Participatory theatre for human rights
Exploring its benefits for newcomers in London
in view of the UK's hostile environment

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ABSTRACT

Apart from bridging the fields of participatory theatre and human rights research, the main aim of this thesis was to explore how participatory theatre helps newcomers in London to navigate the UK's 'hostile environment' and promote their lived experiences as valuable human rights knowledge. First, the thesis conceptualised how both fields are interlinked, building on existing literature about epistemic injustice, dialectical theatre, the aesthetics of human rights, and theatres of sanctuary. Next, with the Theatre of the Oppressed framework as theoretical and methodological underpinning, seventeen qualitative interviews were conducted with newcomers, theatre practitioners and experts, complemented by an immersion into a series of five theatre workshops with newcomers. The thematic data analysis showed that, amongst newcomers, participatory theatre nurtured a sense of community, belonging and safety, and enabled healing and expression. Newcomers also felt empowered to counter one-sided, dehumanising and victimising narratives, despite the overall challenges of reaching target audiences and persuading them to take action. However, an explicit human rights language was rarely used, indicating that further research is needed on participatory theatre's capacity as a direct source of human rights knowledge. Lastly, most companies found the benefits of their recognition as a theatre of sanctuary rather minimal.

Word count: 17.734

KEY WORDS

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Problem area and justification

The number of performing arts scholars interested in the relevance of their fields for addressing sensitive, often political topics such as conflict, trauma and transitional justice, has grown over the past couple of years. Arts-based as well as participatory research approaches have gained popularity, primarily with a focus on promoting 'positive social change' (see e.g. Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010; Kapitan et al., 2011; Mckenna, 2014; Gutberlet et al., 2017; Heslop et al., 2021). Oftentimes, such approaches involve communities which are "considered vulnerable or disadvantaged" and "affected by migration, poverty or homelessness" (Opferman, 2019, p. 2; Marín, 2007; Erel et al., 2017; Enria, 2015). By contrast, there is a notable gap between the fields of human rights and performing arts research, and theatre in particular (English, 2023), which I aim to bridge with this research. The gap is rather remarkable for the following reasons: i) modern and politically motivated theatre already emerged in the 1960s (Dennis, 2009; Kershaw, 1992), and ii) since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, the international human rights regime has inspired scholars and practitioners from different fields of study to undertake significant interdisciplinary research, connecting human rights to law, philosophy, humanitarianism, medicine and social sciences, among many others (English, 2023).

When theatre is used to raise awareness about societal issues, it rarely seems to employ an explicit human rights language, let alone in a participatory setting. Exploring this unused potential seems relevant, and I aim to do so following a five-step process. First, in the literature review, I discuss relevant publications in both areas (section 2). I elaborate on how easily marginalised voices tend to be disregarded, even within the field of human rights. The legal frameworks, policy papers and advocacy campaigns are abundant (e.g. Landman, 2004; Freeman, 2017), yet do not always consider peoples' lived experiences as a source of knowledge or, at best, extract those to be told by others. In that light, I address the notions of artivism, epistemic and aesthetic injustice, and misrecognition (Nossel, 2016; Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2018; Dalaqua, 2020a). Next, I link this to Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970) and Dialectical Theatre (Brecht, 1964) as a segue into the Aesthetics of Human Rights (English, 2023). I highlight the link between morality and political action, a commonality between (participatory) theatre and human rights. Concretely, I explore what those concepts mean for

newcomers' lived experiences in the UK's so-called 'hostile environment' (Kaptani et al., 2021; Liberty, 2019; Narita, 2023; Schroeter, 2013), and explain the Theatre of Sanctuary framework (Grace et al., 2019).

Second, I introduce Augusto Boal's (1979) Theatre of the Oppressed framework as the theoretical and methodological underpinnings for this research (section 3). Based on those two sections, I outline my research questions (section 4). Apart from bridging the theatre and human rights research areas, the main objective is to explore how participatory theatre helps newcomers to navigate hostility and promote their lived experiences as valuable human rights knowledge. The overarching research question is as follows: *How do newcomers in the wider London area experience participatory theatre practices and are those practices a potentially useful human rights research method?* Third, I elaborate on the methods, sampling, ethics and approach used for the data analysis (section 5), to then proceed with discussing the results of the analysis. That happens in two separate segments, as I spoke to newcomers as well as to theatre practitioners in the wider London area (section 6). Lastly, in the conclusion, I discuss the main outcomes by answering the research questions, and include limitations and suggestions for future research (section 7).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Performing arts for positive social change

Arts for positive social change (see section 1) can be catalogued as 'artivism', a term often used to refer to the integration of art into activism or political action, following Suzanne Nossel (2016, p. 103). According to her, it has become of academic value only fairly recently, which can be explained by an overall unfamiliarity with its utility and the challenges that come with measuring social change, especially in quantitative terms. Nevertheless, in an evolving landscape of knowledge production and research methodologies, the integration of theatre and other performing arts presents a compelling divergence from traditional approaches, which are historically characterised by emphasis on reason, rationality, and writing (Opferman, 2019). Performing arts are often a useful tool for victims or survivors to work through violent events of the past and make more sense of the present (Destrooper, 2018). I believe it is relevant to further explore such 'alternative,' more constructivist ways of producing knowledge, particularly in the context of human rights.

2.1.1. Lived experience as human rights knowledge

Predominantly positivist approaches often ignore the rich spectrum of embodied knowledge, including physical expressions, emotions and feelings, and undervalue the complexities of lived experience and human understanding (Neuman, 2007). Dwight Conquergood (2002, p. 146), known for his 'radical research' on the ethical and political dimensions of performance studies with marginalised communities, referred to this oversight as 'epistemic violence.' According to him, nuanced and tacit forms of meaning integral to human interaction are all too easily disregarded. Opferman (2019, p. 3) read it as "the overlooking or denial of viewpoints and meanings that are more difficult to grasp and leave room for interpretive doubt."

In the context of international relations and its subdisciplines, including human rights, epistemic violence is framed as both a phenomenon and a concept that is deeply embedded in the structures of colonial modernity. Following Claudia Brunner (2021), it is characterised and shaped by power, knowledge and being, and contributes to a world order that perpetuates violence in various forms. Brunner (2021, p. 193-194) critiques the mainstream understanding of violence in international relations as something that 'occurs elsewhere,' 'by others,' and as a

'deviation from the norm,' thereby suggesting that this perspective in itself is a form of epistemic violence. As such, the production and organisation of knowledge legitimises other forms of violence.

That resonates with Todd Landman (2004) and Sally E. Merry (2011) in terms of knowledge production in the context of human rights. Landman (2004, p. 917-918, p. 926) talks about the importance of documenting and measuring human rights, of which the latter can be done in principle, in practice and as outcomes of policy. Focusing on 'in practice,' he defines three useful types of data: events-based reporting of violations, standards-based evaluations of state practices, and survey-based data on perceptions. At the same time, he also points to a continued need for "high-quality information" generated "at the lowest level of aggregation" (Landman, 2004, p. 930). In other words, civil society organisations (CSOs), international bodies, national governments and academia, amongst other usual 'data providers,' may insufficiently consider lived experiences as a highly useful type of data, or dismiss it if it does not serve their agenda.

Similarly, unlike the rather mainstream data providers mentioned here, creative spaces such as theatre companies seem to be found irrelevant or incompetent for taking up a knowledge producing role. I expand on this later on, exemplified by the topic of migration in the UK. When looking beyond "press releases and petitions" (Nossel, 2016, p. 103), though, theatre companies may be a well-suited alternative for tackling the difficulties of reporting human rights in practice which Landman refers to, such as capturing the fear or resilience of victims, or the perceived or exerted power of offenders. In that light, theatre companies could nuance or fill the gaps of the more traditional, "readily understandable and convenient forms" of knowledge, which are "highly indicator-focused and economy-driven," as described by Merry (2011, p. 92-92).

Like epistemic violence, it is also useful to mention the notion of 'epistemic injustice,' as introduced by Miranda Fricker (2007) in her work on power and the ethics of knowing. It inspired José Medina (2018), amongst other scholars, to elaborate on it. He added the term 'misrecognition' as something that contributes to and exacerbates epistemic injustices. Fricker initially identified two types: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. The first one occurs when a speaker's credibility is unjustly dismissed or given less weight due to the listener's prejudice based on demographic characteristics like gender, race or social class (Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2018). Not only does it affect the speaker, it also undermines the collective pool of knowledge in society. The second one often happens to marginalised or oppressed groups because their experiences are not adequately captured by the dominant

cultural and linguistic frameworks (Fricker, 2007). Such 'misrecognition' of individuals or groups – that is, the failure to acknowledge or accurately understand their social identities and contributions – ultimately further marginalises and silences their voices (Medina, 2018).

As a way to tackle this, it is vital to consider not only what we know, but also how our ways of knowing can either perpetuate or combat injustice rooted in systemic power imbalances (Fricker, 2007; Brunner, 2021). 'Epistemic activism' (Medina, 2018) and 'epistemic virtues' (Fricker, 2007) can help challenge and change the conditions of knowledge production. This means creating spaces where marginalised voices can be heard, developing new interpretive resources that better capture diverse experiences, and encouraging individuals to recognise and correct for their biases. Borrowing from Michel Foucault, Brunner (2021, p. 208-209) suggested, among other things, to actively listen to and learn from subjugated and alternative forms of knowledge. Again, this is where theatre companies, amongst other creative spaces, could showcase their utility.

In relation to epistemic violence and injustice (Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2018; Brunner, 2021; Conquergood, 2002), Gustavo H. Dalaqua (2020a) advanced the notion of 'aesthetic injustice,' which is defined as harm inflicted on people in their capacity as aesthetic beings, affecting their abilities to perceive, feel, and imagine. "Oppression cannot survive without some degree of consensual validation. If the oppressed refuse to believe in the social hierarchy invented by the oppressor to demean them, oppression cannot sustain itself. Oppression is an exercise of power that is both repressive and productive" (Dalaqua, 2020a, p. 3).

He argues that the two types of injustice are intertwined, as they both heavily impact how people understand the world and oneself. "Aesthetic injustice distorts our perception in ways that [camouflage and] make us accept oppression," meaning that "one cannot critically judge a given perspective if one is not able to keep a distance from it" (Dalaqua, 2020a, p. 4, p. 8). That in turn shapes our participation in a democratic society and the very concept of democracy itself. He advocates for recognising the link between artistic expression and democratic freedom, which is indisputably relevant for and connected to human rights.

"The society of equals that democracy comprises" promotes "aesthetic multiplicity" and does not divide people into superior or inferior categories. Differences in experiencing reality are not only accepted but also deemed vital for policymaking. "Democracy is related to aesthetic justice because it refuses to allow difference to become a justification for hierarchy" (Dalaqua, 2020a, p. 7-8; Dalaqua, 2020b). Engaging in creative practices can significantly

advance the fight against epistemic and other forms of injustice, which is why he resorted to the 'Aesthetics of the Oppressed,' as designed by Augusto Boal (2006) to do exactly that.

2.1.2.   Conscientisation: Pedagogy of the Oppressed

The critique on positivism (section 2.1) is extendable to contemporary societies being highly influenced by traditional and social media, which tend to standardise thought processes, positioning individuals primarily as passive consumers (Tolomelli, 2016). That resonates with Augusto Boal's (1979) reference to the 'invasion of the brain,' which affects people's ability to think critically (Dalaqua, 2020b). Hence, following Monika Salzbrunn (2022), artivistic practices are useful to challenge positivist political, economic and social stigmatisations, especially in the context of anti-migration and gentrification policies in urban spaces. She argues that if we stop perceiving marginalised populations through 'ethnic lenses,' their sense of community and belonging would improve (Salzbrunn, 2022, p. 41-42).

The uniformity of thought and passive knowledge consumption also underscore the importance and significance of, for example, the 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (Freire, 1970). Paulo Freire's educational theory is built on the idea that knowledge construction is an inherently autonomous activity, fostered through dialogue and reciprocal interactions with other people. This approach advocates for an active participation in meaning-making and challenges traditional education models which treat learners merely as empty vessels to be filled by educators (Tolomelli, 2016).

Performing arts can serve as a powerful means of 'disturbance' and transformation in the face of fear and repression (Nossel, 2016, p. 105). Arts-based approaches foster an environment conducive to communal and harmonious interactions and knowledge creation. This environment enables participants to collaboratively reflect on topics that are frequently considered taboo (Kaptani et al., 2021). These approaches emphasise the importance of lived experiences, embodied knowledge, and transformative actions (Kaptani et al., 2021; Haraway, 1988; Kaptani & Yuval-Davis, 2008).

