering, for example on life as a migrant in the UK?
- Have you been in close contact with refugees and asylum seekers before?
- What is it like when you take part in the sessions without volunteering? Why do you join and what does it give you?

Movement sessions & 'Sit with Us'

- What do you, in general, think working with movement and dancing can give the women? What do you think are the benefits with movement exercises?
- What was the aim and purpose with your sessions around movement for the project 'Sit with Us'?
- Did you plan the sessions and exercises for the project alone or together with Keziah and Tamsin?
- Did the women come with any ideas during the project or give you feedback, for example about what they liked or disliked?
- Did you experience any challenges during the sessions?
- Were there ever misunderstandings or disagreements in the project group?

Appendix 3 – Participant Observation

Here follows a short description of the participant observation taking place during online Zoom sessions and physical theatre sessions in an art studio in Leeds.

	Description
Online sessions	
5/3	Theme: Listening to live opera with Opera North, Leeds • Warm-up: Everyone comes up with a stretching or hugging-oneself exercise which the others have to imitate • The women listen to a female opera singer singing songs in English, German, and French • The participants share their feelings around the music
19/3	Theme: Co-creating poetry with the female poet Rommi Smith around the topic: 'What does the city Leeds mean to you?' • Warm-up: Everyone expresses how they feel in that moment by starting the sentence with: "I feel…" (examples: "…excited, tired, worried, stressed, hopeful") • The women are told to find an object in their homes which symbolises Leeds to them (examples: a theatre ticket, a library book) and share the story with the group • The participants create a simple poem together with Rommi Smith around their thoughts about Leeds (examples: "Leeds is a quiet place full of welcoming organisations", "Mafwa is a place for friendships")
26/3	Theme: 'What does comfort mean to you?' • Warm-up: Everyone is told to wrap themselves in a blanket and imitate the simple exercises for giving themselves a gentle face and neck massage • The group votes between the final two choices for a group name and ends up with the name 'Kuluhenna Drama' • An external evaluator asks the women questions about their experiences of the Zoom sessions (most people express that it has been less personal, the actual drama exercises been fewer but that Keziah and Tamsin have been supportive and stayed in touch) and about their suggestions for future activities with Mafwa (examples: working with stories, collage-making) • Cool-down: The participants imitate the facilitators doing stretching and circular movements with their body
16/4	Theme: 'Comfort' and 'Feeling at home'. • A key worker introduces her charity offering free 'mental health services' for women struggling + the facilitators mention an arts-based project with an organisation sending out creative packages to people during the pandemic • The group talks about their plans of working with textile as decorations and personal 'soundscapes' for their art installation 'Sit With Us' for Refugee Week 2021. • Everyone goes to find a piece of fabric in their house that means something special to them. It leads to different people

	sharing stories about the use of textiles and the meaning of patterns in different cultures and countries. • The participants are told to create a comfy corner where they feel relaxed in their house and take a picture of it • Cool-down: The participants each come up with stretching exercises while holding a pillow and imitate each other doing yawning exercises
30/4	Theme: 'Comfort' and 'Feeling at home' with poet Rommi Smith. • The group once again generates words and poems with Rommi which will be used for their art installation for Refugee Week 2021 • More of the women have had their photo taken with Mafwa before in front of a space or building in Leeds which means something to them (examples: a library, a park, the cricket stadium). They now share with the group how they feel about the place while Rommi 'scribes' i.e., they talk while she takes notes before reading it back to them • The group talks about their feelings as participants in the Mafwa Theatre group (examples: a place of acceptance, somewhere to belong), their favourite music for relaxing and what 'home' means to them (more say that it is loving people who make a 'home') while Rommi takes notes • The women take turn reading Rommi's notes aloud from the chat and simple poems are shaped
7/5	Theme: Comfort through movements with volunteer Aine • Warm-up: The women take turn expressing how they are feeling at the moment through hand movements and facial expressions • Everyone is asked to pick an object in the home which makes them feel comfortable (examples: a scarf, pillow, book, game console, the Bible) and explain to the group why they have chosen it • Everyone dances simultaneously to music with their object while exploring it (examples: opening it, feeling it, throwing it in the air) – first by themselves and then in pairs
Physical sessions	
25/6	Theme: Evaluating the recent project 'Sit with Us' for Refugee Week 2021 + Socialising over pizza and music • The participants give feedback around: the positives and negatives from the project, and possible ideas and improvements for future projects • They discuss options for an upcoming theme. The facilitators suggest working around 'green spaces' as more of the women have shown an interest in nature or growing their own plants and vegetables. Most members are very positive to it • Afterwards, they have pizzas together while listening and dancing to different types of music
30/7	Theme: 'What does 'Green Spaces' mean to you?' + welcoming new people into the group

	• Warm-up: Standing in a circle, everyone comes up with an activity starting with the first letter in their name and a movement the others have to imitate (example: Tamsin – tennis, Anne - acting) • Warm-up: Still standing in a circle, the women take turn saying their name before saying one of another person in the group; all without showing ones teeth or the others shout 'teeth, teeth, teeth!' (example: 'Tamsin to Anne' –> 'Anne to Keziah') • All participants choose how they want to physically embody something in a green space (examples: a 'tree', 'dog' or 'hiker') on the floor. They take turns moving around each other or standing still as their character or object • The participants are divided into pairs and talk about their last experience in nature before sharing it with the group • Cool-down: A cooperative game played with everyone's eyes closed and combining breathing exercises with taking turns counting without two people talking at the same time.
13/8	Theme: Puppetry with an external female artist • Warm-up: The participants move around in the room and do a movement, sound or a little dance when the facilitator says a number • The participants each pick a stick, describe how it looks and feels and make it 'come alive' through imagining how it is sleeping, moving, and talking. • Two women do a smaller play together where one 'stick' wakes up the other which then reacts in a chosen way (examples: fighting, hugging or dancing) • All the women each make a simple puppet out of newspaper and tape before interacting (examples: some make friends and go fishing, another has a heart attack and is given CPR by another puppet, one wakes up speaking only Spanish and realises that a couple of other puppets speaks the language too)