

## Authors

Cigdem Esin, University of East London

Cigdem Esin is senior lecturer in Psychosocial Studies and co-director of the Centre for Narrative Research. Her research interests are in narrative methodologies, interconnections between gender, power and politics, migrant and refugee narratives and visual storytelling.

Aura Lounasmaa, University of East London [a.lounasmaa@uel.ac.uk](mailto:a.lounasmaa@uel.ac.uk)

Aura Lounasmaa is a lecturer in the School of Social Sciences Foundation programme, Psychosocial Studies and Life Stories in the Jungle short course. Aura is the director of the Erasmus+ funded Open Learning Initiative course, which introduces refugees and asylum seekers in the UK to higher education. She is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Narrative Research.

## **Narrative and ethical (in)action: creating spaces of resistance with refugee-storytellers in the Calais ‘Jungle’ camp**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores how a multimodal narrative methodology can open a creative, relational and safe space, in which refugee-storytellers negotiate their positioning within racialised power imbalances. Personal narratives that facilitate/enable storyteller’s agency have a potential to empower and elicit social change (Williams et al. 2003). When refugees are denied their right to claim/speak/act, the act of narrating becomes a vehicle for social change. Creative workshops delivered in the ‘Jungle’ refugee camp 2016-17 enabled us to co-construct a relational space with refugee participants, based on the principle of ethical hesitancy (Kofoed & Staunæs, 2015). In this paper we argue that the relational space offered possibilities for refugee storytellers to resist and challenge the representation of refugee stories, whilst giving rise to ethically important moments. These moments provide important perspectives on how practitioners and researchers can use narrative processes in creating spaces of resistance and social change with refugee participants.

Keywords: narrative research; ethics; refugee studies; social change

Refugees in the Jungle  
By Omer AKA Dream (from  
Sudan)

Blue,  
Like the cloudless sky  
On a sun filled day!  
Soft,  
Like the sleeping child  
In a rocking cradle!  
Voice,  
Like the sounds of grief  
Through her gritted teeth!  
Coffin,  
Like the skeleton carried  
In my darkest deepest sleep!  
Dream,  
Like the birth of my child  
With a new mother tongue!  
Fear,  
Like carrying a heaviness  
Over endless trails of fatigue!  
Hope,  
Like arriving in my home  
Where my tears are my own!

(Voices from the Jungle, 2017,  
p.1)

## Introduction

Between November 2015 and September 2016, under the University of East London civic engagement and impact schemes, the authors ran overlapping projects with the refugee residents of the 'Jungle', the unrecognised refugee camp in Calais, together with colleagues and students who volunteered their time. The projects aimed to encourage refugee<sup>1</sup> participants to tell, share and make sense of their life stories using visual, verbal, written narratives and processual narratives. The interrelated projects also encouraged the residents to think about education as a possibility in their new countries. The work included a short, accredited university course called Life Stories, which consisted of a Multimodal Narratives project with photography and visual storytelling workshops, film-making, workshops on opportunities in higher education in Europe and a co-authored book, entitled '*Voices from the 'Jungle'*'.

In this paper, we explore the possibilities offered and the challenges posed by the relational space of the projects, which explored what a multimodal narrative

---

<sup>1</sup> In this paper we use the term refugee to mean all people who have fled persecution, without alluding their legal immigration or citizenship status or the complex legal systems that govern asylum in Europe.

methodology could offer participants and facilitators. We explore how refugee participants of the projects built narrative practices through which they made sense of their lives, connecting their histories to their present, and to their imagined futures. We argue that the relational processes through which these stories are told shape their potential to emerge as practices of resistance. Story-telling can work if ethical considerations are made of the spaces in which the telling happens and the power relations that govern those spaces. Our aim was to encourage refugees to tell their stories and to make connections to the surrounding world, even when those surroundings are actively severing connections through hostility, violence, trauma and legal barriers.

### **Engaging with a crisis**

Cultural, educational and research projects focusing on lives of refugees in temporary settlements have proliferated in line with the rapid increase in populations crossing borders to reach Europe as a consequence of elevated conflicts and violence in the Middle East and parts of Africa. Documenting refugees' lives and practices has been part of several endeavours which aim to understand the conditions of refugees and/or support them in their journeys. For example, Sanyal (2017) analyses photography and videos from the Calais 'Jungle' with a view to understanding the biopolitics of resistance which includes an interplay between humanitarian action and the refugee as a 'body to be managed' (p. 5). The projects that we draw on in this paper involved collaborating with refugee-residents of the Calais 'Jungle' and can be seen as part of these wider efforts, aiming to reveal and challenge the social injustice surrounding the lives of refugee populations.