2.2. Dialectical Theatre: from empathy to action

As the founding father of 'Epic Theatre,' the German modernist theorist and theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht cannot be left unmentioned here. His innovative take on dramaturgy was shaped by prominent philosophers and artists preceding him, not in the least by Karl Marx and his use of 'dialectics.' Brecht's critique of realism and empathy – however inherent to both

human rights and arts – suggests that emotional engagement can hinder the audience's ability to critically engage with a play's themes or the characters' experiences, potentially detracting from the call to political action. "Once we experience those feelings, the event is complete. At that point the audience members' own feelings *are* the event, and more important than the suffering of the character. We feel good about feeling bad" (English, 2023, p. 22, his emphasis). Instead, when theatre performances embrace a dialectical perspective, it is easier to steer away from inevitable conclusions. As such, Brecht's dramatic aesthetics will uncover the conflicting forces defining our understanding of history and reality and, more importantly, "reveal social conditions as contingent and impermanent" (Stevens, 2016, p. 2).

Not without challenges, Lara Stevens (2016) explores how the Marxist-Brechtian dialectics could be applied to today's world. The emphasis is on advocating for 'emancipated spectatorship' and a non-dogmatic approach to theatre and performing arts, rather than didactic forms aimed at affirming the status quo – something Paulo Freire and Hannah Arendt incorporated in their views on knowledge production. Brecht's description of 'Verfremdungseffekt' – that is, the effect of alienation – is about exploring different ways to challenge how reality is usually interpreted, rather than merely observing it (Brecht, 1964, p. 193; Stevens, 2016, p. 35). It is inspired by Georg Hegel and, again, Karl Marx, and particularly the latter's use of the term 'Entfremdung' for explaining the negative effects of capitalism (Engels, 1859). Brecht, as it were, flipped the coin and started seeing it as "a useful byproduct of capitalist estrangement," because it enabled workers "to view their exploited conditions with an objective eye" (Stevens, 2016, p. 36). As such, Brecht's 'Verfremdungseffekt' utilises alienation to combat the very alienating process, which aligns with Dalaqua's (2020a) critique on aesthetic injustice (section 2.1.1).

His 'Epic Theatre,' which he ultimately refined and renamed as 'Dialectical Theatre,' is all about destabilising "the fixity of the everyday and […] the habits that make images, words or concepts appear universal, obvious, inevitable and unchangeable. Verfremdungseffekt removes the mask that conceals bourgeois attitudes, values and power structures by showing them to be historical constructs rather than given and unalterable conditions" (Stevens, 2016, p. 37). Thus, it brings forward the dialectical nature of reality, and as such the power of dialectics in theatre and their potential for fostering change beyond the stage.

2.3. The Aesthetics of Human Rights

2.3.1.   A theatrical human rights language

To further examine and embrace the 'undeniable' influence of art in driving social change, more substantial academic contributions and collaborative efforts are needed from people working in the field, ranging from drama artists and applied theatre experts to human rights ethnographers and activists (Nossel, 2016, p. 103; English, 2023). The extent to which human rights have been addressed through theatre predominantly focused on increasing awareness among audiences of conflicts and violations, and on evoking compassion (English, 2023). Verbatim Theatre and Playback Theatre are the most commonly used formats for achieving that (Derbyshire & Hodson, 2008; Fox, 1994; Becker et al., 2013; Luckhurst & Morin, 2016).

To date, what appears to be understudied is the utility of dialectical theatre as a method that employs an explicit human rights language (section 1). As mentioned, mere testimonies or portrayals of suffering risk oversimplifying complex societal issues, without delving into their underlying causes or examining the nuances of individual or collective rights in contention. After all, considering Jack Donnelly's (2007, 2008) notion of 'relative universality' and his debate with Michael Goodheart (2008), human rights are quite often paradoxical when put into practice. Hence, for their message to be different than what is covered in "the evening news," Gary M. English (2023) urges theatre makers to enhance the depth of their creations by waving human rights testimonies into the dialectical fabric of theatre. To facilitate that, he developed an 'Aesthetics of Human Rights.'[1] "The complex and reflexive nature of human rights theory is most profoundly expressed when the dialectic[al] and investigative nature of theatre disrupts rather than lectures" (English, 2023, p. 14).

This links back to Bertolt Brecht's 'Dialectical Theatre' and resonates with Lindsay Cummings (2016), who advocated for 'empathy as dialogue.' Also Hannah Arendt had clear reservations about the role of pity and sympathy in promoting human rights. Confronting reality should involve observing tragedy, but without merely filtering it through the stories of victims' suffering (Wilson & Brown, 2009). Hence, in an attempt to further bridge the gap between theatre and human rights, assessing their views on morality reveals a significant overlap.

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[1] In the eighteenth century, philosopher Alexander Baumgarten came up with 'aesthetics' as a discipline, approaching art as the ultimate way of "sensitive knowing" (Euron, 2019, p. 59-60).

2.3.2.   Intersecting moral foundations

Jack Donnelly (2013, p. 16) posits that human rights can be understood as a "self-fulfilling moral prophecy," meaning that treating individuals with humanity leads to the realisation of truly human societies. His perspective suggests that the moral and aspirational visions of human nature – as explored by many other thinkers such as Aristotle, Kant, Hume, Hobbes and Rorty – underpin the social changes advocated for by human rights (English, 2023). Human rights aim to blend moral ideals with political action, therefore existing in a 'dialectical' relationship with human nature and political society. This dynamic shapes society, and by extension human beings, to fulfil the potential of human nature, which in turn is the very foundation for these rights (Donnelly, 2013).

Human rights research usually involves critiquing the acknowledgment, absence, or enforcement of certain rights, often brought back to debates about universality, cultural relativism and the indivisibility of rights (Donnelly, 2007, 2008; Goodheart, 2008; Freeman, 2017). Human rights are, or ought to be, universal, that is, applicable to all human beings at all times, and incontrovertible, that is absolute and undeniable. This idea informed numerous treaties, international bodies, and monitoring mechanisms – often referred to by critics as 'rights inflation' (Freeman, 2017, p.15) – intended to advance equality, dignity and peace for humanity as a whole (UDHR, 1948). Hannah Arendt's (1973, p. 296-298) concept of 'the right to have rights,' however, highlights that mere existence as a human being does not automatically ensure rights. Instead, rights are contingent upon recognition and enforcement by a political entity, and as such by the 'right' to belong to any political community.

Building on Martha Nussbaum's philosophical work on ethics, English (2023) argues that drama offers a more nuanced, human-centric approach to moral theory than broader philosophical discussions traditionally do. This is primarily because of theatre's capacity to simultaneously portray the characters' intricate, often intertwined virtues and flaws. As such, drama reveals the complexity of human beings who, despite their moral convictions, face severe challenges. Those can warp our ability to remain ethically true to ourselves and erode our moral integrity or capacity for compassion. At its core, and when significantly political, theatre excels in crafting serious moral predicaments where protagonists either overcome or are overwhelmed by the challenging (i.e. beyond merely good or bad) situations that shape their identity.

Ultimately, the aim of exploring theories about moral character is not to excuse or rationalise violence or oppression but to understand the specific, contextual factors that

undermine the realisation of the so-called 'human potential' as well as the universal aspirations articulated by the human rights regime (English, 2023; Donnelly, 2013). Therefore, when theatre aligns with human rights principles, it not only brings large-scale conflicts down to a relatable level but also acts as a moral experiment or applied political philosophy in the public sphere. Ultimately, this could also help challenging epistemic violence and injustice (Brunner, 2021; Fricker, 2007; Medina, 2018) (section 2.1.1).

2.3.3.   Theatre: an inductive human rights experiment

Thus, on the one hand, human rights theory often conceptualises individuals as abstract beings entitled to "ethical treatment by the state," predicated on various justifications. The common phrasing found in human rights documents intentionally avoids detailing specific individuals, operating more as a deductive thought experiment: it starts from a broad theory to then delineate concrete principles of how individuals should be treated (English, 2023, p. 4; Donnelly, 2013). On the other hand, drama brings moral and political issues into a more personal and tangible realm. It showcases real-life scenarios, embodying moral dilemmas and political challenges through characters and narratives that viewers can see, feel, resonate or disagree with. Therefore, it is fair to state that theatrical performances act more as an inductive experiment. The specific, individual experiences that are depicted serve as a basis for understanding and applying the insights it provides to wider societal contexts (English, 2023).

In sum, *provoking* thought and human rights action is the most effective way forward, rather than just *preaching* for the sake of 'pathos.' The dialogic structure of a play facilitates a dynamic and exploratory interaction that invites a multiplicity of voices and can challenge audiences to either reconcile or simply embrace conflicting realities which are inherent to shared public spaces. Hence, in bridging theatre with human rights, the focus should not be solely on replicating actual or imagined events with definitive outcomes. Instead, theatre should be viewed as a vessel through which (specific) audiences engage with co-existing moral and human rights related viewpoints and uncertainties (English, 2023; Donnelly, 2007, 2008).

2.4. Migration: the dehumanisation of newcomers

Building on the literature explored so far – in particular regarding epistemic injustice and knowledge production as well as moral and dialectical intersections between theatre and human rights – I dedicate this chapter to the topic of migration in the UK. Because of its rich arts history and wide range of contemporary theatre collectives, I chose the wider London area as

the geographical scope for the field work of this research. Similarly, as a metropolitan city, its great diversity of people serves the chosen thematic focus of migration, not in the least when taking into account the UK's 'hostile environment' policy and the impact it has on the human rights of newcomers (Kaptani et al., 2021; Liberty, 2019; Narita, 2023; Schroeter, 2013).

Additionally, the fact that UK-based theatre companies can apply for the 'Theatre of Sanctuary' status – that is, getting recognition for their performing arts work with people seeking sanctuary in the country – makes up a practically relevant justification for the scope of this particular case study. Linking back to English (2023) and Donnelly (2013), it may be a solid theoretical aspiration that human rights result in equal treatment of everyone by the state and in society. That, however, is not by default true in reality. This chapter ensures a logical progression from theoretical discussions to practical implications, anchoring my research not only in scholarly but also real-world contexts. I elaborate on this in section 5.

2.4.1. The UK's 'Hostile Environment' policy

In 2013, Theresa May, serving as the Home Secretary at the time, introduced the 'hostile environment' policy. Its express purpose was to make life exceedingly challenging for undocumented migrants, indirectly forcing them to voluntarily leave the UK (Kaptani et al., 2021). The repercussions of this policy extended beyond its intended targets, impacting 'legal' migrants and even ethnic minorities with British citizenship. It prescribes checks on a person's immigration status by employers, landlords, NHS staff and other public service providers before offering jobs, housing, healthcare or social support, with penalties for non-compliance, including fines and criminal charges (Kaptani et al., 2021; Liberty, 2019, p. 7).

Illuminating the intersection of border policies, technology and ethics, Kealynn Narita (2023) showcased how the UK technically pushed institutions and even private citizens to become new border agents. Such policies are "doomed to repeat and reinforce social bias and historic racialised practices" (Narita, 2023, p. 294, p. 299). Particularly since the Brexit referendum, there is a direct correlation between the hostile environment policy and an increase in racist attacks, where migrants or people of colour are indiscriminately branded as potentially illegal (Kaptani et al, 2021). According to Liberty (2019, p. 59), these measures violate human rights laws and are a clear example of state-endorsed discrimination.

Many Black British citizens and their descendants from Commonwealth countries who arrived in the UK after World War II – also known as the Windrush generation – ended up being

targeted by the hostile environment policy too. Many of them were left without legal access to employment, healthcare and social services, and even risked deportation, despite their longstanding residence and citizenship in the UK. The policy delineates who is worthy of welfare, clearly undermining familial, postcolonial, and long-term residential ties within the country (Kaptani et al., 2021; Reynolds et al., 2018). Moreover, the British government unfairly depicted young people from racialised or Muslim communities as "potentially dangerous agents of radicalism," placing undue burdens on migrant households (Kaptani et al., 2021, p. 70).

Dominant narratives perpetuated by those in power often sustain systems of oppression by rationalising unfair practices (Schroeter, 2013, p. 407, p. 410). Stereotyping people of colour as migrants, and vice versa, clearly illustrates that. Cultural diversity is frequently portrayed as a barrier to achieving equal rights for all citizens, which enhances a prioritisation of cultural differences. That implies a "hierarchy of belonging," positioning ethnic minorities and racialised individuals "as less legitimate members of society," and therefore "unworthy of protection" (Kaptani et al., 2021, p. 71; English, 2023, p. 5). It is through counternarratives and alternative storytelling that marginalised and racialised communities can share their own experiences of injustice.