When we began working on the projects in the Calais 'Jungle', it was a response to an ethical demand, which arose from our political responsibility and obligation towards one another, as Butler (2016) puts it. In a year when the world witnessed thousands of displaced people walking their way to reach somewhere safer to live, facing violence and deaths crossing borders and the sea, we took an ethical decision to be in solidarity with the refugee communities, and to channel their intellectual and methodological resources into an embodied and embedded practice. Our projects were neither framed as research nor research impact as currently conceptualised within British academia (Reale et al. 2017) but as an instance of public engagement. Our decision to approach the project in this way was underpinned by a desire to secure ongoing support beyond a one-off intervention and because we felt that engagement provided a framework for work shaped by solidarity. As facilitators we understood project participants to be subject to public scrutiny on many levels, and not fully able to set the limits of the representations that are made of them. The discussion in this paper is informed by our reflections as facilitators of the life story projects. The narratives produced by the participants themselves are all available publicly, and where they are not, the authors have granted us the permission to use them. While not strictly classified as research we believe that the questions and possibilities that the authors raise in this paper have implications *for* research with refugee communities as well as making a contribution to methodological debates on the relationship between narratives and social action.

One of the consequences of framing the project in this way was that it exempted us from seeking institutional ethical approval for research. We were keen to avoid

foreclosing the methods and outcomes of the work in the way that may have been demanded by institutional ethical review. However, we did not see this as exempting us from the need to engage in ethical labour throughout the project. We positioned ourselves as facilitators of the projects rather than ‘experts’ imposing an ‘intervention’ or making good/right decisions about the lives of refugee-participants. In making sense of our ethical labours we have drawn on the work of Kofoed & Staunæs, (2015), who deploy hesitancy as an ethical strategy. Our application of this framework involves creating spaces in which narratives; life stories; and stories of encounter can emerge in such a way that they can be linked to broader socio-political power relations and to the ‘transformation’ of conditions for refugees. According to Kofoed and Staunæs (2015) there are moments in zones of high intensity when researchers are required to intervene to solve a problem, to do what is right and take rapid action. In those moments, they suggest, ethical hesitancy may be a useful strategy. They describe hesitancy as ‘a momentary suspension of action due to an embodied sense of thoughtfulness and engaged capability of interrupting one’s own immediate incentives to response and enact embedded normativities and judgements’ (p.25). In Kofoed and Staunæs’ conceptualisation, hesitancy as an ethical position enables the practitioner to consider their long-term contribution to the communities they work with. Instead of contributing to a clear solution, researchers contribute to the development of a solution without rapid intervention. In the context of the Calais ‘Jungle’ we may think of the quest to open space for collaboration as a way of taking up an ethical position without falling into the trap of making the ‘right’ decision from a privileged position.

### **The ethical labours of the participatory photography workshop: control & confidentiality**

In 2015 the University of East London started a short course in the Calais ‘Jungle’. The course was called Life Stories. It offered five credits at level 3 in Social Sciences for those who attended three teaching sessions and completed assessment in the form of their own life story. The assessment could be completed by writing a life story, through oral presentation, a recording, a visual life story or through a combination of these. Translation was also facilitated, where possible, for some who wished to complete the assessment in a different language. The course was validated to introduce potential students in the camp to the UK university system, to show what teaching and learning in UK universities could look like, and to allow those living in the camp to imagine that studying in university was/would be a possibility available for them. While there were no guarantees that university studies could ever become a reality to the participants, being allowed to think beyond material needs while living in the “Jungle” could be important for morale. For example, Zeeshan Javid writes in the *Voices from the Jungle*: “It is important for me with the [university] certificate. I think about my future. When I meet French people, in the future, I have this document. Maybe they will help me in the future.” (Calais writers, 2017, p. 152). The accreditation also allowed institutional support from the University administration, and importantly, a critical intervention inside established HE institutions, requiring them to reconsider who their potential students are. This was in itself an important act of resistance towards the bordering policies practiced by UK universities (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy, 2019).

As part of the course, we organised photography workshops, led by photographers Gideon Mendel and Crispin Hughes, a poetry workshop and discussion by a UK based refugee poet JJ Bola and a discussion about access for refugees and asylum seekers to higher education in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. Facilitators and guest lecturers who came to teach in the camp brought with them readings, including extracts from life story-like writing such as biographies of Malala Yousafzai, Nelson Mandela and Malcolm X as well as readings from Plato and Freire. Teaching and workshops took place in makeshift classrooms in the various schools in the camp as well as the Jungle Books library, in tents, around campfires and outside in the sunshine, sometimes one to one, other times with groups of student-participants discussing the readings and ideas across several languages. Altogether 37 students enrolled and 20 of those completed coursework using photos, recordings and written text as their medium for storytelling. The submissions were made through handwriting, recordings, mobile phones and other media, as access to computers in the camp was scarce.

In the photography workshops, photographers Mendel and Hughes, both experienced in participatory community photography, worked with residents to create visual narratives of their lives, particularly their lives in the camp. Our rationale was to provide emancipatory possibilities for participants to tell their stories (Squire et al., 2014, p.43), in transnational, transcultural and multilingual contexts (O'Neill, 2008), where life stories are heterogeneous and relational. The use of participatory photography, in particular, opened up opportunities for the participants to construct visual narratives, to interpret and analyse them and to make sense of their experiences. This enabling methodology gave participants some control over the process. This approach also creates space for reflection, allowing participants to forge their own ways of communicating meaning (Gauntlet and Holzworth, 2006; Holgate et al. 2012). Gomez and Vannini (2017) identify three ways in which participatory photography enhances working with migrants. First, taking and selecting photographs encourages participants to take control over the information they share visually. Second, photographs can widen the space of research conversation between participants and facilitators. Third, producing and discussing photographs could enable participants to externalise their complex emotions, in contexts where they may find it difficult to speak up for themselves due to power imbalances.

In the workshops, participants were offered digital cameras and invited to take photographs that represented any part of their personal or communal lives. The initial task was followed by a second invitation to edit the photographs in collaboration with the photographers/facilitators. The project team then engaged in conversations with the participants and became part of the photographing without interfering with participants' decisions as to what would be documented. We were told stories about participants' lives at home; their journeys; their experiences, difficulties and friendships in the 'Jungle'; their attempts to cross the border to reach Britain. They introduced the camp to us. Their friends, families and the 'Jungle' community became part of the conversations. We shared stories about our lives in London; our journeys, our work, our families. We answered questions regarding life in Britain, the educational system, the prospects for university education, with the constant fear of giving them false hope of an easy life ahead. We shared tea and food in the camp. Our contact with many of the participants continues through various platforms.

Levels of confidentiality, respect for privacy, notions of taste and style could all be set by the participant-photographers throughout the process. The use of digital cameras, as opposed to disposable film cameras, was significant for the development of trust and dialogue within the space of the workshops. In many projects in which disposable film cameras are used, the cameras imply that the beneficiaries' pictures would be low quality and disposable, that they could not be trusted with a real camera (Lounasmaa et al., forthcoming 2020). Some difficult moments arose, when the photographers and facilitators and the participant-photographers attributed different meanings to the visual material disagreeing about how to edit. As facilitators, we were constantly concerned about anonymity in the photos, as the risk of being identified could have meant problems for participants in future asylum claims due to the Dublin process, (Regulation 604/2013 of the European Union and the European Commission) which stipulates that anyone seeking asylum in the European economic area of European must do so in the first EU member state they enter. We were also concerned about threats of violence from local communities or even threats of violence and persecution against families and communities in countries of origin. Yet, participants, who were well informed of these possible harms, nevertheless chose to share the same pictures on social media. In those moments, photographers and facilitators respected their decision, where possible. However, when participants asked to include images where they or others were identifiable on public forums related to the projects, we usually decided against this for the above reasons.

Our approach to confidentiality involved simultaneously trying to respect authors' choice of topics and representation while anonymising the pictures. Participants were guided to exclude faces from their photographs. They were advised to photograph backs, hands, shadows and outlines instead. When a face was included, Hughes faded the authors' faces from the image, making them appear transparent against the background. Participants remained the owners of their photos and often posted them on social media at the same time as the team was carefully removing them from other public sites.

Some photos and written pieces also formed the basis for contributions to the '*Voices from the 'Jungle'*' co-authored book, published in 2017. This arose from discussions with enrolled students and other participants of the projects. After writing, recording and speaking about their life stories before, in and after the time spent in the 'Jungle', some of the participants asked what would happen to these stories. A few expressed interest in sharing them more widely and making them available to the public. All those who could be contacted were asked if they wanted to write or include their photos in a co-authored book. The book was written by the participants, with only light-touch editing and some re-organising by a team of five editors who had worked alongside them throughout the projects. An outcome like this was largely possible because the aims of the projects were left open for participants to decide and had not been pre-determined by the team at the project beginning. We were also motivated by what we could offer to rather than what we could gain from those stuck in a violent, transitory space with little access to necessities or human rights. As Babak writes in the book: "I think it is important with these kinds of projects because people need care and education. [...] Here you can sleep and eat everyday but not really care what you do, but it is really good to learn new things, for example in a school, like a photography class, or a movie class." (Calais writers, 2017, p. 255).

Our view was that had we began from a position as researchers, the relationships between the participants would have been anticipated and differently ordered. Our decision to approach the work outside of a research frame did not mean that ethical guidelines and procedures were abandoned. On the contrary, the absence of a structured ethical review demanded ongoing ethical reflection within the team and with our participants as they happened. Knowledge of research ethics practices was vital for the process. Issues such as gender, class and language were present in all interactions and created hierarchies of communication within the group. At times, English was the language of dominance and power, whereas at others another language shared by participants would take over. During the day we, as volunteers in the camp felt safe and in control, whereas after dark as women we relied on our participants for safety. Avoiding pre-determined outcomes and processes and including participants in the design of the projects allowed us to create a space of collaboration. In some ways writing academic publications about the 'Jungle' feels like a violation in itself. We believe, however, that with the passing of time, it becomes more possible to speak about the 'Jungle' without inflicting harm on those who inhabited it. While the memory of the 'Jungle' is still painful, those who are now living in relative safety with resident permits and (limited) citizenship rights are not at risk of deportation or denial of rights due to speaking out about injustices. We also believe that the project provides an important contribution to understanding ethical issues in working with refugee narratives, which can be, or at least become, seen as social action.