2.4.2. Dehumanising rhetoric: 'crimmigration' and 'othering'

The conflation of criminal justice and immigration enforcement, sometimes termed 'crimmigration' (see e.g. Bosworth, 2017; Aliverti, 2012; Kaufman, 2015; López-Sala & Barbero, 2019) illustrates a poignant example of epistemic injustice. Migrants and asylum seekers are disproportionately subjected to the punitive measures of the criminal justice system, often based on prejudiced and incomplete understandings of their rights and circumstances (Stumpf, 2006; Bosworth & Guild, 2008). As showcased by the hostile environment policy in the UK, the merging of systems intensifies the exclusion and penalisation of newcomers, embedding a form of moral disengagement within legal and societal contexts.

The concept of 'othering' is central to this debate, as well as to the dialectical connection between human rights and theatre. It provides a lens through which the narrative and performative aspects of exclusion are analysed. As discussed by theorists like Said (1978) and Spivak (1985), 'othering' involves constructing people – in this case newcomers – as fundamentally different and inferior, thereby justifying unequal treatment and marginalisation. When stigmatised, discriminated, criminalised or misrepresented, their lived experiences are often overlooked while being a potentially valuable source of human rights knowledge.

Therefore, this lived reality for newcomers in the UK – particularly under policies that explicitly or implicitly endorse such dehumanising practices – can be highlighted and potentially alleviated when thematically explored through a theatrical lens.

2.4.3.   The 'Theatre of Sanctuary' concept

'City of Sanctuary' is a social movement that fosters a culture of hospitality and dignity for people seeking sanctuary in the UK, Ireland, and beyond. Launched in Sheffield in 2005, it has spawned over a hundred local initiatives aimed at creating welcoming, inclusive communities (City of Sanctuary, n.d.). It uses the term 'people seeking sanctuary'[2] to refer to "anyone who has been forced to travel internationally to seek safety from the threat of violence or persecution, regardless of their stage in the legal process," primarily to counter "the dehumanising rhetoric which can occur when referring to people by their immigration status" (Grace et al., 2019, p. 25). With its different streams of sanctuary, the movement encourages a wide range of stakeholders and sectors (e.g. local councils, schools, healthcare providers, libraries, arts organisations) to embody its philosophy. Established in collaboration with Counterpoints Arts, the arts stream fosters a culture of solidarity, challenging norms and policies, and envisioning a desired societal fabric (City of Sanctuary, n.d.).

"In the UK, statistics and myth-busting have often failed to challenge misconceptions and persuade populations of the importance of protecting the human rights of people seeking sanctuary. Art and creativity can inspire new ways of thinking and feeling, helping ordinary people understand the realities for those making difficult journeys, leaving behind loved ones and all that is familiar. […] We must avoid living in an echo chamber and strive to reach more than just the 'usual suspects'" (Grace et al., 2019, p. 2-3). Despite today's fast-paced, often polarised media landscape as well as persisting financial constraints in the performing arts scene, festivals[3] across the UK are important for showcasing refugee artists (City of Sanctuary, n.d.). It amplifies the transformative power of storytelling in terms of displacement and cultural integration challenges.

With a firm belief in theory of change, it suggests societal transformations through direct interactions between locals and newcomers, aimed at turning people's empathy into action. That

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[2] Within this research, I use the umbrella term 'newcomer' to refer to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

[3] For example: Journeys Festival International, Counterpoints Art's Platforma Festival, Sheffield's Migration Matters Festival, and Refugee Week (City of Sanctuary, n.d.).

resonates with Bertolt Brecht's 'Dialectical Theatre.' Employing words like 'welcome' and 'sanctuary' as "verbs, [as] doing words," highlights that "sanctuary must be enacted, must be demonstrated" (Grace et al., 2019, p. 3-4; City of Sanctuary, n.d.). It is all about "giving a platform to the voices of asylum seekers and refugees, so that they can be heard by those who might otherwise never hear them. […] Art belongs to everyone and one of the most intrinsic features of the human condition is the need for expression. […] We have an opportunity to show those seeking sanctuary as innovative, creative and resourceful and an asset to society" (Grace et al., 2019, p. 1, p. 6, p. 8).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Theatre of the Oppressed

In their efforts, many scholars and practitioners look to the insights and methodologies of Brazilian theatre innovator Augusto Boal, whose work is inspired by Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of 'liberating education,' as outlined in 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (Opferman, 2019; Kaptani et al., 2021; Schroeter, 2013; Al-Azraki, 2020). Boal embraces Freire's conviction that true liberation is achieved through 'conscientisation,' a process through which individuals become aware of the social, political and economic contradictions in their lives and are motivated to act against them (Schroeter, 2013, p. 397; Opferman, 2019, p. 4).

Drawing from Freire and influenced by Bertolt Brecht, Boal (1979) noted an analogy between the fields of education and traditional theatre, emphasising that both are inherently political and usually reflect and perpetuate the prevailing values of society. He critiques conventional theatre for reinforcing dominant cultural ideologies by engaging audiences as passive observers rather than active participants (Schroeter, 2013). Boal underlined that "theatre does not only belong to actors or drama professionals" (Tolomelli, 2016, p. 56), and formulated the transformative theatrical framework known as 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (TO) (Boal, 1979; Dalaqua, 2020b).

3.1.1. Theatre of the Oppressed and 'spect-actors'

With Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal intentionally erased the traditional boundaries between the actors and the audiences, encouraging the latter to become active contributors to the narrative through dialogic interaction (Opferman, 2019). This form of theatre serves as a critical lens through which reality and underlying truths are examined and interpreted, without resorting to simplistic pleasure-seeking solutions (Tolomelli, 2016).

In practice – depending on the context, the topic and the format of the performance – actors showcase both obvious and more subtle forms of oppression. These scenarios play out badly on purpose. In most formats,[4] and particularly in 'Forum Theatre,' the aim is to transform

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[4] Other popular formats are 'Rainbow of Desire,' a technique used to reveal and address internalised oppressions, and 'Legislative Theatre,' an extended version of Forum Theatre used to formulate policy recommendations (Dalaqua, 2020b; Boal, 2002).

audience members from passive viewers into 'spect-actors,' actively motivating them to address the depicted oppression and propose alternative approaches and solutions (Boal, 1979, 2002). This iterative process is led by a 'neutral' facilitator,[5] often referred to as the 'Joker,' who bridges the gap between the stage and the audience (Schroeter, 2013). The modification and re-enactment of specific scenes serve to empower the protagonist to overcome injustice, highlighting both the reality of oppressive situations as well as the audience's capacity for change (Opferman, 2019).

3.1.2. Agency and participation: reclaiming one's narrative

Boal argues that this empowerment enables spect-actors to inspire and devise real-life applications for altering the power dynamics that shape their existence beyond the theatre, thus treating the experience as a 'rehearsal for revolution' (Boal, 1979, p. 142; Schroeter, 2013, p. 397; Opferman, 2019, p. Al-Azraki, 2020). It allows for individuals to reclaim their narrative and understanding of the world (Tolomelli, 2016). TO not only raises individual awareness about oppression and personal empowerment, it is also a catalyst for collective action towards societal change, embodying a dual liberatory effect. "Participants' increased individual consciousness leads to action that will trigger a transformation in society as a whole" (Opferman, 2019, p. 4).

I underscore the necessity of reevaluating familiar beliefs to confront and understand the discomfort of new and unfamiliar perspectives. As such, it helps if actors and participants are simultaneously a "character, creator, commentator, and activist" (English, 2023, p. 8). Dialogue and reflection generate great opportunities to grapple with a simple though pertinent question, coined by Madison (2010, p. 10-11): "What should I do with what I have witnessed?" She goes on arguing that unconventional art forms help producing a 'response-ability,' which aligns with Alessandro Tolomelli's (2016, p. 51) view of TO as a 'learning by doing' approach. "The goal is not to get a single right answer, but to get all the people involved into the revolutionary process of approaching new understandings of reality" (Tolomelli, 2016, p. 54).

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[5] In October 2023, I participated in a 2-day Joker Masterclass at the School of the Theatre of the Oppressed (STOP) in London, founded and facilitated by Adrian Jackson, Augusto Boal's right-hand man for many years prior to his death in 2009. The key takeaways from the workshop: i) have authority without being a top-down educator, ii) have no agenda outside of the process and create a 'temporary autonomous zone' (TAZ) for ideas to flow freely, iii) listening and reading the room are key – everything is participation, even if it does not seem that way, and iv) follow Boal's trilogy of connection (i.e. identification, recognition, resonance).

Boal teaches that the uniqueness of human beings lies in their 'three-dimensionality,' which encompasses the ego acting within a situation, the self being observed, and the perspective of the other through whom we see ourselves as if in a mirror. These dimensions form the core of what theatre is (Boal, 1979; Tolomelli, 2016, p. 55). Hence, our very existence is theatrical in nature, embodying a dual role: we are both the performers and observers of our actions. We engage in actions while simultaneously witnessing ourselves in action, envisioning the unfolding of these very actions.

Following Santos (2019), for Boal, theatre is a universal human language, utilised by everyone in their daily lives. Thus, to understand human existence is to understand it through the lens of theatre. Considering non-discrimination and dignity – both cornerstones of human rights theory and practice – human rights prescribe what it means to be a human being and to be treated as such, which easily invokes the parallel with Boal's claim that "human being means being theatre" (Tolomelli, 2016, p. 55). In sum, TO empowers individuals by unveiling the theatrical dimension of human experience as a means of insight and restoring people's central role in the daily drama called life.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

4.1. Justifications & objectives

As outlined in the introduction (section 1), there are several reasons for the relevance of this research. It is one thing to observe and understand that the fields of theatre and human rights, both in terms of research and practice, are rarely, and if so, vaguely interlinked. It is another thing to advocate for the opposite to occur more frequently and with depth. To do so, I aim to explore the utility of theatre as a human rights research and knowledge production method. Concretely, with the Theatre of Sanctuary framework in mind, I aim to take stock of the participatory theatre practices in the wider London area that have a specific focus on amplifying newcomers' voices. I aim to investigate how such practices promote newcomers' lived experiences as information sources and empower them to navigate their lives in the UK's hostile environment.

4.2. Overarching question and subquestions

Based on the literature review and the chosen theoretical framework (sections 2 and 3), I developed the following research questions. Ideally, answering these questions will illustrate why the gap between theatre and human rights research should be narrowed. The overarching question is as follows:

How do newcomers in the wider London area experience participatory theatre practices and are those practices a potentially useful human rights research method?

I formulated three subquestions accordingly – one in relation to newcomers' experiences with participatory theatre, one in relation to theatre as a human rights tool, and one regarding the Theatre of Sanctuary framework.

1. Do participatory theatre practices support newcomers in the wider London area in feeling recognised, represented and empowered?
2. Are participatory theatre practices useful to better understand newcomers' lived experiences and, as such, a relevant method for human rights research?
3. Practically speaking, do theatres of sanctuary have more leverage to amplify newcomers' voices than theatre companies without the sanctuary status?

5. METHODOLOGY

This research is fundamentally approached through a constructivist lens, emphasising the subjective interpretation of social realities and the co-construction of knowledge between researcher and subject. Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), as conceptualised by Augusto Boal (1979), serves not only as a theoretical framework (section 3) but also as a methodology in this research. As outlined in the literature review, Boal's theatrical principles and formats are often used to operationalise dialogue and social action in the context of justice and oppression, and are extendable to the concepts of human rights and dignity.

As such, it is a useful methodology to capture, understand and potentially alleviate hostility towards newcomers, particularly in the wider London area, and to value their lived experience as a useful source for the promotion and protection of human rights. Unlike Bertolt Brecht, who certainly championed a participatory approach to theatre through 'emancipated spectatorship' (Stevens, 2016), Boal's emphasis on direct participation of oppressed groups in the actual art- and meaning-making itself is even stronger.

Based on the research questions and objectives, it was relevant to follow a qualitative and participatory approach. In-depth, semi-structured interviews have been conducted, which were combined with an immersion into a series of theatre workshops with newcomers, similar to participant observations. Below, the relevance, theoretical grounds, sampling, ethics and limitations of both methods are addressed, as well as their interconnectedness. Finally, I describe how I analysed the collected data.

5.1. Methods

I aim to understand in more detail if and how participation in theatre facilitates overcoming personal and social obstacles for newcomers in the wider London area. In order to do so, directly addressing the members of the community was relevant. Additionally, talking to practitioners who directly collaborate with them allowed for a better understanding of the theatre companies' mission and approaches to engaging both the community as well as different audiences, including decision-makers. I also anticipated that it could shed a light on how respondents viewed newcomers' lived experiences as valuable human rights knowledge.