### **Multimodal narratives and resistance**

In their exploration of participatory action research with asylum seekers and refugees, O'Neill and Harindranath (2006) argue that narratives collected in participatory projects have the potential to reconstitute the boundaries of citizenship for communities of displaced people. Participatory methods have been widely adopted by migration researchers seeking to increase the involvement of beneficiaries and promote change (see Dona, 2007; Erel et al., 2017; Gomez & Vannini, 2017; Holgate et al., 2012). Such approaches also problematise power differences that are often evident in the research process. In her elaboration on the microphysics of participation in refugee research, Dona (2007) points out multiple ways in which participation unfolds in connection with power structures and relations. In this project our goal was to create a participatory space; to challenge 'exclusionary processes' and discourses targeting refugees' lives, through the production of biographical narratives and offer representational challenges that are transformative (O'Neill, 2008). Multimodality allowed the use of different forms, such as visual and oral narration, social media posts, poetry or other types of writing. Using multiple narrative modalities to construct life stories helped us to work across language and cultural differences. Many participants worked in their own mother tongues. These were sometimes translated into English, and at other times included in the original language as a reminder of the multilinguality of the space and the speakers. Life stories were understood broadly as any part of the life the narrator wished to discuss, including imagined futures. Using multimodal narratives, a combination of written and visual narratives within the context of these projects also enabled us to build up a dialogue between participants.

Refugees are constantly asked to narrate specific parts of their lives, and these stories

form the basis of their claims for safety, respect and human rights. In the narration process linked to legal claims for asylum, the content and form are strict, and the act of narration is scrutinised for consistency, plausibility, truthfulness, and the recollection of established facts and linear progression, among other things (Millibank, 2009). We wanted the projects to provide a space where it was possible to tell other kinds of stories and where the experiences of refugees, so often marginalized and problematised, were welcome. We also wanted to hear the voice of the refugee/forced migrant, which can challenge the competing voices that come from more socially powerful exogenous agents, such as the mainstream media and politicians, which often discount or minimise the refugee experience (Benezer & Zetter, 2014).

What does it mean for the refugees to tell their personal narratives? According to Meretoja (2018) narratives are political projects themselves. Each encounter with new experience leads to new interpretations that prompt individuals to tell new stories through which we continuously construct meanings. Narratives constitute new possibilities of action; an action that can change the world in which we live (Brockmeier and Meretoja, 2014, pp. 4-5). It is the potential in narrative practices to re-interpret the meanings in this world and to re-constitute it make them significant in political projects which aim to reveal social injustice, to mobilise solidarity and transformation. Also discussing the political aspects of narratives, Andrews (2014, p.85) argues that personal and communal stories are pivotal to how politics operate, and how we make sense of our place in a political world. Political narratives are not limited to micro stories that individuals tell about their experience of the world and their sense of belonging. Understanding the interconnection between micro and macro narratives is a way to understand how narratives operate as political practices, which are always constituted within a network of power relations. It is significant to consider personal and communal narratives as political practices in the current historical milieu, in which anti-immigrant discourses across the world deepen racism, inequality, conflict and violence. Life stories, which framed the university course and the book, offer tools to re-imagine and reconstitute the sphere of politics within the current climate. These practices may also offer resources to refugees to make sense of who they are as individuals and communities while they are going through displacement in a socio-political crisis that continually positions their lives and identities as the 'Other'.

Tamboukou (2003, pp. 94–102) defines 'technologies of resistance' as sets of practices in the cultivation of the self. We follow her Foucauldian approach to narratives which considers narrative as an effect of specific historical, social, cultural, political and economic discourses, rather than being natural and unquestionable (Tamboukou, 2013, p.89). Within a Foucauldian notion of power, subjects can act and resist the power relations imposed upon them at the same time as they are subjected to certain systems of power. It is through their stories, their 'technologies of resistance' that individuals may fashion new forms of subjectivity, always moving between constraining reality and the dream of limitless freedom and adopting precarious positions between them. Investigating forms of resistance is a starting point for a Foucauldian analysis of power relations - there are no relations of power without resistance. 'It exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence like power, resistance is multiple' (Foucault, 1998, p. 142). The relationality of power depends on a plurality of resistance points which should not be reduced to a single



locus of revolt or rebellion (p. 95). If we approach narratives as effects of power relations wherein subjectivities are also discursively constituted within specific historical contexts, biographical narratives can also become a site of self-construction in which the storytellers deploy 'technologies of resistance' (Tamboukou, 2003, p. 94). This Foucauldian approach has enabled us as facilitators to reflect the layers of power relations under scrutiny in the projects and the power imbalances that shape the lives of camp residents (similarly to other marginalised groups) and the narratives they tell about themselves. In the next section we illustrate this via two life stories from the 'Jungle' project.

### **The 'Displaces' project: Forging narratives of resistance**

The Calais 'Jungle' was an unrecognised refugee camp where refugee residents' right to citizenship was suspended as a technology for governing the displaced populations (Rygiel, 2011). In this context, a social action which aimed to enrich the lives of residents needs to be understood as challenging the reduction of the meaning of camp to 'bare life' for its refugee inhabitants (Rygiel, 2011, p.4). The legal and political frameworks, which limit refugees' right to citizenship and human rights set ethical and practical limits on our work with refugee participants. Safety concerns and decisions involving anonymity were always pressing. Participants had fled violence, torture and imprisonment in the countries they fled from, in the places they travelled through, and the 'Jungle' itself. The 'Jungle's' reputation at the time meant many participants felt constrained to hide from their families that were living there. They used visual life stories to represent an aspired new life in France. This possibility to show a new life was read as a form of resistance, responding to the unstable definition of violence, with reference to Veena Das (2008). While structural issues confined the participants to living in the 'Jungle' which had by this stage gained a reputation in the Middle East and parts of Africa the participants came from, by telling a different story of their lives in Europe to their families allowed them to project another possibility and a possible self

We have chosen to share two short extracts, already published online by Mani and Habibi (pseudonyms selected by the authors) as part of the 'Displaces' photography project. We have selected these two participants as their narratives emerged across different modalities, enabling us to read and assemble moments in their storytelling. Reading their visual stories together with the written narratives have guided us toward their meaning-making. Mani and Habibi's narratives demonstrate the two most frequent responses to the living conditions of the 'Jungle' amongst all the participants – one rejecting the living conditions as inhumane, the other as highlighting the humanity of the camp's residents. Mani and Habibi both spent several months in the 'Jungle' and participated in various projects, Mani producing arts and working with art-based groups, and Habibi volunteering as the librarian in the Jungle Books library. Participants also wrote/spoke about their journeys, their home countries and their futures, but for the purposes of this paper we wish to focus on those narratives that discuss the very space in which they were shared. Showing how different interpretations of the same space, the 'Jungle', emerged in conversations we were having with participants while sitting together and watching this very space around us, demonstrates the potential narratives have in questioning and reinterpreting our social world.

### ***Mani (from Iran) – Finding beauty***

There were no adequate provisions for sanitation, housing, food or heating in the camp. There was a constant risk of police and civilian violence. Participants portrayed the camp conditions in their visual narratives as a strategy to reveal the difficult conditions to a wider public in Britain and France. Simultaneously they struggled to balance these portrayals with the stereotypes and prejudice attached to refugees and their lives.

[Picture 1]

*‘This was beautiful for me. The main street in the Jungle. I pass this way a lot a lot, some thousand times. This area for us has not a very good feeling, not good memories. We all have dreams and wishes. 99% of us don’t want to be here. But sometimes in a place you hate you can find something interesting and beautiful. I find a beauty in this place.’*

(Mani from Iran)

Source: Displaces- Photography narratives project with the residents of the Calais camp <https://educatingwithoutborders.wordpress.com/displaces-a-project-by-gideon-mendel-and-calais-jungle-residents>

In his narrative, Mani links his hate for the material conditions of the camp to his dreams for the future. Mani does not romanticise or deliver an unrealistic narrative about the living conditions or his emotions. Instead, he crafts his narrative as a path for resistance, between the unbearable materiality of his present and his desire for a better future. Other participants who wanted to show beauty in the ‘Jungle’ often spoke about the community building that was taking place and the offers of help and hospitality that made the ‘Jungle’ beautiful. The community spirit of the ‘Jungle’ was also more than a narrative of resistance to some. After reaching the UK Refugee’s Voice writes in *Voices from the Jungle*: “The time I was in Calais was better than now to be honest, mentally, and in my heart I was in peace” (Calais Writers, 2017, p. 220). In 2015-16 the press, especially the Right-Wing press in the UK were reporting weekly about the violence, dirt and squalor of the camp (Finnish Institute, 2017). Mani’s search for beauty seeks to change that narrative and hence our views of both the ‘Jungle’ and its inhabitants.

### ***Habibi (from Afghanistan) – ‘Not living in the ‘Jungle’***

Habibi chose a different path to craft his resistance to respond to the stereotypes and judgement the life in the ‘Jungle’.