5.1.1. Qualitative & semi-structured interviews

From an engaged research point of view (e.g. Orlowski, 2019; Campos & Anderson, 2021) – which encourages direct engagement with those stakeholders affected by the very research project – semi-structured interviews were an appropriate qualitative method (Patton, 2015). Unlike observational methods, this format enabled me to capture nuanced perspectives, contexts and experiences which are not per se my own.

It allowed for both structure and flexibility, combining predetermined questions for comparability purposes across respondents within the same category (i.e. either newcomer or practitioner), with the possibility for open-ended, elaborate responses and opportunities for clarification or follow-up (Robson, 2002; Patton, 2015; Knott et al., 2022). Furthermore, those characteristics made the interview process more conversational, which in itself fostered a sense of ownership over the research process amongst interviewees, and thus increased its validity. I used a set of guiding interview questions, which were slightly tailored to each group (i.e. newcomers and practitioners), and are attached in Annex 1.

5.1.2. Participant observation: immersion into workshops

Generally, participant observation is a versatile and powerful qualitative research method that, despite its challenges, offers rich insights into human behaviour and social interactions. This method is rooted in ethnography and anthropology but is increasingly used in other research domains, allowing researchers to immerse into the environment of their subjects, usually for extended periods of time (Moeran, 2007; Brancati, 2018; Woodsong et al., 2005). When approached through a more critical lens, this method is also relevant to understand and criticise oppression, asymmetrical power relations and dominant discourses on certain (human rights) issues, and interrogate the social inequities faced by marginalised communities (Palmer & Caldas, 2016; Fitzpatrick & May, 2022).

I chose to conduct an active observation over a passive one, meaning that I fully engaged in every discussion and theatre activity during the workshops, as if I was a full member of the newcomer community. The emphasis was on immersion. Similarly, and although less transparent, I opted for a covert observation over an overt one, meaning that I concealed my identity and purpose towards other participants (Brancati, 2018). That allowed me to obtain an in-depth understanding of the workshop process, foster authentic interactions, and minimise intrusiveness (Woodsong et al., 2005; Brancati, 2018). To compensate for the lack of

transparency regarding my role, I addressed the ethical considerations as well as participants' confidentiality with the 'gatekeeper' (i.e. the lead facilitator), and secured permission to participate beforehand. Moreover, during the immersion process, there was no need for revealing my objectives as I did not have individual interactions with other participants outside of the theatre workshop environment.

In line with guidelines in literature (Moeran, 2007; Brancati, 2018; Woodsong et al., 2005), I captured as many actions and inactions, verbal and non-verbal cues, and general contextual information. Apart from being time consuming, this method was also challenging in terms of balancing objectivity and detailed reporting with deep, yet subtle engagement. Being an 'observant participant' (Moeran, 2007, p. 13) allowed me to identify patterns and interpret them in conjunction with the data collected during the qualitative interview process. The so-called fieldwork results helped to either consolidate or nuance what was said during the interviews with individual newcomers and practitioners of other theatre companies.

5.2. Sampling

I recruited the interviewees in two stages. First, I focused on finding and contacting theatre practitioners associated with a theatre company in the wider London area that has a specific connection to the topic of migration, as well as a predominantly participatory approach. Via City of Sanctuary, I was able to identify and email the seven theatre companies that fit the geographical criterion and that had received the 'Theatre of Sanctuary' award. Six of those were willing to participate – five of them are based in London, one in Reading.

Additionally, I targeted four migration-focused theatre companies without the sanctuary status, two of which agreed to be part of the research – one in London, one in Oxford. For all companies, the artistic director(s) approved my request or forwarded it to a colleague. Second, with the approval and assistance of the theatre practitioners, I was able to set up interviews with newcomers who were, or still are, participants at the respective theatre companies.

During the data collection process, 17 interviews were conducted over a period of ten weeks. In line with the literature on saturation (e.g. Saunders et al., 2018; Legard et al., 2003), data reaches redundancy around the eighth interview, which is a benchmark well-met by this research. Six respondents identified as a man and eleven as a woman, and, based on the data provided, the age range of all respondents was between 21 and 50. Seven interviews took place

via video call, using Google Meet or WhatsApp, and ten interviews were held in person. All interviews lasted between 35 and 70 minutes, depending on the respondents' fluency in English.

I conducted seven interviews with newcomers and eight interviews with theatre practitioners. It is worth mentioning that, over time, two newcomers had worked themselves up into a theatre practitioner role, and conversely, one theatre practitioner also had lived experience as a newcomer back in the days. Despite their dual capacity, the three of them were considered an interviewee for only one of the categories. Lastly, the two interviews I did with 'Theatre of Sanctuary' experts were ultimately used for background information and were as such not taken up in the data analysis. Table 1 provides an overview of the entire sampling.

During one of the theatre practitioner interviews, the founder and artistic director of the Legal Aliens theatre in London invited me to join the rehearsal process of the show she is working on with newcomers. In alignment with my participant observation method, I accepted the invitation and attended five of the 2-hour workshops which are organised every Monday evening at The Engine Room in Tottenham Hale, London. In every session, between 15 and 20 newcomers participated, though only about ten of them joined in every week. In total, based on the info provided by the director, Legal Aliens has up to 40 participants. Some of them are EU citizens (e.g. Czech Republic, Italy, Romania, Spain), others are from e.g. Armenia, Brazil, China, Iran, Sierre Leone and Venezuela. The majority is estimated to be between 21 and 35 years old, with a few outliers above the age of 45, including some pensioners. Some participants have been involved since the very start in 2018, others joined fairly recently.

Table 1 – Overview of the interview respondents

N°	Name	Category	Country of birth	Theatre company	Location	Sanctuary	Interview
1	Abel	Newcomer	Ethiopia	Phosphoros	London	Yes	In person
2	Ammar	Newcomer	Syria	Good Chance	London	Yes	In person
3	Carolina	Newcomer	Brazil	Migrants in Action	London	No	Online
4	Maryna	Newcomer	Ukraine	Justice in Motion	Oxford	No	In person
5	Mo	Newcomer	Sudan	Good Chance	London	Yes	Online
6	Mohand	Newcomer	Sudan	Psyche Delight	London	Yes	Online
7	Valentyna	Newcomer	Ukraine	Justice in Motion	Oxford	No	In person
8	Anja	Practitioner	Germany	Justice in Motion	Oxford	No	In person
9	Christine	Practitioner	Australia	Ice & Fire	London	Yes	In person
10	Seb	Practitioner	United Kingdom	Ice & Fire	London	Yes	In person
11	Jude	Practitioner	United Kingdom	Rank & File	Reading	Yes	In person
12	Kate	Practitioner	United Kingdom	Phosphoros	London	Yes	In person
13	Lara	Practitioner	Italy	Legal Aliens	London	Yes	In person
14	Sophie	Practitioner	France	Psyche Delight	London	Yes	Online
15	Marieke	Practitioner	The Netherlands	Justice in Motion	Oxford	No	Online
16	Ashley	Expert	United States	City of Sanctuary	London	/	Online
17	Tom	Expert	United Kingdom	Counterpoints Arts	London	/	Online

5.3. Ethics

Conducting interviews and participant observations implies a few ethical issues which need thoughtful consideration, especially when those methods involve interaction with marginalised communities such as migrants, refugees or asylum seekers. As per the European Commission's Guidance Note (2020) on research with such subjects, it is important to be aware of their vulnerable situation and potentially traumatic experiences.

5.3.1. Informed consent

Therefore, I conducted a comprehensive informed consent form outlining the research objectives and intentions as well as the interviewee's rights. The form entailed a detailed description of how the data would be collected, stored, processed and protected, including references to confidentiality. For the newcomers, I made additional requests for explicit consent about the use of certain demographic characteristics, such as their first name, age and country of birth. I provided the form to each respondent prior to the interview and allowed them to ask questions in case further clarification was needed. All interviewees gave their consent by reading and signing the form, and agreed to the recording of the interview in audio format. At the beginning of each interview, as a matter of good practice, I asked the respondents which questions they did not want to be asked. Some interviewees responded that they were not willing to describe in detail their journey to the UK or (some of) the reasons for it. I respected their request and emphasised that it is not the research focus anyways.

The theatre practitioner who co-facilitated the workshops I attended signed a similar consent form, agreeing to my role as both participant and observer throughout the different sessions. I had permission to take pictures of certain activities (see Annex 2) and to quote participants as long as their anonymity was guaranteed. However, the workshops were not recorded in audio or video format to avoid that participants would feel self-conscious or restricted to fully immerse and express themselves. For the same reason, I deemed it necessary to not just observe, but also to actively participate (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Moeran, 2007).

5.3.2. Positionality

It was important to be aware of my own positionality throughout the research process, as is the case for all qualitative methodologies (McCorkel & Meyers, 2003). With regards to the immersion, I literally was a newcomer within a group of newcomers, though without self-

identifying as a member of a marginalised community on the basis of my 'migration status' in the UK. Being an international student doing research in a country that is not your own is by no means comparable to, for instance, having the lived experience of being labelled and treated as an 'illegal' migrant.

This aligns with Dwyer and Buckle's (2009) rejection of the dichotomy of 'insider versus outsider.' They argue that the researcher can be both at the same time to foster a deeper understanding of what is being researched. "Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p.60). Applying 'active reflexivity' seemed an appropriate remedy too; that is, "adopting a disposition toward both ongoing reflection about our own social location and […] on our assumptions regarding others' perceptions" (Soedirgo & Glas, 2020, p.527).

As a human rights policy and practice student, and given my interest in this topic, it is fair to assume that I do not have radical anti-migration views. Hence, avoiding subjectivity is key, which was challenging, given that no other researchers were involved to eliminate any discrepancies when necessary, and given that there was no time for participant debriefings or validity checks with interviewees. To account for my own potential biases, I chose to analyse the data as laid out in the next section.

5.4. Thematic analysis

Based on the audio recordings as well as my own written notes, I transcribed each interview, supported by the Otter.ai transcribing tool. I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach, using a six-step process.

First, I thoroughly reviewed every transcript and made adjustments based on the audio recordings and hand-written notes to fully familiarise myself with the data. Second, without a pre-existing coding frame in place, I assessed each transcript to identify common narratives and manually code them, highlighting what was most prevalent rather than salient in relation to the research questions. That not only minimised my own biases, it also made sense given the highly explorative nature of the research.

Third, I collated various initial codes (Boyatzis, 1998) into potential themes, which I kept rather broad instead of focused. I remained purposefully open to any emerging outcomes, which increased the respondents' co-ownership of the research process and ultimately ensured an

inductive, data-driven approach. Fourth, based on the coded extracts, I reviewed the themes in relation to the entire data set.

Fifth, I developed definitions and names for each theme. Ultimately, I described the analysis in a coherent and insightful narrative for each of the respondent categories (i.e. newcomers and practitioners), integrating quotes from respondents and observations from my participation in the theatre workshops to illustrate the themes. I mostly reflected in a semantic way how respondents described their experiences, though added, where relevant, interpretations of their statements in relation to human rights (literature), as those were often more hidden.

6. RESULTS

In this section, I discuss the results of the data analysis and connect those to the literature review and, in case of unexpected outcomes, reference other academic contributions. I elaborate on the data collected through interviews with newcomers (n=7) first, and then repeat that process for the theatre practitioners (n=8). The observations from my immersion into the series of theatre workshops with newcomers are weaved into the narrative of both respondent categories, wherever relevant. Important to note is that I did not do a comparative analysis between the two categories, though I addressed any potential overlap in support of one another, as outlined in the conclusion (section 7.1) of this research.

From the data analysis, a total of nine themes emerged. The following five themes amongst the newcomers were more or less of the same 'weight': i) community building, ii) creative safe space, iii) victimhood and empowerment, iv) dehumanising stereotypes, and v) platform for the voiceless. For the practitioners, there are four themes, of which the first two were more prominent then the others: i) social acceptance and cultural integration, ii) persuading uncritical masses, iii) practicalities of sanctuary, and iv) dehumanising stereotypes. There is some overlap between themes within one respondent category as well as between themes across respondent categories. Each theme as well as its definition and associated codes are listed in Table 2.