The participants had had a long journey before they reached the Jungle; they had fled war and the fear of persecution in most cases. They left their lives and families

behind. Many of them chose to revise the reality of their lives in the camp to not make their families worry by telling them about the dire and vague situation they found themselves in. This was a response to the media representation of the ‘Jungle’ as a dangerous place.

Habibi’s narrative strategy was utilised by many other residents of the ‘Jungle’. The choices that some of the refugee participants made to avoid the camp conditions in their narratives were related to their expectations of life in Europe when they had to flee their countries because of conflict, death threats or fear of persecution. After long journeys, they imagined arriving to safety in Europe with good standard of living. When they are forced to live in an unrecognised refugee camp under dreadful conditions, they choose to edit their stories to resist the materiality of their lives.

### [picture 2]

*‘All over it’s full of water, it’s like a river here. Nobody can pass, because it’s too muddy.’*

*My parents are in Afghanistan. I didn’t tell them, ‘I’m living in the Jungle’. When my mum calls, I say, ‘Actually yeah, they gave me a very nice house here’. Sometimes they tell me, ‘Send me a picture’. I go to a volunteer’s house, taking pictures of it, sending them to them. As if I have a really nice house. I cannot tell them the truth, that I’m living the ‘Jungle’ life.’*

(Habibi from Afghanistan)

Source: Displaces- Photography narratives project with the residents of the Calais camp <https://educatingwithoutborders.wordpress.com/displaces-a-project-by-gideon-mendel-and-calais-jungle-residents>

In his picture Habibi shows the unliveable conditions of the camp as the first part of his narrative, highlighting the need for better protection for refugees in Europe. Many other participants spoke of this also. For example, Mohammed from Syria states in the book: ‘Anyway, when I arrived in the camp, I was surprised that I saw no houses, no electricity; there were just shelters, and some tents and strange people. [...] I arrived after two days of travelling, with my empty stomach and a broken foot [...] knowing no one, with no connections, to see a place that belonged to the European Middle Ages’ (Calais Writers, 2017, p. 113). The ‘Jungle’ had become infamous in other parts of the world, and especially the younger participants worried what their families would think if they knew their sons were living in these conditions. The shame of arriving in Europe only to find oneself in the ‘Jungle’ also alludes to the class position of some of the participants – Habibi was a pharmacist in Afghanistan before he had to leave. Other participants, such as Zeeshan Javid (Calais Writers, 2017, p. 119) told their families they lived in Paris and photographed themselves in front of statues and inside volunteer’s houses to show their families, and to some extent to themselves, the other European life that they were waiting for.

To understand the potential for resistance in the narratives above, we can turn to Riessman’s (2000) study of the destigmatising practices of South Indian women in reaction to childlessness. Riessman here questioned Western frameworks that

understand resistance as something that seeks to turn social structures upside down. In fact, she identified more subtle aspects of resistance among these women, characterising them as 'slow practices' that would not upset the family/gender structures. Life narratives made sense within the local complexity of social relations without overthrowing them. Similarly, the refugee storytellers develop life stories in the workshops which counter the reputation of the camp as a place of violence, reassuring their families and building their claims for citizenship. This was not an organised resistance, but one that helped us understand the possibilities a relational space could offer to participants of such non-invasive projects.

We are left thinking about the ways in which narratives function as a political resource for engaging with the imagination. Narrative is not only implicated in constructing stories about the past and the present, but in helping to articulate political change and a vision of future (Andrews, 2014, p.86). Berg and Milbank (2009) discuss the importance of personal/micro narratives as refugees claim independent verification of group membership based upon political opinion, race, nationality and religion. Particularly in the case of individual claims, such as ones based on sexual identity, individual narratives are re-framed in order to fit the expectations of families or the state, while also remaining the personal. This simultaneity is evident in Mani and Habibi's narratives. Both engage with the imagined, while depicting the very real physical conditions of the camp.

Mani and Habibi to tell stories about the camp life differently. Firstly, they acknowledge their gendered privileged to participate in the workshops. Secondly, they respond to their own ability to tell their stories in the way they can, twisting the meanings of translation and expert knowledge. Thirdly, they respond to the formal expectations of the governments, to whom they may make claims of membership, keeping their critique of the 'Jungle' subtle. Fourthly, they participate in the power structure of the projects. By responding, they both exercise their role as strategic storytellers, who use narratives as political practices.

### **Concluding reflections – Towards the relationality of ethics**

In this article we have discussed how the use of participatory methods created spaces where interactions could take place between refugee participants and the team of facilitators in the unrecognised refugee camp called the 'Jungle'. The relational space was built from the collaborative learning experience in the Life Stories course, non-linear conversations and interactions throughout the participatory workshops and daily activities in the camp. The space of the project was shaped by the power relations of the camp and was not free of differences or complications. The forms of interaction and the use of time and space were negotiated in varied ways. For us, facilitators, times of day were determined by daylight hours, when it was safe for us to stay in the camp, and Eurostar timetables. For most of our participants, times and spaces were framed by nightly trips to the port to 'try' for England, availability of food and supplies and the various ways in which living spaces and possessions in the camp were policed and at risk. Power differences across political and ethnic biographies and communities, generations and social classes shaped the spaces of the projects.