Table 2 – Overview of themes, including definitions and codes

NEWCOMERS		
Theme	**Definition**	**Codes**
1. Community building	Creating a network of individuals from different backgrounds though with similar experiences, fostering respect, mutual understanding and social connections.	Inclusion, representation, integration, belonging, isolation
2. Creative safe space	Offering sanctuary and a safe space for newcomers to recover from emotional and physical distress and to freely and creatively communicate how they feel.	Safety, healing, expression, relief, dignity, trauma
3. Victimhood & empowerment	Providing creative tools to newcomers to enhance their self-confidence and self-worth, nurture their strengths, boost their skills, and give new meaning to life on and off stage.	Purpose, routine, respect, pride, courage, agency, potential, compensation
4. Dehumanising stereotypes	Highlighting dehumanising narratives towards newcomers – in politics, media and society – and countering unjustly mainstreamed prejudices.	Stigma, statistics, bias, hostility, label, ignorance, subhuman
5. Platform for the voiceless	Being a versatile and accessible medium for raising awareness about human rights issues, giving a voice to the voiceless, and advocating for change.	Inspiration, empathy, action, status quo, delivery, format, audience

THEATRE PRACTITIONERS		
Theme	**Definition**	**Codes**
1. Acceptance & integration	Facilitating a welcoming environment where participants can find their voice, feel secure, become a part of the community, and receive appreciation for their contributions.	Inclusion, representation, acknowledgement, safety, empowerment, heritage, adjustment
2. Persuading uncritical masses	Motivating and broadening target audiences to help challenge the anti-migration status quo, and support outreach and advocacy efforts.	Inspiration, empathy, activation, mentality, delivery, format
3. Practicalities of sanctuary	Assessing the changes in practitioners' approaches and practices that the 'Theatre of Sanctuary' award has or has not led to when working with newcomers.	Status, recognition, leverage, network, capacity, impact
4. Dehumanising stereotypes	Actively working to dismantle harmful generalisations and misconceptions about newcomers and valuing their lived experiences as a source of knowledge.	Narratives, stigma, statistics, hostility, ignorance, media, victimisation

6.1. Data analysis: newcomers

6.1.1. Theme 1: community building

For all seven newcomers, theatre has been a valuable means for community integration and avoiding isolation. That aligns with City of Sanctuary's objectives (Grace et al., 2019), even though some respondents (n=3) were part of a theatre company without the status. In different terms, they referred to the creative environment as "a metaphor for welcome" (Respondent 2), as their starting point for "interconnectedness" (Respondent 3), "camaraderie" (Respondent 5) and "companionship" (Respondent 7), affirming that artistic approaches facilitate communal interactions (Kaptani et al., 2021). At the same time, Respondents 1 and 6 acknowledged their tendency to remain within familiar circles, partly due to the lack of experience with theatre, but mentioned that they both eventually stepped out of their comfort zone. Respondent 6: *"I said to myself to go meet new people, […] do something new, because during that time, we were waiting for our papers. So we don't have colleagues, we don't have a lot of friends. We don't have anything to do. [Meeting the director] was a first step for me. […] And now we are good friends, […] a group, a mix from different countries. [Without them], I would have had a different life."* Hence, even for newcomers without a background in arts, theatre proves to be appealing and useful as a first resort in unfamiliar places and uncertain times, not in the least until they consolidated their 'right to have rights' (Arendt, 1973; Donnelly, 2007).

Respondents 1, 4, 5 and 6 explicitly highlighted how being part of a theatre community has helped them to improve their English language skills and adapt to cultural differences. Respondent 5 even dropped out of English classes as a result of faster progress in his artistic environment. Referring to the artistic director as a "sister from another mister", and echoed by Respondent 7, Respondent 4 recognised theatre as a catalyst for meaningful connections. *"[J]ust to train my English actually, just to talk to people, just not to be alone. […] people, it's my healing, it's my medicine […]. Theatre is great to find new connections, all creative people, they have more empathy. [Through] the performances, […] we have understood that for the majority of Ukrainians, […] we are fighting for freedom and we are dying for freedom. [W]e stopped to be just participants of some project, we started to be a real community."*

Like Respondents 1 and 6, Respondent 5 actively sought connections with locals or newcomers from other countries. *"I feel like I'm home now. I feel like I'm supported […]. For example, [my friend] Ammar, I love him so much. He's like my brother. Now I call him that. My*

actual brother is called Ammar as well back home, now I've got two." Others were drawn to compatriots to build a basis for forging a network in the UK. That was true for Respondents 3, 4 and 7. From participating in the Legal Aliens workshops, I noted that, in terms of intra-group dynamics, precaution remains important when different cultures and religions come together. One transgender participant said that, in the beginning, she "was worried [about interacting with] participants from countries where even just being gay is against the law." Luckily, she emphasised that there has been nothing but respect so far.

In Respondent 3's quest for representation, she observed a lack of projects driven by and for specific communities, often noticing a top-down approach "led by white Europeans" rather than horizontal collaboration. The risk of 'hermeneutical injustice' is there, as laid out by Fricker (2007) and Medina (2018). *"[A community to] talk to [each other] equally, not as a subject of research. We are our own research. [W]e try to access the spaces where we would not have access usually, if not as a collective, if not using the arts [sic]. And so by knowing that you are not alone, you feel stronger to fight for your own personal rights [and] your community's rights, for women's rights."* That resonates with the dual liberatory effect of TO, particularly in terms of instigating collective action (Opferman, 2019, p. 4). Respondent 3 added that this also challenges the idea that theatre is only a luxury for the elite, reaffirming Boal (1979), Santos (2019), Tolomelli (2016, p. 56) and Grace et al. (2019).

In terms of community, Respondent 2 urged for caution when "defining sanctuary," as such symbolisms could be interpreted differently across cultures. *"[T]heatre of sanctuary, what does this mean? [W]e need to be careful, what meaning of sanctuary we're working on. Is it the western one or the meaning that the newcomer is coming with, and to what extent you [can] cover the newcomer's expectations [sic]."* That somewhat resonates with Grace et al. (2019), who pointed out that 'sanctuary' is a verb and should be enacted, though aligns even more with scholars who are rather critical about the 'politics of the empty gestures' (e.g. Jeffers, 2019). In one of the Legal Aliens workshops, participants had to create a scene that physically explored the meaning of 'welcome.' We embodied our common idea of a very hospitable home, followed by a rather hostile one (see pictures 1 and 2 in Annex 2).

6.1.2. Theme 2: creative safe space

All but one of the newcomers (n=6) reported that the theatre companies they are associated with provided a sense of safety and somehow facilitated a journey of 'healing' (Destrooper, 2018). It illustrates that theatre can be a space for 'epistemic activism,' making

way for marginalised voices (Medina, 2018). Respondent 1 experienced theatre as a transformative space, especially valuable for authentically expressing himself without fear of judgment. *"[As someone] who identifies as a queer person, I felt like I had to hide some part of me in certain places [...], also [due to] safety concerns [...]. I had to shape myself in a different way to different groups. So I really like the space of theatre [where] I can be [myself]."* Respondent 5 echoed that. It was liberating to realise that there are minimal repercussions associated with free speech in the UK, which allowed him to articulate deep-seated thoughts and feelings that needed a creative outlet. *"I came from a country where theatre has no right. [I]t's [generally] illegal to speak [...] about the system in the country. [Here] it's a free country [...] and [being on stage] helps to explain and to express what I want to say."* Both respondents affirm that the need for expression is inherent to being human (Grace et al., 2019) as well as linked to democratic freedom (Dalaqua, 2020a).

Respondent 3 – and with her many other Latin American women who faced discrimination or gender-based violence – underscored that theatre is an antidote to the lack of recognition and stress they are burdened with in daily life, not in the least due to their "invisible yet demanding jobs" (e.g. cleaning, caregiving, etc.). That underscores Medina's (2018) notion of misrecognition. Respondent 3: *"[Here, women] can be present, they can take a deep breath, feel their body, [...] be themselves, speak their own language, make eye contact and express how they feel [...]. I call it the healing phase."* That resonates with Respondent 6, for whom theatre helped to manage emotional triggers and as such increased psychological stability and "self-control" (Destrooper, 2018). For both respondents, a sense of safety and authentic connections seem to be prerequisites for the strength needed to engage with a broader audience.

Respondent 4 highlighted theatre's role in healing from trauma (Destrooper, 2018) by sharing deeply personal stories attached to seemingly banal items brought by participants when fleeing Ukraine. *"[M]any different things which are not precious at all usually, but they are priceless at the same time. And this was the most heartbreaking session. We were talking several hours [...] and we were all just crying [...]. I was shocked, because it's so intimate. Our souls were naked."* Similarly, Respondent 7 appreciated the nurturing, family-like atmosphere (Kaptani et al., 2021) that allowed for the release of negative emotions pinned up in her body. *"[T]hese flashbacks, they are always in your memory in front of you [...]. When we could [...] tell our story, I felt some kind of relief [...]. It really helped to overcome this feeling of being lost, being on your own with [...] your pain. Because this is art therapy."* Thus, several

respondents acknowledged theatre's capacity to value embodied knowledge and suppressed feelings when grasping the complexities of humanity (Opferman, 2019; Neuman, 2007).

6.1.3.   Theme 3: victimhood and empowerment

Respondents 1 and 4 voluntarily engaged in creative activities, not just to have an outlet but also to establish a routine and keep themselves occupied. Respondent 4 found hope and empowerment in the structure the rehearsal space provided. *"From the very beginning my first idea was to be useful. And it was [of] added value for me [...], it gave me some kind of schedule [...], every Wednesday I have a rehearsal and every time it's helped me to rearrange my life somehow, because when you are suddenly nobody and nobody needs you [...] it was like psychological support."* That resonates with Respondents 5, 6 and 7, who gained "pride", "respect" and "confidence" when performing. From that stemmed the realisation that they themselves have what it takes to positively reshape their own lives and contribute to their host country, regardless of negative stereotypes. Respondent 6: *"Before I didn't know anything about theatre, I [had no] idea what actors do. So theatre for me it gave me power, to continue your life, [...] and I look [at it] through a different window now. [Everywhere] we have bad people and good people. So you have to take [life] in your own hands, work [...], [instead of] not even learn the language and then feel not welcomed [sic]."* Several participants of the Legal Aliens workshops echoed this, with one rather timid though seemingly resilient person saying that "you just have to do it, keep going, and don't give up."

In addition to providing a sense of purpose, several respondents recognised theatre's ability to devictimise them. Respondent 1 felt that his skills were embraced and his ambitions nurtured, regardless of identity markers, suggesting that testimonial and hermeneutical justice were rendered (Fricker, 2007; Brunner, 2021*). "I felt like the [theatre] company was really looking for my potential, they don't ostracise me. [Starting] from things I want to do, not just because I'm queer or black, so I really connected with that."* Not being misrecognised (Medina, 2018) or looked at solely through an 'ethnic lens' (Salzbrunn, 2022) helped him massively in other parts of life. *"I feel like [it] really gave me like, a map, how to navigate because what you get from theatre, it's like transferable skills where you can take it everywhere you go [sic], [into] jobs, etcetera."* To raise awareness about the 1-year anniversary of the war in Ukraine, Respondent 4 turned her grief into creative expression, advocating for the recognition of refugees' strengths. *"I wanted to express my feelings and do something, but not in a boring way. [...] I wanted to spend this day somehow with purpose [...] and not to be a victim [...], not just*

cry and feel weak. [...] My decision to open my own company, it was as a result from that. So I felt that I could do more, I'm still strong and not [as] weak as I thought." She implicitly promoted aesthetic justice for refugees (Dalaqua, 2020a) and showcased through performance how unproductive pity is for progressing in life (English, 2023; Wilson & Brown, 2009).

On a critical note, Respondent 2 highlighted that also theatre spaces or practices sometimes perpetuate the idea that newcomers are useless. That reinforces both notions of epistemic violence (Conquergood, 2002; Brunner, 2021) and aesthetic injustice (Dalaqua, 2020a). *"[S]ometimes [they] care more about identity politics than the story itself. [...] I think this becomes more of virtue signalling, like, look how good we are [sic]. We transitioned from the age of dignity into the age of victimhood [...]. [We]'re talking about the difference between sympathy and empathy. [If] you want to support someone [...], you need to support them with dignity [and consider] the translation of cultures, behaviours and motivations."* In acknowledging the importance of upholding dignity – a key principle in the field of human rights (e.g. Freeman, 2017) – Respondent 2 advocated for a dialectic approach (Brecht, 1964; Stevens, 2016; English, 2023).