Although our aim in this project was not to ‘represent’ the narratives of the refugee participants, once narratives were constructed we became audiences for these stories and over time found ways to bring the ‘voices of refugees from the Calais camp’ into different environments. We embraced the multiplicity of the stories and places and audiences they reached, while simultaneously worrying about the unpredictable and uncontrollable reactions these stories may provoke. We were and are aware of the emotional investment that refugee storytellers make by telling their stories and are alert to the ways that storytellers may be more concerned about their families’ opinions than possible consequences for their European asylum claims. Our collaborations in editing photographic narratives led to discussions of the ways in which participants’ stories could be used to develop communication within and beyond the ‘Jungle’. In addition to the book, *Voices from the ‘Jungle’* participants wanted to create online content with photos and narratives, to be shared and discussed publicly, creating further spaces for slow resistance and possibilities for changing public perceptions and treatment of refugees.

The projects had to be framed by a carefully constructed ethical conduct, ‘ethics in practice’ (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). It involves the recognition of ethically important moments and ethical hesitancy (Kofoed and Staunæs, 2015): decisions the facilitators and participants had to make in the process and taking time to stop and hesitate before acting upon these decisions – engaging in a ‘slow practice’. It is impossible to claim that all our decisions were ethically made, yet they included important dialogues, such as those leading to decision about anonymity in photographs or making some materials public. It was possible to discuss with participants our common plans for the future of the stories, but simultaneously, it was impossible to predict this future. Employing our own reflexivity as an approach to knowledge making (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, pp.274-75) was crucial and allowed us to both to make sense of the experiences of the projects, including unanticipated consequences and to generate insights of value to others. Hesitancy can also help frame both the stories and the instances of telling – what is narrated and what is not? Allowing time and silence, without rushing into narrative makes us aware of the conditions that need to be in place for new kinds of stories to emerge (Ellis 2007, p. 4). We saw this as an ethical position that responds to uncertainty embedded in the refugee lives and camp conditions, where lives and acts of camp residents are framed by their limited legal and social rights, when their right to citizenship are systematically suspended in the camp. The moments of hesitancy opened spaces for interaction between the participants of the projects and the facilitators. We suggest that practitioners/researchers working with refugees and migrants utilise ethical hesitancy as a principle to collaborate with the project participants in the development of long-term transformations.

Our role as facilitators within the projects necessitated deploying an ethical position beyond the baseline of ‘do no harm’. By framing our work as education and participatory story telling in solidarity with refugees, we were able to remain open to all possible outcomes, or indeed none at all. This does not mean that we advocate not engaging with institutional ethics – on the contrary, it is extremely important to do so when researching vulnerable populations. Instead, we felt that the residents in the ‘Jungle’ should not be turned into objects of knowledge at all, but rather we wished to engage in ways that had the potential to benefit them more directly. Our ethical

position pushed us to recognise the limitations of the work; to be open to engage in conversation.

In this article, we have explored narrative practices in which storytellers constructed life stories to reveal and challenge the macro-political discourses regarding the lives of refugees, and the spaces in which these narratives emerged. These macro narratives, produced in popular media and political discourses, constantly position refugees and displaced populations as the Other. By creating spaces for alternative story-telling practices to arise, the workshops provided some possibilities for change through narrating a different past, present and future. We facilitated the creation of these spaces through our relational approach to ethical encounters with refugee participants, which builds on ethically important moments, reflexivity and ethical hesitancy. The examples of Mani and Habibi's narratives here demonstrate how the process was able to facilitate forms of slow resistance, where the refugee-storytellers challenged power relations and harmful representations of refugees. The act of narration itself became a form of resistance, and the public sharing of the narratives continue to facilitate further social transformation.

#### References:

- Andrews, M. (2014). *Narrative imagination and everyday life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail (1982). *The dialogic imagination*. Austin, TX: Texas University Press.
- Benezer, G. and Zetter, R., (2014). Searching for directions: Conceptual and methodological challenges in researching refugee journeys. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 28(3), 297-318.
- Berg, L. and Millbank, J., (2009). Constructing the personal narratives of lesbian, gay and bisexual asylum claimants. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 22(2), 195-223.
- Brockmeier, J.& Meretoja, H. (2014). Understanding Narrative Hermeneutics. *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 6(2), 1-27.
- Bruner, J. (1990) *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Butler, J. (2016) *Frames of war: when is life grievable?* London: Verso.
- Calais writers (2017) *Voices from the 'Jungle': Stories from the Calais refugee camp*. London: Pluto Press.
- Das, V., (2008). Violence, gender, and subjectivity. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 37, 283-299.
- Doná, G., (2007). The microphysics of participation in refugee research. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20(2), 210-229.