Respondent 3 held similar views, stating that newcomers are not "guinea pigs" – a clear example of 'othering' (e.g. Spivak, 1985). Instead, they're worthy of a "mutually beneficial exchange," which aligns with the notion of 'empathy as dialogue' (Cummings, 2016). She also linked it to the right to equal pay (UDHR, Art. 23). *"[I]f [you] want us to perform, you have to pay for transport [and] accommodation, and you have to pay for a fee, [...] it is a way of valuing [our] knowledge, because why is only academic knowledge valid? Lived experience should be knowledge [...] as well. [It is a] principle, otherwise I'll be reproducing the same issues that I'm trying to fight against [...]. We need to understand that empowerment also involves financial, economic empowerment."* Once again, lived experiences were reported to be undervalued (Opferman, 2019; Neuman, 2007; Kaptani et al., 2021) and yet promoted as human rights knowledge, in line with the gap defined by e.g. Landman (2004). In contrast, Respondent 7 said that her involvement in theatre led to new career opportunities, as she was able to secure a new job in the music industry, an area she always wanted to explore.

6.1.4.   Theme 4: dehumanising stereotypes

Most respondents found theatre to be a powerful medium to challenge one-sided narratives and reduce stigma surrounding newcomers. By "using their voice" and presenting lived experiences, Respondents 1, 6 and 7 countered often biased portrayals in mainstream news media and misleading political agendas. Respondent 1: *"[D]oing our shows, people were really seeing what it's like on the ground, other than the news. Because we were showing that this is what's happening [...] to us. [...] they just want to distract from the political side."* That also emerged from the Legal Aliens workshops, as multiple participants denounced "the government's misuse of migration statistics to divert attention from domestic issues." This highlights how theatre reveals the complexities of lived experience and its capacity as a knowledge source, allowing different narratives to co-exist (Opferman, 2019; Neuman, 2007; Tolomelli, 2016) Similarly, according to Respondent 7, witnessing and engaging with performers on stage who "experienced bombings in real life" has a bigger impact than passively consuming it through watching TV (Tolomelli, 2016). Such dialectics (English, 2023) challenge people to critically use their brain (Freire, 1970) rather than having it invaded (Boal, 1979).

As such, participatory theatre is not only great for myth-busting (Grace et al. 2019), but also for amplifying voices that are frequently ignored or misunderstood. Most respondents praise the format's capacity to shed a "human light" on topics like migration (English, 2023). Respondent 3 referred to Brexit as a catalyst for the hostile narratives (Liberty, 2019; Kaptani et al., 2021; Narita, 2023). *"[Newcomers] aren't animals, they eat like you, they go to places like you, they take the bus like you, they walk on the streets like you. You don't see it because you don't want to see it. [...] All our voices have always been there. You just refuse to hear us."* This exemplifies the literature on the 'hierarchy of belonging' and being othered as 'inferior' or 'unworthy of protection' (Kaptani et al., 2021; English, 2023; Reynolds et al., 2018; Schroeter, 2013; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1985). Respondent 3 argued that it is partly due to the use of impersonal data, not only in politics or the media, but also in academia. *"[P]eople in these [academic] papers, they're just anonymous, they have no face, they have no bodies, you don't see them. It's so important to acknowledge that we exist. We are diverse, we have diverse journeys."* Translating that into a solid story brought to life on stage helps to reclaim and reshape the narrative, as reinforced by Respondent 4. *"It's all about statistics. You know, so many Ukrainians came, [...] so many Ukrainians died, [but] they don't know us. [T]hen the reaction is 'poor refugee' [...]. I wanted to show [...] real people [...] to understand that we have same hopes, feelings, children, knowledge, and so on [sic]. The human side."*

Respondents 1 and 5 also highlighted people's ignorance, especially about ongoing struggles that newcomers face beyond arrival in a new country, such as finding work, pursuing education and navigating bureaucratic processes. Respondents 2 and 4 echoed this. Unable to secure permanent status or fully integrate, newcomers are kept in "purgatory" or "a state of limbo," which connects to the 'right to have rights' (Arendt, 1973; Donnelly, 2007). Such "grey zones" hinder their ability to contribute meaningfully to society, perpetuating a cycle of marginalisation and prejudice (Medina, 2018). Again, this shows how policy can be a vessel for state-endorsed discrimination (Liberty, 2019; Kaptani et al., 2021). That resonates with "stop talking about boats,"[6] the working title chosen by the participants of the Legal Aliens workshops for the show they are devising. They said that "being a [newcomer] is about more than just crossing borders." As such, denying newcomers the right to work also feeds the perception of them being incompetent, which in turn contradicts the mainstreamed narrative that "newcomers steal locals' jobs." If that was at all true, following Respondents 2, 3 and 4, then it is merely for "those jobs that locals refuse to take up," rather than what most newcomers are actually professionally qualified for. Respondent 4: *"[People] should start to think about refugees as potential co-workers, as team members, even as family members, […] so it's no longer humiliating by default […] because of your status."*[7]

Ultimately, Respondents 3 and 7 also highlighted that the arts foster resilience and a strong sense of dignity amongst newcomers, and that their self-worth should not be dependent on those who perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Respondent 3 also explicitly rejected the term 'rehumanising.' *"[Then] we understand that, by default, we are being dehumanised, and this is not our problem, it is the problem of who does it. We are humans, people just see us and what we do through different lenses. […] we don't want to bring humanity to us, because we already have it."* By upholding such views, both respondents keep an objective distance from the harm inflicted upon them, in line with the 'Verfremdungseffekt' (Brecht, 1964; Stevens, 2016). As

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[6] During the Legal Aliens workshops, participants were e.g. paired up to invent migration stories off the beaten path as well as to mirror each other's movements, transcending cultural differences and synchronising their energy. They also walked across the stage, embodying different emotions shouted by facilitators, culminating in a group tableau. This was coupled with folding paper boats and dispersing them across the stage, shifting attention from the vessel to the people who are often forced to use it (see picture 3 in Annex 2).

[7] This aligns with the opening scene as rehearsed during the Legal Aliens workshops. Participants practiced walking in slow motion, focusing on their posture and gaze, and forming group poses to convey strength and unity. "We want to show that we're here, we're strong, we're ready, whether you like us or not," a participant said (see pictures 4 and 5 in Annex 2).

such, they showcase that oppression cannot sustain itself as long as they do not consent to being affected by it (Dalaqua, 2020a). This highlights how theatre operates as a laboratory for debating human nature and the morality underpinning human rights (Donnelly, 2007, 2008, 2013; Freeman, 2017; Arendt, 1973; English, 2023).

6.1.5.   Theme 5: platform for the voiceless

Respondents 1 and 6 described how theatre about newcomers' lived experiences served as a "model" or "example" for refugee communities as an audience, demonstrating that they too could engage in acting and advocacy for their own sake. They both said that they take action by being "a voice for the voiceless," embodying the fact that social conditions are alterable and impermanent (Stevens, 2016). Respondent 6: *"I told the [refugees] that I was like them, but also to look at where I am now, just in a few years […], I've given them a life example. When I came here I know just the three words, 'yes', 'no' and 'good morning' […]. Give hope and inspire to do their best [sic]."* Respondent 1 also acknowledged the versatility of theatre when it comes to addressing human rights topics and promoting intersectionality, showing different versions of reality (Tolomelli, 2016; Opferman, 2019; English, 2023). That aligns with Dalaqua's (2020a) notion of aesthetic multiplicity and Madison's (2010) concept of response-ability. *"[T]heatre can move them to do something like […] volunteering, spread[ing] the word about it. [Not everyone is] going to wake up and accept everyone, but it's showing them that [we] exist. [It] could teach people how to live with everyone harmoniously, […] respect each other with dignity."*

Respondent 5 held similar views on theatre as a tool to "educate audiences," explaining that "changing thoughts means changing politics." Conversely, Respondent 2 said that a dialectic approach is more efficient to challenge the status quo, prioritising empathy over sympathy once again (Brecht, 1964; English, 2023; Arendt, 1973; Wilson & Brown, 2009). *"I think the theatre's job is not to teach, […] seeing people as victims, that makes your job easy, you just sympathise. Yes, sympathy is the laziest task ever one does [sic]. Empathy is a different story."* To avoid that audiences resist being taught or criticised directly, he emphasised that the story and the format needs to feel "close enough to home." That resonates with Respondent 3, who said that a strong message often benefits from a rather "easily digestible" delivery. *"With performance we can communicate in more palpable ways, so [audiences] see there are people experiencing that, not only numbers, they look at people's eyes. Theatre [is] more accommodating, is less aggressive, and people can accept it in a better way. So we first put on*

like a little bit of makeup, and then go straight to the point." She underscored that oppressed groups need to "take centre-stage" and ask the public what change they can contribute to (Boal, 1979), which aligns with the notion of 'emancipated spectatorship' (Stevens, 2016). *"This is what Boal says, [...] he used the theatre to challenge the status quo, to bring invisibilised, marginalised communities to tell their own stories [...] and counter the narrative. [With his] philosophy [...] we call people for action [sic]."*

Such an inductive approach humanises stories which people usually can't relate to (English, 2023; Donnelly, 2013). That resonates with what Respondent 1 said about people living in harmony, despite their differences. Respondent 4 echoed that too, though she advocated for thought-provoking performances that are more "disruptive" and "unconventional." For Respondent 7, in order to "inspire dialogue and action," theatre has to be "authentic" above all. Finally, Respondents 3 and 4 highlighted that it is useful to reach out to all sorts of audiences, even those that are by default supportive of newcomers. Respondent 3: *"[Some] stories are of such a specific group of people [...]. So you might be an artsy, cool and open-minded person, but I'm sure you never thought about how difficult it is for [migrant] women delivery drivers when they are in their periods [sic]."* Moreover, according to Respondent 4, targeting decision-makers and bureaucrats is not by definition useless, who in turn did not want to dehumanise hem. *"People like politicians, and people in all these bureaucracies, they are people and they have emotions, [...] they could be hosts for refugees at the same time, they could be visitors of theatres."* That resonates with City of Sanctuary's aim to not only target the 'usual suspects' (Grace et al., 2019).

6.2. Data analysis: theatre practitioners

6.2.1. Theme 1: social acceptance and cultural integration

All eight theatre practitioners highlighted the importance of participatory theatre for fostering inclusion, and to feel represented as part of a community. Respondent 12 referred to its transformative power as "a site of rethinking care, solidarity and hope." Respondent 9 and 10 offer creative and community-building workshops for those affected by human rights issues, such as homelessness, sexual assault and homophobia. Additionally, their public-facing verbatim readings are usually delivered by a mixed cast of local and global majority actors, with or without lived experience (see picture 6 in Annex 2). Respondent 11 unites people with disabilities, with migration backgrounds as well as victims of domestic violence. *"[Newcomers] are part of a collective of individuals [...] presenting unique truths."* Respondent 14 described the communal value of engaging both locals and newcomers. It generates trust and distracts from everyday struggles: *"A lot of people who arrive in this country are extremely isolated due to the language barrier, due to the lack of money [...]. They are not allowed to work [or] study. [Theatre] brings a bit of relief."* In other words, when being denied the 'right to have rights' (Arendt, 1973), theatre can indeed offer sanctuary.

Respondent 13 echoed this, as she receives referrals from doctors for newcomers who feel depressed and isolated. Her workshops at Legal Aliens function as "a space of relief for their constantly precarious state of mind." As an observant participant myself (Moeran, 2007), I noticed that migration status does not matter when one wants to join the community. Asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and basically anyone whose first language is not English fits the typical participant profile. She said: *"It's important to mix [newcomers] with settled migrants as well because [they] want to have a sense of how their life can progress, [of what] to aim at."* I observed that this approach fosters mutual respect, hope and representation, and it helps that she and her co-facilitators have a migration background too. Nonetheless, she admitted that it is a struggle to inform newcomers about the inclusive platform she is offering. With or without sanctuary status, building an authentic reputation and trust is a long-term process – it is not just "distributing flyers." It did help though that drinks and snacks were offered for free and that transport costs were covered for participants. Similarly, Respondent 11 emphasised that consistency is key when working with marginalised groups.

For Respondent 12, focusing on capacity-building and training opportunities fosters a sense of belonging and recognition for newcomers. Her theatre company sometimes gets commissioned for campaigns or creative work, helping newcomers to build their portfolio. Respondent 11 even said to promote leadership. Rather than being passive beneficiaries, newcomers are *"in the driver's seat. They have [to] feel a sense of autonomy and ownership. [...] that's why they keep coming back."* This empowers them to lead with agency, away from victimising mindsets, as advocated for by English (2023) and Dalaqua (2020a).

To overcome language barriers, Respondent 13 applies and advocates for the use of non-verbal theatrical formats. *"[We start] from the body, teach people how to be proud of their presence and what it means to be on stage, but also in life, to take [up] space, because that is political in itself."* That aligns with Boal, who said that human beings equal theatre. Respondent 13: *"Movement can be empowering in itself. [Spoken word is] always the last thing as we try to make things happen physically and visually first."* Nonetheless, also physical activities often need proper verbal explanations, which was something the facilitators struggled with at least once in every workshop. Often lengthy and unclear instructions led to confusion amongst participants and loss of spontaneity. Such issues were often resolved with humour, encouraging participants to flip narratives by "making fun of the perpetrators instead of the victims."

Respondent 14 echoed this, as offering a space for people to express themselves in a way that transforms a traumatic experience into something they can be proud of (Destrooper, 2018). *"[I]t's to create beauty from horror [...]. [E]ven though some people might think it's superficial, I think that drawing, playing music, singing and moving are vital. [T]hey went through so much [...], they feel like an empty bottle. They don't feel their body anymore. They literally can't feel it."* Her approach combines artistic practices such as dance, clowning and image theatre to create "visual poetry" and "tableaus of metaphors," which are known for improving mental health. She promotes the use of low-threshold games that foster energy, community and rhythm. Only Respondents 8, 13, 14 and 15 explicitly referred to Boal's (1979) philosophy of TO. However, the TO formats and the extent to which the respondents apply them varies. Literature shows that this is quite common, as TO techniques have been modified to serve different goals (e.g. Boal, 2002; Dennis, 2009; Kaptani & Yuval-Davis, 2008; Erel et al., 2017).

For Respondents 9 and 10, increasing newcomers' sense of safety is one of the reasons why they choose Verbatim Theatre (Derbyshire & Hodson, 2008) over TO. Newcomers can share their testimonies safely, in a way that avoids being re-traumatised. Respondent 9: *"[They] don't have to go through [their story] and do it [a] 100 times, even if it's in [their] own words."*

That contrasts with Respondents 8, 11 and 13, who said it is key to prioritise and respect what participants are willing to share and work towards, regardless of the format. Respondent 11: *"[W]hat they think they're getting into and what they're actually getting into might differ, things can get lost in translation."* Nevertheless, partnerships with other service providers and regular check-ins with experts foster both safety as well as participation. In the Legal Aliens workshops, participants could voluntarily open up about their migration journey and embed their stories into the devised theatre scenes. Only a handful took the opportunity to do so, though most of them avoided being left too vulnerable by not going into much detail.

In that light, Respondent 12 advocated for "theatrical resistance" that explores alternative realities. Rather than being predicated on the promise of authenticity or truth, her approach encourages fictional narratives that "show us what might be" (see e.g. Tolomelli, 2016). Respondent 8 echoed this point of view. Conversely, in favour of verbatim work, Respondent 10 pointed out that safety is not only important for newcomers. *"I think there's a safety for audiences to listen in a way you're not worried about the person [sic]. There's not a sense of [...] guilt, of voyeurism. It removes also putting people [sic] on a pedestal as martyrs or heroes or victims [...]."* As such, the audience can imagine the reality of the story without it being an explicitly physical "recreation." Based on my experience, however, this format unfortunately does not evoke the minimum of 'disturbance' (Nossel, 2016) required for an audience to take action (Kaptani et al., 2021).

6.2.2.   Theme 2: persuading uncritical masses

All eight respondents mentioned that raising awareness and advocating for change are amongst their objectives, which resonates with the literature on 'artivism' (Nossel, 2016; Salzbrunn, 2022). Respondents 8, 9 and 14 recognised theatre's power to change mentalities, though that its high-level impact may be limited depending on the size of the company. They suggested a more grass-roots, bottom-up approach, and as such acknowledge theatre's capacity as an inductive experiment for tackling moral issues (English, 2023;   Donnelly, 2013). Respondent 8 stated: *"You need to change people's hearts before you can change their minds. That's precisely what performing arts are for."* In that light, Respondents 8, 11 and 15 point to the use of both specific and spontaneous outreach. They discussed the value of outdoor, impromptu performances that can "capture a wide audience by accident," while also implementing targeted advocacy to ensure that e.g. policymakers hear directly from individuals with lived experience. Respondent 11: *"[Showing] how policies are responsible for creating*

the barriers [newcomers face], [how] they're dysfunctional and they might cost the governments [and taxpayers] more [sic]."

Persuading people into taking action is a higher form of progress than merely raising awareness or triggering compassion (English, 2023; Cummings, 2016; Brecht, 1964; Wilson & Brown, 2009), which is what most respondents implied. Echoed by Respondents 8 and 15, Respondent 9 said: *"[If] you're a citizen of this country, [and when] there's an election coming up, you've got an MP, do something on that level, or join a charity that's helping people with practical things [...]. That's what we're trying to direct people to."* In line with Madison (2010), Respondent 14 encourages "a sense of responsibility as a citizen" through theatre, particularly in upholding the right to freedom of expression (UDHR, Art. 19). *"Expressing yourself, [it] is a human need. It's a very vital one. That's the big difference with being an animal [sic]."*

Respondent 8 said about her physical theatre ethos that "we move to move you," implying to trigger both an emotional and hands-on response from the audience. She, and Respondents 9 and 14 with her, also brought up the utility of post-show Q&A sessions. I attended one following Ice & Fire's verbatim performance of 'Asylum Monologues' and one following Psyche Delight's theatre show 'Mohand & Peter,' both in London. Respondent 9: *"We don't just come in and bring these tough stories. [Afterwards], we try and steer the discussion, asking what are we going to do in your own sphere of influence about it [sic]?"* The newcomers who performed elaborated on the impact theatre had on adjusting to the UK, while enabling spectators to directly engage with their lived reality. Most found that to be of "added value," which reinforces the effectiveness of theatre when it is of a dialogic nature (English, 2023; Cummings, 2016).

Most respondents acknowledged the challenges of directly changing the minds of those holding radical beliefs, noting that this can be unsafe for participants and that it is usually ineffective. At the same time, as per Respondent 12, bringing theatre to a refugee audience or "people that are on a similar journey" inevitably results in trying to convince those who already are. However, she emphasises the significant potential for people with moderate political views to access new and in-depth perspectives and learn more about critical human rights issues, such as the framing and age assessments of unaccompanied minors in the UK. Respondent 13 echoes this: *"[If] you're not completely taken over by 'the dark side', if you're just on the fence or if you're somebody who cares or doesn't care that much, maybe those are the people we should target [sic]. [T]he person who could go either way."*

6.2.3. Theme 3: practicalities of sanctuary

Almost all theatre practitioners (Respondents 9, 11, 12, 13 and 14) who are part of a theatre of sanctuary recognised that the status resulted in a 'symbolic' recognition for and credibility of the work they've been doing with and for newcomers. They also reported that being embedded in a network of similar organisations has been useful in terms of sharing contacts and knowledge. That resonates with the City of Sanctuary's mission and objectives, as outlined in the literature review (City of Sanctuary, n.d.; Grace et al., 2019). However, they all noted that the award did not lead to any other practical changes or "higher audience numbers" (Respondent 14). Conversely, Respondent 8, who is not part of a theatre of sanctuary, reported difficulties "accessing refugee communities," which indicates that having the respective status could alleviate this issue.

For Respondent 9, it opened doors for accessing funding and partnerships. Respondent 13 echoed this, noting that her small-scale, grassroots approach is of interest to larger theatre companies, who could in turn offer broader outreach and visibility when collaborating. In contrast, to a certain extent, Respondent 11 found the recognition to be counterproductive, as more requests for often unpaid work came in, which did not always have the newcomers' or her company's best interest at heart. She also pointed out that the application process for receiving the status was "a hassle" which overstretched capacity. Conversely, Respondent 12 deemed the award "self-evident," as it aligns seamlessly with her theatre company's mission and DNA. She mentioned that City of Sanctuary is "quite understaffed," though without implying that the awarding process therefore had become an arbitrary "tick-box exercise."[8]

Finally, even though most practitioners agreed that the sanctuary framework offers indirect support to newcomers, Respondents 11, 13 and 14 expressed some degree of disappointment related to its lack of immediate significance to the target group. Respondent 13: *"I [...] was trying to find a part-time job for one of our youngest [refugee] participants [...], because [when you turn 18], they kick you out [of] the government accommodation. I was hoping [...] to find him a job as an usher, for instance. I couldn't find [any larger theatre of sanctuary] who was willing to employ [him]."* Also, according to Respondent 14, too many

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[8] That was confirmed in the conversations I had with the City of Sanctuary's Arts Stream coordinator, Ashley Beckett, and Counterpoints Arts' senior producer, Tom Green. However, as said, their input as experts served as background information and is not taken up in the data analysis.

theatres of sanctuary focus on newcomers only, rather than reaping the social inclusion benefits of a mixed-participant approach.

6.2.4. Theme 4: dehumanising stereotypes

Respondents 9, 11, 12 and 13 explicitly mentioned the detrimental impact of a decade of the UK's hostile environment being in place (Kaptani et al., 2021; Liberty, 2019; Narita, 2023; Schroeter, 2013). Respondent 12 advocated for more exposure through theatre of the deeply rooted complexities of those policies. Respondent 13 echoed this: *"[Y]ou have to explain that there are no safe routes [to come to the UK] but that means going beyond the easy headline, and people don't care [or] listen to the details, unless [if] it's posted online by somebody they like […]."* She underscored as well that the harsh reality of newcomers' journeys do not end upon arrival, implying unequal treatment by the state (Liberty, 2019; English, 2023; Donnelly 2013; Dalaqua, 2020a). Respondent 11 said that she challenges audiences to think critically instead of blindly following governments that aim to divide by putting people in "their own little box," which connects to the frameworks of Freire (1970) and Boal (1979).

In that light, Respondent 9 criticised the superficiality of mainstream media representations (e.g. Salzbrunn, 2022; Tolomelli, 2016; Grace et al., 2019), advocating for theatre as a means to capture the "real experiences" and "worldview" of individuals instead of "sound bites" or "case studies." Respondent 10 acknowledged that it is not only about conveying a sequence of life events, but also newcomers' perspectives, sensibilities, humour and passions. *"[U]nderstanding something from a human perspective rather than […] the stats and figures is so important."* That reinforces what English (2023) is advocating for. It resonates with Respondent 11, who said that "[w]e're people and communities, not just names and numbers." Interestingly, she simultaneously critiqued verbatim theatre – used by Respondents 9 and 10 – as a format that itself tends to extract marginalised stories as commodities, which, if true, would be a form of epistemic violence (Conquergood, 2002; Brunner, 2021).

"[People are] groomed into hating foreigners," Respondent 13 stated, mainly due to opaque laws and biased media "echo chambers," which emphasises what Schroeter (2013) described as the rationalisation of unfair practices. It is also proof for how the notions of 'othering' (e.g. Said, 1978; Spivak, 1985) and 'crimmigration' (e.g. Stumpf, 2006; Bosworth & Guild, 2008) are manifested. Theatre can serve as a form of "resistance against dominant, often reductive and oversimplified narratives," according to Respondent 12. Respondent 14 shared those views yet also deemed it necessary to avoid perpetuating a simplistic helper-victim

dichotomy. *"[As if only] local people are helpers and asylum seekers are the people needing help [sic]."* She viewed theatre as a means for individuals to reclaim their narrative and transform public perception from pity and fear into admiration and respect, which was echoed by Respondent 15. That resonates deeply with the Brechtian (1964) dialectics and English' (2023) 'Aesthetics of Human Rights.' Even in a non-participatory context, Respondent 9 pointed to the importance of equipping participants with tools for expression without having a rigid, pre-fixed empowerment agenda. Respondent 10 elaborated that this approach allows individuals to direct the narrative and approve the content before it is performed by others.

7. CONCLUSION

I sought to narrow the gap between theatre and human rights research. Therefore, I aimed to explore i) whether participatory theatre practices produce useful human rights knowledge, ii) how newcomers in the wider London area experience their participation in such practices, and iii) whether the Theatre of Sanctuary status is of added value for theatre practitioners to amplify newcomers' voices and lived experiences.

As per the literature (sections 2 and 3), several concepts and frameworks were the building blocks for this research: epistemic and aesthetic injustice, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Dialectical Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, the overlapping moral foundations between theatre and human rights, and the UK's hostile environment policy.

I conducted 17 qualitative semi-structured interviews (i.e. with 8 practitioners, 7 newcomers, 2 experts) and immersed myself as an 'observant participant' (Moeran, 2007) into a series of five theatre workshops with newcomers, facilitated by Legal Aliens, a theatre of sanctuary in London. The thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) resulted in a rich and nuanced understanding of the respondents' experiences with participatory theatre and its connection with human rights.

In the remainder of this section, I discuss the main outcomes in view of the research questions (section 4), as restated below, and address research limitations and recommendations.

How do newcomers in the wider London area experience participatory theatre practices and are those practices a potentially useful human rights research method?

1. Do participatory theatre practices support newcomers in the wider London area in feeling recognised, represented and empowered?
2. Are participatory theatre practices useful to better understand newcomers' lived experiences and, as such, a relevant method for human rights research?
3. Practically speaking, do theatres of sanctuary have more leverage to amplify newcomers' voices than theatre companies without the sanctuary status?

7.1. Discussion of results

7.1.1. Research question 1

> Of all subquestions, the first one can be answered most positively. Yes, despite some criticism about the lack of newcomer-led projects and virtue signalling, participatory theatre practices in the wider London area effectively support newcomers in feeling recognised and empowered. Newcomers felt enabled to join communities, practice English, culturally integrate and reduce isolation. Theatre also provided a safe space for expression and healing. The purpose, skills and confidence gained enabled them to e.g. find a job or stand up for their rights.

Integration & inclusion

First and foremost, all newcomers (n=7) reported that participatory theatre – regardless of the company's sanctuary status – has been a catalyst for establishing new connections, practising English and building community, both with other newcomers and local residents. This was also true for those who had no prior experience with theatre. That affirmed how artistic practices facilitate communal interactions (Kaptani et al., 2021) and reduce isolation. Similarly, all practitioners (n=8) highlighted the importance of participatory theatre for fostering inclusion and cultural integration. This community-related outcome was expected, though as a by-product rather than participatory theatre's main virtue, given its indirect link to human rights. Important nonetheless, as some newcomers testified feeling more at ease standing up for their rights as part of a creative collective. That reinforced TO's 'dual liberatory effect' (Opferman, 2019, p. 4). At the same time, the lack of theatre projects not only *for* but also led *by* newcomers was criticised, as well as the ambiguity around 'sanctuary,' given that its meaning differs cross-culturally. The importance of such precaution also emerged from the workshops, exemplified by potential clashes between queer identities and religious backgrounds.

Mental well-being

Interlinked with community building, nearly all newcomers (n=6) said that theatre provided a sense of safety and room for healing from traumatic experiences. Respondents were enabled to release pinned-up emotions and authentically express themselves without fear of personal or political repercussions. As such, theatres are spaces for 'epistemic activism' (Medina, 2018) and amplifying marginalised voices, which is important for democracy and the freedom of expression (Grace et al., 2019; Dalaqua, 2020a). Moreover, theatre compensated for

the lack of recognition and the precariousness most newcomers are facing. That highlighted its capacity to value embodied knowledge as a source of information (Opferman, 2019; Neuman, 2007). However, the data also shows that, in the context of TO, newcomers' exposure to broader audiences must be aligned with the speed and depth of their recovery. Most practitioners echoed this, while adding that it is a long-term process to establish an authentic reputation, mutual respect and trust. The majority advocated for non-verbal formats, which boost mental health. Four practitioners explicitly referred to Boal or TO, whereas two others preferred Verbatim Theatre for the safety it provides. However, the latter may not result in the 'disturbance' (Nossel, 2016) needed to provoke action, and was critiqued for being extractive (Brunner, 2021).

Productivity & potential

Several newcomers reported that participatory theatre made them feel useful and empowered to devictimise themselves. As it facilitated a routine, it productively rearranged their lives and gave them purpose. For some respondents, theatre resulted in employment opportunities and skills transferrable to other parts of life, and the confidence to bargain and advocate for (the right to) equal pay. The theatre environment embraced their contributions and nurtured their ambitions, regardless of demographic characteristics. It helped avoiding the trap of crying and weakness, which underscored how unproductive pity and pathos are for progress (English, 2023; Cummings, 2016; Brecht, 1964). Conversely, one respondent accused some theatres of virtue signalling and thus, like other human rights actors, of inadvertently perpetuating the idea that newcomers are useless. Some practitioners echoed that, denouncing echo chambers and simplistic helper-victim dichotomies.

7.1.2. Research question 2

The answer to the second subquestion is also yes, though more nuanced than the first one. Participatory theatre practices are useful for understanding and showcasing newcomers' lived experience, given the value practitioners allocate to the uniqueness and depth of individual stories and the various tools and formats they provide for verbal and physical expression. It helps to challenge stereotypes and one-sided narratives while preserving dignity and self-worth. It is unclear, however, if it suffices to substantially influence human rights policy and practice. That is predominantly due to the lack of an explicit human rights language, and the difficulties in reaching critical key audiences.

Human-centric counter-narratives

Overall, all newcomers (n=7) and practitioners (n=8) recognised theatre as a powerful medium for myth-busting, challenging one-sided narratives and reducing stigma. It enabled newcomers to reclaim their stories and counter biased portrayals in media (e.g. sound bites), politics (e.g. othering) and academia (e.g. impersonal data) with a human touch. They highlighted theatre's significance as a vessel for knowledge. Engaging with performers with lived experience is more impactful than passively consuming the news (Tolomelli, 2016). Such dialectical engagement (English, 2023), encourages audiences to critically use their brains (Freire, 1970) rather than being spoon-fed narrow views (Boal, 1979). In that light, several respondents explicitly referenced the UK's hostile environment (Liberty, 2019; Kaptani et al., 2021). Newcomers reported that many people are ignorant, often thinking about migration in terms of boats rather than people. That extends to the challenges newcomers face upon arrival. The ambiguity of their migration status resonates with being denied the 'right to have rights' (Arendt, 1973) and perpetuates a cycle of marginalisation and state-endorsed discrimination (Kaptani et al., 2021; Schroeter, 2013; Spivak, 1985). Nonetheless, through theatre, newcomers were reminded of their dignity and self-worth, which made it easier to distance themselves from stereotypes. They do not need to be 'rehumanised,' as that would imply consenting to the loss of their humanity in the first place.

Targeting the open-minded

Some newcomers viewed participatory theatre as a platform for the voiceless, to illustrate to their peers that their stories matter, that the status quo is challengeable and their social conditions changeable (Stevens, 2016). Most practitioners echoed this. There was praise for theatre's versatility to shed light on various human rights stories, including intersectionality (Tolomelli, 2016; English, 2023; Opferman, 2019), though the explicit use of human rights language was largely absent. Some respondents promoted educational theatre, whereas the majority emphasised its power to nurture audiences' ability to actively and practically respond in their own personal sphere (Madison, 2010). All practitioners (n=8) mentioned awareness raising and advocacy to be amongst their objectives, in line with 'artivism' (Nossel, 2016; Salzbrunn, 2022). Most of them employed a bottom-up approach combined with outdoor, impromptu performances to capture wide audiences spontaneously. Also post-show Q&A sessions were said to be popular. Finally, most practitioners believed it to be both ineffective and unsafe for the newcomers involved to target people with radical anti-migration beliefs.

7.1.3. Research question 3

> The answer to the third subquestion is predominantly no. The Theatre of Sanctuary award is mostly an act of symbolism and its practical benefits are rather minimal, certainly with regards to newcomers.

Symbolism of sanctuary

All but one (n=4) practitioners from a theatre of sanctuary said that the status brings symbolic recognition, credibility and networking opportunities. However, none of them reported that it had led to significant practical changes or higher audience numbers. One respondent described the application process as a hassle and found the status somewhat counterproductive, attracting unpaid work requests that were neither benefitting newcomers, nor the company. Some practitioners agreed that the status does not result in immediate support for newcomers, and critiqued other companies for not leveraging the status to mix newcomers with locals. Practitioners from theatres without the award reported difficulties accessing newcomer communities and disappointment about their unawareness, despite their track record.

7.1.4. Overall conclusion

In sync with the literature, albeit on a rather secondary level, participatory theatre has proven to operate as an inductive laboratory for debating human nature and the morality underpinning societal issues. In some particular cases, that included discussions about human rights, however indirectly (English, 2023; Donnelly, 2013). More importantly, though, were the overwhelmingly positive reactions about participatory theatre being a dynamic space for newcomers to freely and safely assert their humanity and collectively challenge oppressions of various sizes. Practitioners showcased the utility of participatory theatre – and some of TO in particular – as an alternative knowledge source, though struggle with reaching those who need to hear their message most. Nonetheless, it was agreed upon that encouraging people to take action – both participants and audiences – is far more productive than merely evoking compassion (English, 2023; Cummings, 2016; Brecht, 1964; Boal, 1979). Being victimised is ultimately dehumanising in and of itself.

7.2. Research limitations and recommendations

I recommend expanding i) the thematic and ii) the geographical scope of this research. First, rather than focusing on migration, the connection between participatory theatre and human rights could also be explored in the context of e.g. LGBTQI+ rights, religion, homelessness or poverty, and as such increase the credibility of this approach. Second, future studies could include many more, if not all theatres of sanctuary across the UK, as to obtain a more nuanced view on the (potential) benefits of the award. In that light, I would also recommend theatres of sanctuary to collaborate more, e.g. by developing joint newcomer-led programmes, collectively applying for grants or upscaling theatre productions.

Due to the limited timeframe, my 'observant participation' was limited to a series of five theatre workshops. I recommend other researchers to engage for a much longer period of time and in multiple workshops and formats across different theatre companies. Additionally, and for the same reason, I did not design or facilitate a TO workshop myself. An A-Z reflection of such a process could have provided even richer data, especially when focused on one specific format (e.g. Rainbow of Desire, Forum Theatre, Legislative Theatre, etc.). I would also recommend expanding on or zooming in on particularly sensitive aspects of participatory processes, such as intersectionality and intra-group dynamics, language barriers, risks of retraumatisation and the commodification of suffering.

I did not manage to speak to at least one newcomer and one practitioner of every company involved in this research – for some there was only one respondent, for others there were multiple, yet within the same respondent category. For a more streamlined data analysis, I would recommend other researchers to consider this. The sampling of the overall respondent group could also be refined further, e.g. based on year of arrival in the UK, prior experience with theatre, and demographics such as age, ethnic background, gender and migration status (i.e. migrant, refugee, asylum seeker).

It is rather complex to capture the actual impact of participatory theatre on (target) audiences' attitudes and behaviours towards newcomers and their human rights. That was not within the scope of this research, though I recommend both human rights and theatre scholars to further investigate that, both quantitatively and qualitatively, for a better understanding of the outward effectiveness of such methods. Together, they would also have a stronger position to advocate for policy change.

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Annexes

Annex 1 – Interview guides

Interview Guide – Theatre Practitioners

- What was your motivation to start or get involved in a theatre company that is concerned about the grievances of newcomers?
- How would you describe your artistic and community approach, and which formats do you use? (Optional prompts: Theatre of the Oppressed, etc.)
- What makes participatory theatre more impactful than traditional theatre? What are the most common benefits and obstacles? (Optional prompts: action vs. sympathy, etc.)
- How does participatory theatre help newcomer communities, both on and off stage? (Optional prompts: friendships, empowerment, opportunities, etc.)
- How do you navigate ethical considerations when integrating real-life stories and experiences of newcomers into theatre practices and performances? (Optional prompts: trauma, intra-group differences, etc.)
- Who are your target audiences? How do you reach them, and what are the related challenges? (Optional prompts: preaching to the converted, hostility, etc.)
- What is your view on human rights in general, and particularly the human rights of newcomers? What role can participatory theatre play in this context?
- How do you measure and promote the impact of the work you do?
- If applicable, how would you describe the advantages and disadvantages of being a Theatre of Sanctuary?

Interview Guide – Newcomers

- How does it feel to be a newcomer in the UK? (Optional prompts: hostility, stigma, misperceptions, etc.)
- What was your motivation to join a participatory theatre company?
- How has your participation in theatre helped you, on and off stage? (Optional prompts: recognition, empowerment, networking, etc.)
- What have been the most challenging aspects of being involved in participatory theatre? (Optional prompts: language barriers, prior experience, cultural differences, etc.)

-    Why do you think it is important and useful to communicate and perform newcomers' stories? (Optional prompts: positive social change, knowledge gap, ignorance, etc.)
-    Which changes did you notice in the people's perceptions since you got involved in participatory theatre? (Optional prompts: target audience, mindset, advocacy, etc.)
-    If you feel comfortable sharing, what is your country of birth, when did you come to the UK and what were your main reasons for it?
-    If applicable, were you aware of the company's Theatre of Sanctuary status when you joined it, and if so, has that been of any practical help for you?

Annex 2 – Pictures

Pictures 1 and 2 – Legal Aliens workshop: building (welcoming and hostile) human houses

Picture 3 – Legal Aliens workshop: 'Stop talking about boats' physical scene with props

Picture 4 – Legal Aliens workshop: rehearsal of opening scene on presence and unity

Picture 5 – Legal Aliens workshop: group tableau and movement mirroring activity

Picture 6 – Ice & Fire: workshop, verbatim reading of 'Asylum Monologues' and Q&A