- Ellis, C. (2017) “Compassionate Research: Interviewing and Storytelling from a Relational Ethics of Care,” *The Routledge International Handbook on Narrative and Life History*, edited by Ivor Goodson, Molly Andrews, and Ari Antikainen. Routledge, pp. 431-445.
- Erel, U., Reynolds, T. and Kaptani, E., (2017). Participatory theatre for transformative social research. *Qualitative Research*, 17(3), 302-312.
- Foucault, M. (1998). *The History of Sexuality 1-The Will to Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (2001). ‘The Subject and the Power’ in J. D. Faubion (ed) *Power: Essential Works of Foucault (1954-1984)*. London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press.
- Foucault, M. (2006). *Psychiatric Power. Lectures at the College de France 1973/74*. J. Lagrange (ed.) A. I. Davidson (English Series Ed). Translated by G. Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gauntlett D & Holzwarth P (2006). Creative and visual methods for exploring identities. *Visual Studies, Journal of the International Visual Sociology Association*, 21(1), 82-91.
- Gomez, R. and Vannini, S., (2017). Notions of home and sense of belonging in the context of migration in a journey through participatory photography. *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*, 78(1), 1-46.]
- Guillemin, M. and Gillam, L. (2004) Ethics, reflexivity, and “ethically important moments” in research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(2), 261-280.
- Holgate, J., Keles, J., & Kumarappan, L. (2012). Visualizing “Community”: An Experiment in Participatory Photography Among Kurdish Diasporic Workers in London. *The Sociological Review*, 60(2), 312–332.
- Hugman, R., Pittaway, E. and Bartolomei, L., (2011). When ‘do no harm’ is not enough: The ethics of research with refugees and other vulnerable groups. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 41(7), 1271-1287.
- Kofoed, J. and Staunæs, D., (2015). Hesitancy as ethics. *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology*, 6(2).  
<https://journals.hioa.no/index.php/rerm/article/view/1559>
- Lounasmaa, A., Esin, C. and Hughes, C., (Forthcoming 2020) Decolonisation, representation and ethics in visual life stories from the Jungle, in S. Dodd and J. Carsten (eds) *Ethics and Integrity in Visual Research Methods*, Emerald Publishing
- Meretoja, H., (2018). *The ethics of storytelling: Narrative hermeneutics, history, and the possible*. Oxford University Press.

Millibank, J. (2009) 'The ring of truth': a case study of credibility assessment in particular social group refugee determinations. *International Journal of Refugee Law* 21(1), 1-33  
doi: 10.1093/ijrl/een040

O'Neill, Maggie (2008). Transnational Refugees: The Transformative Role of Art? [53 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 9(2), Art. 59, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0802590>.

O'Neill, M. and Harindranath, R., (2006). Theorising narratives of exile and belonging: The importance of biography and ethno-mimesis in "understanding" asylum. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 2(1), 39-53.

Reale, E., Avramov, D., Canhial, K., Donovan, C., Flecha, R., Holm, P., Larkin, C., Lepori, B., Mosoni-Fried, J., Oliver, E. and Primeri, E., (2017). A review of literature on evaluating the scientific, social and political impact of social sciences and humanities research. *Research Evaluation*, 27(4), 298-308.

Riessman C. K. (2008) *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, London: Sage.

Riessman, C.K., 2000. Stigma and everyday resistance practices: Childless women in South India. *Gender & Society*, 14(1), 111-135.

Rygiel, K., (2011). Bordering solidarities: Migrant activism and the politics of movement and camps at Calais. *Citizenship studies*, 15(01), 1-19.

Squire, C., Andrews, M. & Tamboukou, M. (2013) Introduction: what is narrative research? in M. Andrews, C. Squire & M. Tamboukou (eds) *Doing Narrative Research*. London: Sage.

Squire, C.; Esin, C. & Burman, C. (2013). "You are here": Visual autobiographies, cultural-spatial positioning, and resources for urban living. *Sociological Research Online*, 18(3), Art. 1

Squire, Corinne; Davis, Mark; Esin, Cigdem; Andrews, Molly; Harrison, Barbara; Hyden Lars-Christer & Hyden, Margareta (2014). *What is narrative research?* London: Bloomsbury.

Tamboukou, M. (2003). *Women, Education, and the Self: A Foucauldian Perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tamboukou, M. (2013) A Genealogical Approach to Narratives in M. Andrews, C. Squire, M. Tamboukou (eds) *Doing Narrative Research*. London: Sage.

Williams, L., Labonte, R., & O'Brien, M. (2003). Empowering social action through narratives of identity and culture. *Health promotion international*, 18(1), 33-40.

Yuval-Davis, N., Wemyss, G. and Cassidy, K. (2019) *Bordering*. London: John Wiley and Sons



Picture 1:



Picture 2:

