

MAKING MEDIA WITH REFUGEE  
YOUTH IN THE UK AND  
LEBANON:  
A PRACTICE-BASED ENQUIRY  
INTO CO-CREATION

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## DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Mary Mitchell, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> August 2019

## ABSTRACT

An inequality of global resources has resulted in what communications theorist Nick Couldry describes as a crisis of voice (Couldry, 2010), one particularly acute for refugees (Malkki, 1996; Turton, 2003). This practice-based enquiry works with young refugees in both the UK and Lebanon to investigate the process of media production with others through the lens of co-creation (Cizek et al. 2019). Co-creation invites us to consider all of the relationships inherent in the media making process, seeking to offer alternatives to a single-author vision through evolving processes within communities and alongside others.

The thesis aims to understand how a collaborative process of storytelling can be met with listening (Couldry, 2010, Macnamara, 2013), to identify the forms taken by co-creation in online networks, to contrast what the outputs themselves tell us about the refugee experience vis-à-vis traditional representations of refugees, and to provide initial findings about how young people in Rashidieh camp are using social media to express themselves online. Through three practice projects using different collaborative methods of production the research offers three key observations.

Firstly, in investigating the communicative ecology (cf. Hearn et. al. 2009) of Rashidieh camp, the research sheds light on how communications practices have transformed since the widespread adoption of social media and increased connectivity. Secondly, the thesis identifies the emergence of the networked narrative (Page et al., 2013) on social media as a site for the shaping of identity and the building of community and argues that this network contributes an additional layer to the model for participatory filmmaking described as horizontal learning and vertical communication by Snowden in the Fogo Process (Snowden, 1983). Finally, the creative outputs themselves are found to be different from dominant modes of refugee representation, covering a vast expanse of personal experience and representing the moments of everyday survival alongside moments of crisis.

The thesis proposes that future research take into consideration the ways in which non-human actors shape the process, of co-creation investigating the architecture of social media platforms and the way their algorithms and moderation mediates what content is viewed (Tufekci, 2017).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to the families in Rashidieh and al-Buss who have welcomed me at different points over the past decade.

To the al Assad family for the meals, hospitality and welcome, Mohammed for teaching me about life, patience and hope, Abu Tareq, Mouna, Meerna and Fatima, and Yousef and Dalia.

*Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it. The dehumanisation resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice. Hope, however, does not consist in crossing one's arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait.*

- Paulo Freire

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## PRACTICE MATERIAL

Provided in pocket attached

### Films

- A. *Captured* crowdfunding film, UK, Mitchell, 2013 (02:49)
- B. *Help as Best They Can*, Lebanon, 2015 (03:16)
- C. *A Big Failure*, Lebanon, 2015 (02:52)
- D. *Child Protection*, Lebanon, 2018 (03:56)

### Photographs

- E. *Captured* (2013) final selection
- F. *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2014) high resolution selection

### Other

- G. *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2014) Facebook page published content and comments
- H. *Captured* (2013) Project Facilitator Guidelines
- I. Collaborative Filmmaking Training Materials

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## ACRONYMS AND ARABIC TRANSCRIPTION

<i>CFC/SN</i>	<i>Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle</i>
<i>DfID</i>	<i>Department for International Development</i>
<i>NGOs</i>	<i>Non-Governmental Organisations</i>
<i>NFB</i>	<i>National Film Board Canada</i>
<i>ODI</i>	<i>Overseas Development Institute</i>
<i>PaR</i>	<i>Practice as Research</i>
<i>PAR</i>	<i>Participatory Action Research</i>
<i>PRA</i>	<i>Participatory Rural Appraisal</i>
<i>PRS</i>	<i>Palestinian Refugees from Syria</i>
<i>RSN</i>	<i>Refugee Support Network</i>
<i>UNHCR</i>	<i>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</i>
<i>UNRWA</i>	<i>United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East</i>

This thesis refers throughout to a number of Arabic terms and place names. Where possible these are transcribed consistently according to the American Library Association – Library of Congress (ALA-LC) romanisation standard, simplified to avoid diacritical marks. However, in many cases for place names, the most common or recognisable spelling diverges from the standard transcription. For example, throughout this thesis Rashidieh camp (الرشيدية) is spelt *Rashidieh*, while the project discussed here is referred to as *Humans of Al Rashidiya* because it was an Arabic language project (entitled الإنسان في الرشيدية – *al-insan fi al-rashidiya*).

# INTRODUCTION

## Background

In 2008 I spent two months teaching English in the Palestinian refugee camps of al-Buss and Rashidieh in southern Lebanon. Wherever I went there were stories. Stories from the children I was teaching in the form of drawings or broken sentences, stories from the adults I spent the evenings with of decades of isolation and pain, and stories in the landscape itself in the form of graffiti, posters and wall paintings (Ramadan, 2009). These stories were contained within the boundaries of the two camps, enclosed by layers of guards with guns, checkpoints and searches.

People I met there communicated one need to me, above all others. It wasn't a need for material support, despite the struggles to live on the basic provisions given by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), or a need for opportunities or employment, despite the fact that the government restricts employment for Palestinians born in Lebanon. It was a need to have their stories told. Over and over again I was asked, "Will you tell our story?", "Do people in the West know what happened to our parents and what we are now experiencing?", "How can we tell others about our lives?" In all my trips to the camps and the relationships I've since built, this remains a constant request

In response to this, I began to write. I spent time with a man called Fadi and his family, and documented the stories he told me, the most powerful of which included the re-telling of his sister and brother-in-law hiding with their children during the 2006 Lebanon War, petrified of a repeat of the massacre of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila in 1982. A year later I wrote an article 'The dream of returning home' (Pole, 2009), published by Electronic Intifada, in which I included as many first-person quotes as possible, keen to ensure that Fadi's words took priority and mine were simply providing the context. I discussed the article with him and sent him a link to it online. Yet this seemed unsatisfactory.

As I dissected the process of this writing over the following months, I knew that it wasn't enough for me to be telling my version of the story; I knew that in selecting his words and framing them with mine I was making decisions that were mine alone and reducing his agency. I knew that although he had shared his story with me freely I had greater understanding of the contexts in which his words would be read and shared, and that

somehow by telling me his stories the power imbalance between us had been reinforced; while he received nothing for the article I published, I received a by-line that would put me one rung ahead for my next journalistic endeavour. I remembered my discomfort with his violent hatred of Israelis and the pride he took in owning a Kalashnikov, and realised that in wanting readers not to share my discomfort I had chosen to emphasise what I thought was justification of this, ending the article with, “I will not throw my weapons down. I need them to save the refugees in Lebanon and save our lives. We are not terrorists, we have peaceful minds, but we have no choice” (Pole, 2009). I knew that there were so many stories untold and I wanted them to be heard, but I felt increasingly that my role as the storyteller should be to create spaces for others to use their voices, rather than mediating their voices through my own.

After my trip to Lebanon in 2008 my career led me to experiment with various modes of communication within the refugee assistance and international development sectors, playing different roles as I did so. I worked as a researcher for London-based documentary production companies, shot and edited my own short films in Central Asia and the Middle East for charities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and returned to Kyrgyzstan in 2010 after the ethnic conflict to report on the pain and suffering that people I knew were experiencing. I sat with women who had experienced sexual violence and seen their children be killed and with families in temporary shelters set up by United Nations High Committee for Refugees (UNHCR). I tried to document their suffering as humanely as I could. The year before I had lived with an Uzbek family in a neighbourhood that resembled all the others in the city that were targeted, yet despite this close proximity I was still a voyeur to their pain, and I never felt comfortable being behind the camera capturing my version of their suffering and then being the one responsible for sharing this with the world as the finished story. I wasn't living through their pain and the privilege that meant I could dip in and out of theirs made the stories I was telling feel tainted.

I also ran communications for two refugee charities in the UK, and consulted for charities around the country, when stories were both a form of currency for fundraising as well as tools for advocacy and policy change. The two dominant forms of storytelling that I came across in the activism and refugee assistance space both seemed insufficient; traditional documentary photography and filmmaking designed to achieve an audio-visual product to be shared with wide audiences that didn't involve subjects in the process, and participatory video and photography that prioritised the participation over the audio-visual product. I wanted to explore the middle ground that neither spoke over indigenous voices

and excluded them from the editorial process nor idolised participation at the expense of quality and audience reach. I wanted to understand how collaboration and co-creation between an outsider and a group of insiders could better serve the needs of the community as a whole, equip and provide frameworks for participants to tell their stories in the long-term, and ensure that these stories were received by wider audiences.

Palestinians in Lebanon have had their stories told in part, and mostly by outsiders. What they haven't had is an opportunity to narrate their lives in their own words to an outside world. I resolved to return to the communities that had welcomed me, not just to tell their stories as I understand them, but to train and equip those who wanted to be able to share their own stories with the world, in their own words and with their own agendas. This research documents and analyses the result.

There has been a recent shift towards recognising, valuing and providing spaces for refugee voices within academia, journalism and the aid sector through first-hand testimonies and storytelling projects. Within academia this shift can be marked by the first publication of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* in 1998 with the inclusion of a section entitled 'Refugee Voices'. Within the aid and development sector this shift has been more recent and has mushroomed following the Syrian refugee crisis, with projects including *Inside Zaatari* (2014), a collaboration between Save the Children and Magnum Photos, and *Wou Ba'den (And after?)* (2015) from ECHO, UNICEF and Solidarities International. Journalists and documentary filmmakers have also created space for refugee voices through projects including *Refugee Republic* (NL Film Funds, 2014), *Life on Hold* (Al Jazeera, 2015), and *Syrian Journey* (BBC, 2015). However, these projects on the whole are conceived, designed and produced entirely by professional media teams with no involvement from the refugee communities other than as subjects of the camera. The vast majority of those featuring as subjects in these interactive storytelling experiences will never even see the films or the websites on which the projects are based due to poor connectivity, something that became clear to me during my research when attempting to show some of these projects in al-Buss camp. For the online projects, features that would make them accessible to those with slow internet were in many cases completely absent, rendering these projects about refugees invisible to refugees themselves.

This increased recognition of the value of refugee voices needs to be met with scholarship and practice that can both suggest ways forward and ensure they are rooted in research of the lived experiences and ongoing self-expression of refugee communities.

## Practice as research

These experiences served as the foundation for my PhD, provoking questions I felt could only be answered through practice as research (Nelson, 2013). A practice-based enquiry enabled me to conceptualise and deliver projects while learning from and contributing to wider practice and academic enquiry, in a loop of reflection and practice. I explore this further in the methodology chapter.

This approach is particularly relevant within the documentary tradition, enabling the researcher-practitioner to reflect on their role in the process itself rather than simply the final artefact. Many fields of practice shaped my enquiry, as the literature review demonstrates, but the emerging field of ‘co-creation’, as a “method or an intention to make media with people that aren’t media makers” (Wiehl, 2017) is where I found counterparts asking the same questions of the role of subject and creator. The term ‘co-creation’ is defined and explored in Chapter One. Practice-based research has taken place in much of the work this thesis investigates and builds upon, notably Daniel Meadows and Mandy Rose in the work of *Capture Wales (2001-2008)*, and Katerina Cizek and her work *HighRise (2008-2015)* and through the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) and latterly the MIT co-creation Lab.

I began the practice that constitutes this PhD working within one refugee context in London, and ended it working with another refugee context in Lebanon. Both inform my understandings of co-creation. During the period in which I conducted this research I gained a certification from PhotoVoice in Participatory Photography, conducted training in filmmaking and storytelling workshops alongside my professional engagements as a videographer, and became an active member of the interactive documentary community in the UK hosting an i-docs evening on ‘co-creation’ in London and publishing blog posts for the i-docs website. I was therefore able to learn from other practitioners and understand how the emerging definition of co-creation applied to the work I was trying to do, and how I could best contribute to the field through my practice work in the UK and in Lebanon.

I realised that most media projects aimed at increasing participation apply a predefined methodology to the context without understanding the ways in which participants already use technology to communicate. This was the way in which I approached my pilot project, explored in Chapter Two. I wanted to adopt an approach that was embedded in research and a fuller understanding of the communications and information environment, and I

therefore carried out focus groups, interviews, conducted film screenings and discussions, and used digital research methods in a process of analysing the 'communicative ecology' (Hearn et al., 2009) prior to project implementation. The findings of this are documented in *Chapter Four: Researching the Communicative Ecology for Co-creation*.

This thesis and the practice works submitted are therefore the product of discussions, research, and relationships developed over a ten-year period. Each of the mediums explored for collaborative storytelling has emerged organically, in line with community use of technology, and each has explored the same questions. Being subject to time frames set by those I've worked with rather than my own timeline has facilitated an organic, flexible approach that both documents three different mediums for co-created storytelling and also the way in which advances in technology have changed the lives of refugees.

My role as both participant and observer was the starting point for this research. I did not come to either of these communities as a researcher, nor did that role describe the primary function of the relationships I built. As much as the projects analysed throughout this thesis tell the stories of those who created them alongside me, they also tell my story; this decade-long relationship with specific individuals and families from Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and engaging with asylum seeking youth in London marks a decade of me exploring with different storytelling methods, and trying to better understand the complexity of co-creation.

## **Research context**

This practice-based research is two-sited. The first context involved working with unaccompanied asylum-seeking youth in London from countries including Sudan, Eritrea and Afghanistan, the second with young people growing up as third generation Palestinian refugees in camps in Lebanon. In both these contexts, bureaucratic labels are a part of the day-to-day experience, as terms that shaped what support they had access to and the futures they were afforded. In the Palestinian case, the label 'refugee' is a vital part of the claim to their land and a term which binds the diaspora together (Khalidi, 2010). In the case of young people seeking asylum alone in the UK, the label 'asylum seeker' is central to the working of a mechanism of surveillance and control that has been set up to identify, label, oversee and monitor (Chase, 2010, p. 2055).

The most commonly accepted and universally applied definition of a refugee is that of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of the Refugee which defines a refugee as someone who,

*'Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unwilling to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.'* (UNHCR, 1951)

Subsequent legislation has adapted this; The 1967 Protocol removed its geographical and time limitations, extending the definition to cover refugees outside Europe and produced after January 1951. On a regional level adaptations have also taken place. In the 1967 Protocol to the convention, geographical and temporal limitations were removed, along with the addition of Article 1D, which excluded anyone receiving protection or assistance from a United Nations Agency – specifically the UN Refugee and Works Agency (UNRWA) from the convention (Bastaki, 2017). UNRWA defines Palestinian refugees as 'persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict' ("Palestine refugees," n.d.) This was subsequently broadened to include third generation refugees.

While the law offers one mechanism for defining refugees and those seeking asylum, refugees are also defined by the ways in which they are represented to others and the central role these representations play in the production and exchanging of meaning between members of a culture (Hall, 2013). While this thesis draws on broader research on the labelling process of refugees and the many problems inherent within it (Malkki, 1996; Zetter, 1991) it is concerned with how refugees and asylum seekers speak of their own experiences, thus representing themselves to others, in ways that transcend and sometimes contradict the external labels placed on them.

The rise of social media, smartphones and connectivity in refugee countries of origin present new opportunities for storytelling in which the individuals represented have a choice about how they are represented and enable researchers to understand the impact of these representations upon visual culture and as a site for meaning making. Indeed, where culture and narrative within culture is a means for colonisation and imperialism, it is also a means of emancipation and for the colonised to assert their own identities, history and culture (Said, 1978). If 'the power to narrate or to block other narratives from forming and emerging' constitutes one of the main differences between culture and imperialism (Said, 1978, p. xiii), then new forms of media production hold the potential to release new narratives that can directly counter the mainstream.

An examination of co-creative media with refugee youth speaks to wider questions about the power of individual experiences to contradict and challenge the securitisation and categorisation of refugees, shines a light on the cultural production of young refugees and asylum seekers which can easily be dismissed as vain and hedonistic, and demonstrates to academics and practitioners alike the reality of self-representation in the digital age while operating at the technical margins.

### *Asylum-seeking and refugee youth in London: uncertainty and silence*

The first context for my research, and the context in which I carried out my pilot project, was the uncertainty that faced young asylum seekers and refugees in London becoming adults, building friendships, and shaping their identities in a new country. This project was carried out in partnership with Refugee Support Network, a London-based charity working with Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). I discuss the organisation in more detail in Chapter Three.

The UK Home Office defines a UASC as a person under 18 who is applying for asylum in his or her own right with no relative or guardian in the United Kingdom (Malkki, 1996; Zetter, 1991). In 2016, UASC applications represented 10% of all main applications for asylum, with the countries of origin of Afghanistan, Albania and Eritrea comprising 49% of the total UASC applications (Home Office, 2017).

Children and young people become separated from their families and are forced to leave their countries of origin for a number of reasons including armed conflict, persecution, economic hardship as a result of conflict, and trafficking for the purposes of exploitation. Research suggests that for the most part the decision to leave is made by a significant adult in young person's life, rather than being a decision in which they had agency (Chase and Statham, 2013).

These experiences of trauma and loss may be more extreme for UASCs than for young people seeking asylum with the support and protection of family members. There is substantial evidence pointing to the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder among children and young people seeking asylum on their own in the UK (Ehnholt and Yule, 2006; Hodes, 2000) as a result of the loss of friends and family at the point of departure

itself, an often traumatic journey at risk of exploitation, abuse and trafficking (Thomas et al., 2004) and the challenges they face upon arrival in the UK.

The vast majority of young people arriving unaccompanied into the UK in search of asylum are found not to meet the criteria for asylum under the Refugee Convention, and are granted a period of discretionary leave to remain until they turn 18. This period of uncertainty or 'waithood' (Honwana, 2012) where they cannot work legally and have limited post-18 educational entitlements can have a significant impact on wellbeing (Chase and Statham, 2013) as well as a limited ability to construct a biographical narrative of past, present, and future to guide them as they prepared to leave care. (Devenney, 2017)

For or many of these young people the act of 'speaking' is a means of asserting the right to remain in the UK, having experiences and identity validated, and ending the legal limbo in which the majority of UASCs find themselves. Conversely, secrets, silences and partial disclosure can also define the UASC experience, as a way of surviving intolerable loss and dealing with deep disturbance (Johnson, 2011; Pupavac, 2008; Szörényi, 2006; Turton, 2003), or in order to cover up details of their journey to protect those who enabled it or to tell a specific story to maximise their chance of successfully claiming asylum. Selective disclosure can also be as a result of a desire to retain a degree of agency as young people navigate their way through a complex web of immigration, asylum, social care, health and education systems (Chase, 2010).

In his study of unaccompanied minors in Germany, Anderson (2001) refers to the 'secret task' of the story that unaccompanied minors must tell regardless of the fact they or their families have suffered real persecution, as the only particular version of the truth that will enable them to remain. "Regardless of whether this conforms to the exact truth or not, the young persons are therefore under enormous pressure always to get the details exactly right and keep them consistent – otherwise they will fail" (Anderson, 2001, p. 196) This pressure is compounded by the sense of responsibility that they have been chosen for survival in contrast to those they have left back home (Anderson, 2001, p. 196).

In Kohli's 2006 study social workers across four local authorities were interviewed about the context of silence and mistrust in their relationships with UASCs in their care. Their answers fell within four categories; silence as a result of grief and trauma, silence due to fear of revealing truths that may impact their asylum claim or endanger family members,

silence due to a focus on day-to-day survival and a reluctance to look forwards or backwards, and fear about the future hindering an ability to look backwards (Kohli, 2006, p. 714). Acts of speaking, and the state of silence, are therefore an important site of investigation.

### *Palestinians in Lebanon: Dispossession and visibility*

The second context for research is the Palestinian refugee camps in Southern Lebanon, Rashidieh and al-Buss, where I had existing relationships from my voluntary work in 2008.

The events following the creation of Israel in 1948 created almost 750,000 Palestinian refugees who lost their homes and livelihoods, and were expelled or fled to the West Bank and Gaza Strip as well as the neighbouring countries of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Palestinians in each of these host countries have undergone different trajectories with regard to access to citizenship, livelihoods and property rights (Shiblak, 1996). The descendants of the 104,000 who crossed into Lebanon in 1947-9 (Sayigh, 2013, p. 100) now number over 450,000, living in informal settlements and refugee camps managed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the UN body established in the wake of the Palestinian refugee crisis. The vast majority of residents within the camp were born after the *nakba* in 1947 and know only the Palestinian camps of Lebanon as home. They have no direct memories of the land lost but instead are dependent on memories shared by their elders and the ongoing projection of narratives about home, return and 'Palestinianness'.

Palestinians in Lebanon rely on UNRWA for health, education, relief and social services, and have no property ownership rights outside of the camps. Despite changes to Lebanese law in 2005 and 2010 that gave Palestinians legal access to some employment in the private sector, prohibitions still exist against employment in 36 professions including medicine, public transportation and accountancy. Required work permits involve a long administrative process leaving applicants tied to prospective employers. The majority of employment available to Palestinians is seasonal, insecure, and underpaid (UNHCR, 2016).

Rashidieh camp is one of twelve in Lebanon, hosting around 30,000 refugees ten miles from the border with Palestine. The landscape of Palestine is visible from several points

within the camp. Rashidieh and al-Buss are located near Sour and were the first two camps for Palestinian refugees, originally created for Armenian refugees in 1935. Refugees were initially housed in tents and then gradually built temporary structures which have now become permanent. This process took place without infrastructure planning, resulting in poor sanitation or access to water, a haphazard plotting of buildings and unevenness of roads and pathways through the camps. Recent work by UNHCR has rehabilitated the storm water drainage and water supply system, but the camp still has no sewerage system.

Rashidieh camp contains one entrance which is controlled by two checkpoints belonging to the Lebanese Army and the PLO. This makes travelling in and out of the camp a time-consuming process for residents, who are subject to checks at the will of these two actors. Legislation prevents them from buying property outside of the camps. In this way although Palestinians technically have the right of movement within Lebanon, 30,000 people are restricted and imprisoned in an area no larger than 2.5km square.

Other communities have sought refuge in the camps either temporarily or permanently throughout their history. In the Israel-Lebanon war of 2006, 10,000 displaced Lebanese were given shelter and hospitality by Palestinian refugees in the camps of southern Lebanon (Ramadan, 2008). The recent Syrian conflict has resulted in 53,000 Palestinians from Syria seeking refuge in Lebanon, some of whom reside in the Palestinian refugee camps, along with a small number of Syrians. I go on to engage closely with this interplay between Palestinians from Lebanon and PRS throughout my practice work.

Documentary culture and visual culture plays a key role in the production of contemporary geopolitics. Images are used to shift public opinion, to start wars (Miller, 2003), to promote specific interpretations of events, and as a tool for the circulation of false information (Garrett, 2017). The Palestine-Israel conflict is a site of struggle between political and social realities fought over competing images, and therefore any representation of Palestinian refugees is imbued with meaning and significance. It should also be recognised that there are multiple, contrasting, representations of Palestinian identity just as there are multiple contrasting identities (Khalidi, 2010).

Palestinians themselves are part of this process, recognising the role that images and video play in communicating their right to the land and the occupation they suffer. It is important to note that even this process itself is imbued with the political realities and

concerns of external observers. Matt Sienkiewicz provides a fascinating insight into this in his description of the conditions that independent Palestinian media makers operate under, referring to a transnational 'censorscape' defined as the challenges involved in the weaving together of different external stakeholders and their various political concerns in order to bring production to life (Sienkiewicz, 2013). This is a tension that can be actively explored through taking a position of co-creation.

Visibility has been an important part of Palestinian activism, galvanising individuals and communities around the world to support the Palestinian cause, exemplified during the 1960s-1980s when Palestinian organisations invited foreign witnesses to come to the camps in Lebanon and speak of what they had seen, furthering the narratives about a nation in exile whose suffering supports the argument for return. The writing of French poet and playwright perhaps best illustrates this, contributing to what could be argued to be the pinnacle of the international gaze on Palestinians in Lebanon after the Sabra and Shatila massacres in 1982, and fulfilling tropes of the painting of refugees as victims through the use of women, children and emphasis on vulnerability;

*"The Palestinian woman was probably elderly because her hair was gray. She was stretched out on her back, laid or left there on the rubble, the bricks, the twisted iron rods, without comfort. At first I was surprised by a strange braid made of rope and cloth which went from one wrist to the other, holding the two arms apart horizontally, as if crucified. Her black and swollen face, turned towards the sky, revealed an open mouth, black with flies, and teeth that seemed very white to me, a face that seemed, without moving a muscle, either to grin or smile or else to cry out in a silent and unbroken scream." (Genet, 1983, p. 8)*

Within Lebanon Palestinian NGOs have contributed to shaping public perceptions through the ways they choose to represent the Palestinian refugees in the country. In his study of the 2010 reforms regulating Palestinians' access to the labour market Sergio Bianchi (2014) argues that Palestinian NGOs produced converging representations of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon, and that these representations underpinned the debates and actions concerning the reform initiatives. These textual representations present the essential characteristics of Palestinians in Lebanon as twofold: the deprivation of their rights that leads to poor living conditions, marginalisation and exclusion and their status as refugees. These centre on two signifiers – dignity and return. This enabled the NGO community to advocate to a Lebanese audience for economic integration while maintaining a boundary by referring to the Palestinian

displacement and right of return (S. Bianchi, 2014). While refugees may resist the categorising and labelling that representation in the public gaze subjects them to, it must be recognised that this labelling can be leveraged to raise awareness of their struggle on a political level and frame their claim to rights within the language of international norms.

Historically Palestinians in Lebanon have been put forth as the visible totem of suffering and exile of a people without a land in order to maintain the right to return on behalf of all Palestinians (Sayigh, 2001). More broadly in the region, the 'Palestinian refugee' is also used as a symbol of resistance to fight a wider conflict of Muslim rights. Representations of Palestinians are invoked alongside Muslims dying in Bosnia, in Iraq, in Kosovo.

The projects through which this thesis engages young Palestinians in Lebanon bring greater nuance and depth to the lived experience of these communities. In exploring small acts of storytelling within a wider context, they also look at the interplay between individual and community identities and representations.

## **The outputs**

The creative component of this research consists of outputs from projects discussed in Chapters Three, Five and Six. These artefacts represent not only the audio-visual products, but the process of co-creation between both subject and creator, and people and technology, speaking to the rich multi-layered process enabled by co-creation. Additional outputs are included and referenced in the body of this written thesis.

Captured, London, 2013

- *Captured* crowdfunding film, UK, Mitchell, 2013 (02:49) Film
- *Captured* (2013) final selection
- *Captured*, facilitator guidelines

Humans of Al Rashidiya, Lebanon, 2014

- *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2014) high resolution selection
- *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2014) Facebook page published content and comments
- *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2014) Messages between the audience and project creators

A Big Failure (2015), Child Protection (2018), As Best They Can (2015)

- *Help as Best They Can*, Lebanon, 2015 (03:16) Film
- *A Big Failure*, Lebanon, 2015 (02:52) Film
- *Child Protection*, Lebanon, 2018 (03:56) Film
- Filmmaking training materials

## Overview of thesis structure and chapters

In *Chapter One: From Participation to Co-creation* I outline the theoretical and conceptual framework on which the thesis is based, introducing the importance of voice for self-expression and meaning making, participation, and representation. Through a literature review highlighting key movements and case studies that have tried to bring unheard voices to the fore through I identify some of the key principles and methods that I explore through my practice work. I introduce the concept of co-creation as a method or process, and a lens that can illuminate the different relationships in a media making process. I end with an articulation of the research questions that guide the practice.

*Chapter Two: Methodology* outlines the approach I have taken to my PhD, locating it first and foremost within Practice as Research (PaR) (Nelson, 2013). I introduce co-creation as a creative practice, and the principles of action research that I draw upon to interrogate the context for creative practice and shape its design. I discuss detail the research methods used in the second research context, including focus groups, interviews and film screenings.

*Chapter Three: The Pilot Project* reflects on *Captured* (2015) a project with refugees and asylum seekers in London using participatory photography methodology. Through a discussion of the process of content production, analysis of the narrative outputs and discussion about wider audience engagement, this project reveals some of the challenges in valuing a process of participation without discussing the wider questions of audience engagement and collaboration that a co-creation lens provides.

*Chapter Four: Researching the Communicative Ecology for Co-creation* shifts the focus of the PhD to the second research context, two Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. I discuss findings from field research using a mixed methods approach to gaining a fuller understanding of the communication and information environment within which camp occupants are operating and the role of the internet and social media on storytelling and self-expression. In doing so I build on research focusing on the functionalities of the early

internet in the camps in Lebanon including chat rooms and websites (Aouragh, 2011) and find that a rapid rise in connectivity and social media has created new online spaces for self-representation and shared meaning-making.

*Chapter Five: Humans of Al Rashidiya* explores the connections and networks created by social media during the project *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2014). This project enabled me to adapt participatory media to take into account social networking, and to point to new avenues for reciprocal storytelling. I discovered that in the era of Web 2.0 a rich networked dialogue around storytelling projects can emerge, replacing one- or two-way communication, and bringing into view different members of the storytelling community and subjects of each story in a way that transcends physical boundaries and political borders.

In *Chapter Six: Collaborative Filmmaking*, I discuss the second project in Rashidieh, upskilling young people through training sessions and workshops and working with them to create three short films about their lives. In this project I positioned myself as a collaborator and sought to bring my professional skills to the process of media production. I investigated the dynamics at play in doing so, and introduced storytelling equipment tailored to the smartphone dominated environment I identified in Chapter Four.

Finally, *Chapter Seven: Next Steps for Practice and Research* highlights the possibilities for future co-creative work with young Palestinians in Lebanon through analysis of a third, unfinished, project. It also introduces findings from the practice research which point to the need for continued research into the ways in which technology mediates and co-creates self-expression online, and the ways in which the public sphere is censored and controlled. I argue that these findings are relevant in many contexts across the world but are particularly salient in protracted refugee crises.

This thesis draws on discussion of the role of power in storytelling (Couldry, 2010) and adapts these questions to the era of social media and the context of the global refugee crisis. It argues against simplistic dichotomies that either idolise participation or the role of the professional storyteller instead suggesting that the term co-creation provides a lens for interrogating the contributions of and relationships between all parties, whether this be professional media makers, those whose stories are being told, or the technology itself.

# CHAPTER ONE: FROM PARTICIPATION TO CO-CREATION

*"If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings." (Paulo Freire, 2000, p. 88)*

*"The truth is, these women already have voices. They have voices and they've been using them. The problem is, they haven't been heard." – Dr Karen Tucker, consultant on Quipu Project (Norris, 2015)*

## Introduction

In this chapter I introduce the key theoretical concepts that will guide my practice and research and I chart the progression of media initiatives designed to include others in the media making process. I discuss key case studies when filmmakers and journalists have worked in collaboration and have set up frameworks for others to create in, and argue that these all help to shape contemporary understandings of co-creation. I also propose a conceptual framework to underpin the research.

## The theoretical framework

This section situates the research within an established set of concepts which the literature and empirical research explore. The primary concept for the theoretical framework and the questions that form this PhD is voice. Voice has been understood as the medium through which we express reality and have a world (De Saussure, 1989), a site in which power is embodied (Foucault, 1969), and a tool through which we link self-expression with civic participation (Rheingold, 2008). Refugees are commonly described as "voiceless", acts of participatory media can be described as "giving people voice", activism is described as "lending one's voice" to a cause. These require further investigation.

### *Voice as representation*

The power of voice is demonstrated by its assertion to represent reality. Representation in naming and categorising is an assertion of power, from the creation story of Adam and Eve naming the animals to demonstrate their dominion over them (Arendt, 1970;

Foucault, 1982, 1969) to more recent assertions of power in the representations of slavery and empire (Said, 1978, 1995). Thus the use and suppression of voice as an assertion of power is at work in representations of reality, and the capacity for self-representation. Nichols (1994) asks:

*Who has the responsibility and legitimacy (or power and authority) to represent others, not only in the sense of rendering likenesses but also in the sense of “speaking for” and “presenting a case”? An unasked but crucial question is, In what way does this representation matter to those it represents? (Nichols, 1991, pp. 64–65)*

Within the context of media arts, voice is not limited to vocal representation, but encompasses a wide range of expression and representation. Textual and visual representations sit in a complex web of relationships between production, consumption, power, ownership, identity, belonging, politics and geography. While this complex web applies equally to other groups that have been misrepresented or silenced by the media such as the trans community, it also has important implications for refugees due to the way in which they expose a contradiction with one of the most powerful and persistent ideologies of our time, that of the nation-state. In his paper on the labelling and categorisation of refugees, David Turton describes this position thus, “The refugee is therefore ‘out of place’ in a conceptual as well as an empirical sense. He or she is an anomaly produced by the universalisation of the nation-state as a principle of political organisation” (Turton, 2003, p. 11). The exclusion of the refugee from the universalising narrative of the nation-state is thus another means of depriving them of their voice.

### *Voice as narrative, self-interpretation and remembrance*

The power of voice to represent has a further dimension through time, as individual acts of representation corporately entail a narrative of identity and interpretation. This solidifies with the passage of time into remembrance and history.

Judith Butler’s articulation of “Voice [a]s the process of giving an account of oneself through a narrative” (2005) connects the idea of self-representation with voice as the process of forming identity through narrative. Consistent with this definition by Butler, this research draws on the idea of narrative as not only the assertion of power in articulating an existing identity, but a projection of power in aspiring to a narrative of future action. Narrative does not only allow the voice to represent itself, but it allows the voice to articulate an anticipated identity – a representation of a potential self (Ricoeur, 1992).

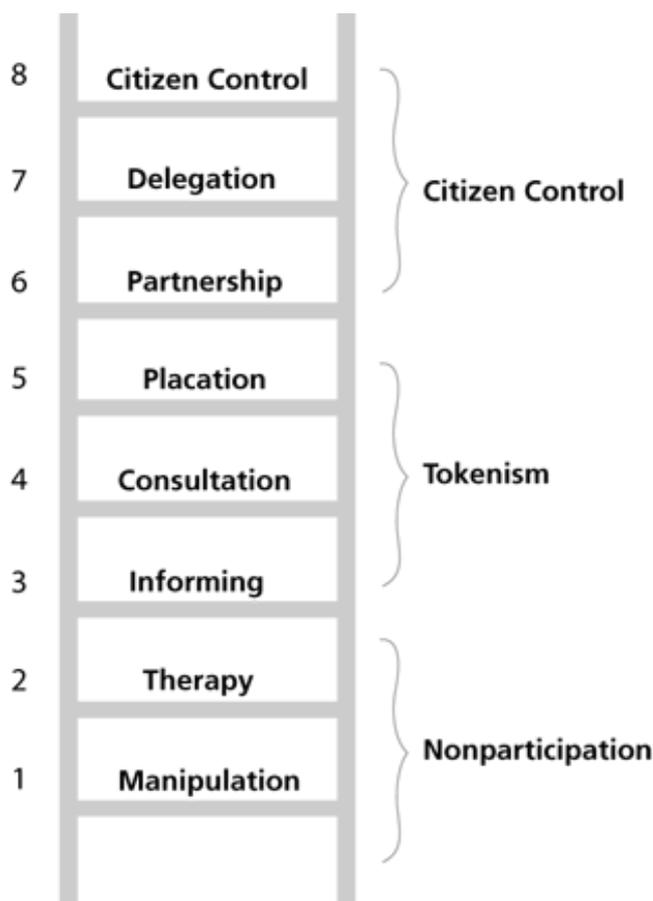
In *The Human Condition* (1958) Hannah Arendt ascribes value to the act of storytelling, as the weaving of a narrative out of the actions and pronouncements of individuals due to its function enabling the retrospective significance of an action for the actors themselves and for spectators. In acting and speaking, 'men (sic) show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world' (1958: 179). Indeed being deprived of the possibility of 'appearance' before others is to be deprived of reality itself, as "Nothing could appear, the word 'appearance' would make no sense, if recipients of appearances did not exist... Nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a spectator" (Arendt, 1981, p. 19). Presenting oneself to others through narrating one's experience can be understood as a vital aspect of identity formation.

Narratives also preserve the memory of deeds through time, and make them a source of instruction for the future, if they reach an audience or a community of memory. Sheldon Wolin describes the audience as 'a metaphor for the political community whose nature is to be a community of remembrance' (Wolin, 1977, p. 97). Arendt cites the Greek *polis* in the founding myth of democracy as the original congregation of organised remembrance. The seminal literary outputs of classical Greek literature are not the genius of an inspired bard or storyteller, but are enabled by the community of remembrance which supports the production of the narrative (Arendt, 1958). For individuals and communities who have been uprooted and displaced the act of making meaning through narrative to preserve and remember acts is particularly significant.

### *Voice as participation*

Participation, whether in political, creative or decision-making processes, is one way in which those with power facilitate opportunities for the voices of others to take shape, make meaning and be heard. Throughout the twentieth century, participation has influenced understandings of government, art, media, and development - so much so that by 1970 Carole Pateman wrote that 'the widespread use of the term... mean[s] that any precise, meaningful content has almost disappeared.' (Pateman, 1970, p1). Participation is the term that has tended to dominate in discussions since the alternative media movements of the 1960s and 1970s, in methodological approaches such as participatory rural appraisal and participatory photography discussed later in this chapter. In 1969, Sherry Arnstein described a ladder of citizen participation in reference to citizen involvement in planning processes in the United States, which has become a reference

point for many working in participatory media. This diagram helps to demonstrate the ways in which participation has been understood and the value that has been ascribed to it. The diagram features eight rungs on a ladder of citizen participation stretching from degrees of citizen power at the top (citizen control, delegated power, partnership) to degrees of tokenism in the middle (placation, consulting, informing) to nonparticipation at the bottom three rungs (therapy, manipulation) (Arnstein, 1969). This diagram, shown in Figure 1, represented the first time that participation could be benchmarked against a common framework.



**Arnstein's Ladder (1969)**  
Degrees of Citizen Participation

*Figure 1: Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation, taken from 'The Citizen's Handbook' (2019)*

The internet offers new understandings of participation in media as the involvement of individuals in the creation or re-circulation of content, in particular the shift from media distribution to circulation. The rise of the internet has led to optimism about the participatory and democratic potential of new media, with DIY media and connectivity in

developing countries heralding a new era for democracy where unheard voices can be both expressed and heard (Ratto and Boler, 2014).

In a more everyday manner, power, representation and social media converge around the concept of voice as public and civic participation (Rheingold, 2008). An example of this can be found in Koen Leurs' study of smartphones as the personal pocket archives of young refugees living in the Netherlands, arguing from a communications rights perspective that the narrative practices of young refugees can be conceived as distinct performative practices with a transformative political potential. He finds that refugees may become 'performative right claiming-subjects' (Isin and Ruppert, 2015, p. 10) the act of engaging in digital practices such as online conversations or status updates on social media that invoke human rights ideas (Leurs, 2017). The communications rights that Leurs identifies young refugees evoking are that of the right to self-determination, the right to self-expression, the right to information, the right to family life and the right to cultural identity. In this way participation can also be understood as a political act, taking place within a structure of power and control; Nico Carpentier describes media participation as "a struggle for political power (in the broadest sense possible), or better, as a power struggle on who can take on which roles in society..." (Carpentier, 2007, p. 108).

## **Media 'with' not media 'about': The journey to co-creation**

The practice of documentary in 'representing reality' (1991) has been beset by the ethical dilemma of a lack of inclusion since its outset. Bill Nichols, the founder of the study of documentary film, writes:

*"When both filmmaker and social actor co-exist within the historical world but only one has the authority to represent it, the other, who serves as the subject of the film, experiences a displacement. Though bodily and ethically absent, the filmmaker retains the controlling voice, and the subject of the film becomes displaced into a mythic realm of reductive, essentialised stereotype, most commonly romantic hero or powerless victim" (Nichols, 1991, p. 91)*

The response to this challenge has been manifold, and can be seen both as a series of currents operating underneath and separately to mainstream documentary tradition, and waves that emerge forcefully to disrupt the surface, providing a direct challenge to accepted production modes.

Since the very beginning of the documentary genre, filmmakers have been creating ways to create media with those who would otherwise be solely represented by others.

Practitioners working within mainstream documentary and on its margins from diverse fields including international development and community organising have sought to restructure the ways that narratives are created and shared by including marginalised and minority groups in the process of production.

Since I began my research in 2013 scholars and practitioners have begun to join these projects and methods of collaboration together into a cohesive, yet expansive, definition of co-creation. This has been pioneered by practitioners and academics such as Kat Cizek, MIT Open Documentary Lab and Mandy Rose of the Digital Studies Research Centre, University of the West of England, writer of the blog CollabDocs (Rose, 2019) , and co-director of the i-Docs project.

The I-Docs project is a research strand within the Digital Cultures Research Centre at the University of the West of England. Developed by Judith Aston, Sandra Gaudenzi and Mandy Rose, the project aims to explore interactive documentary, defined as “any project that starts with the intention to engage with the real, and that uses interactive digital technology to realise this intention” through research, a bi-annual symposia and a blog (Aston et al., 2017). Co-creation as a community of collaborators developing a project together is understood to be one element of this emerging definition of interactive documentary, with further work understanding the term being developed by Rose (2017, 2014, 2014).

This research has been built upon and formalised into the Co-Creation Studio at MIT Open Documentary Lab which opened in 2019 seeking to explore the form further. In their recently published guide to co-creation, entitled ‘Creative Wisdom’, authors from the Co-Creation Studio describe co-creation as being defined by methodologies that offer alternatives to the singular-author vision, emerging out of process and evolving from within communities and with people, rather than being made for or about them . Their enquiry into co-creation spans disciplines and organisations, and human and non-human systems, in order to highlight under-documented collective media practices. Informed by research, field experience, and interviews with practitioners they define co-creation as:

*‘Co-creation offers alternatives to a single-author vision, and it is a constellation of media production methods, frameworks, and feedback systems.*

*Projects emerge out of process, and evolve from within communities and with people, rather than being made for or about them. Co-creation spans across disciplines and organizations – even beyond them – and can also involve non-human or beyond human systems. The concept of co-creation reframes the ethics of who creates, how, and why.*

*Our research shows that co-creation interprets the world and seeks to change it through a lens of equity and justice.’(Cizek et al., 2019a)*

As defined here, co-creation enables us to examine projects and methodologies of the past in a new light, looking at the role of the storytellers, the participants, the audience, and the technology that contribute to the creation of content. Co-creation offers us the chance to look closer at the relationships at play, at what each individual contributes and at the nature of their interactions, and to design collaborative partnerships that prioritise voices that may otherwise not be heard.

In approaching the projects described in this written thesis from the vantage point of co-creation, the reader is invited to ask questions that look beyond simply the level of participation in a pre-established structure but ask about the mutual shaping and collaboration of an endeavour, to include, How is labour divided?, How was decision-making divided? Who was concerned with completion? Who controlled distribution? Who oversaw technical involvement?

Co-creation invites us to look in new ways at the roles that online audiences play in creating and shaping content. In *Spreadable Media* (Jenkins et al., 2013), the authors analyse new and emerging hybrid circulation model, “where a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how material is shared across and among cultures in far more participatory (and messier) ways. The public aren’t simply consumers of reconstructed messages but people who are shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined.” (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 1) Early internet enthusiasts defined participatory media within a journalism framework as ‘The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information,’ contributing to a healthy democracy, ‘The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires.’ (Bowman and Willis, 2003, p. 9) I argue along with others (Aston et al., 2017; Cizek et al., 2019b; Rose, 2017) that this idea of an audience shaping and contributing to content and messages can also be understood as co-creation. This is something I go on to explore in my practice.

For Brian Winston experiments in process and social advocacy filmmaking represent the only road toward solving the victim problem of the social documentary. However his conclusion leans towards an absolutist position, suggesting that an increase in power or

participation by the community must directly result in a loss of power by the filmmaker. He writes: “advocacy by the subject *means the end of the documentarist as artist*, but, perhaps just as significantly, it also means the end of the victim as subject” (emphasis added) (Nichols, 1995, p. 258). This thesis explores the complexities at play in these relationships and argues for a more nuanced understanding through co-creation where the documentarian can be an artist alongside a subject, working collaboratively to achieve an end product.

In the rest of this chapter I introduce and discuss key movements that can shape our understanding of co-creation and the case studies that characterise them. I do not begin with activist documentary approaches of the 1920s and 1930s which asked many of the same questions of social action and voice, though it plays a key role in the story, but with The Fogo Process founded in 1967 as the seminal movement that foreground participatory media as we understand it today. In locating my practice in a lineage (Nelson, 2013) I hope to highlight some of the key tensions and challenges inherent in making media with others, which will become the focus of my practice and research.

## **The Fogo Process and Challenge for Change**

The Fogo Process arguably made the most significant contribution to the act of creating media with others prior to the internet, for the first time emphasising the *process* of media production over the *product* itself. Pioneering in its approach to participation, the process redefined both audience and participants in the media making process, and went on to influence much work that followed, particularly participatory photography and video.

The Fogo Process was developed Donald Snowden as part of Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle (CFC/SN) which launched in Canada in 1967, facilitating community members on Fogo Island in the articulation of their problems, ideas and vision on films that were later screened to wider community members. Run by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) the primary goal of Challenge for Change was to address poverty in Canada through the production and dissemination of documentary cinema, thus bringing about social change. The program was directly influenced by a new movement of media democracy including the international New Left (Waugh et al., 2010, p. 6). Challenge for Change saw the production of approximately 145 films in both English and French and was ground breaking in its commitment to ‘foreground empowered representation, creative collectivism, dialogic processes, and exposure of and resistance to power and oppression.’ (Waugh et al., 2010, p. 8)

Challenge for Change introduced three unique features to the way in which media was produced and broadcast. Firstly, it emphasised process, and the need to co-create films with communities rather than creating films about them. Secondly, it believed in bridging differences and bringing together previously distant communities through the sharing of opinions on film. Thirdly, it prioritised distribution that circulated locally and used film as a process for self-identification and examination, prior to mass distribution. Underpinning these three features was a fundamental desire to use film to achieve social change, through highlighting social problems and critiquing ineffective government programmes. Emerging out of the first moment in history when camera equipment had become portable, Challenge for Change hoped that by enabling the disenfranchised to have access to this new technology inequalities in power would be readjusted in favour of previously marginalised minorities.

Snowden outlines the two tenets of the Fogo Process; that of horizontal learning and vertical communication. Horizontal learning can be used by communities to teach themselves from within their own villages, or between villages, through sharing videotapes. Vertical communication takes videotapes to people of authority, facilitating communication between previously separated groups of people. As members from different villages on the island began to understand that they were experiencing similar problems, they became aware of the need for community organisation. As well as mobilising different communities to seek change, through vertical communication the films also brought distant politicians face-to-face with the voices and opinions of people they seldom heard, changing government policies and actions as a result (Snowden, 1983). This process became integral to Challenge for Change, and provided a model of communication for development practice and participatory video, explored later in the chapter (White, 2003).

For Snowden, writing shortly before his death to accompany the film *Eyes See; Ears Hear*, the Fogo Process brought about direct change;

"Today few people on Fogo speak often about the filming, yet many believe their lives were changed enormously by it. This can never be accurately measured. But it is certain that the fishermen formed an island-wide producer's cooperative which handled and processed large catches, enabling them to keep the profits on their island. Unemployment of able-bodied men disappeared, and government directed their efforts to helping people stay... Films did not do these things: people did them. There is little doubt, however, that film created an awareness and self confidence that was needed for people advocated development to occur." (Snowden, 1983)

Snowden records that the communities he worked with underwent a process of changing identity through seeing themselves as others see them, building a new identity built on the confidence that their knowledge is important and worth listening to. This is directly attributable to the video techniques the Fogo Process is based on, which ‘create a new way of learning, which not only build confidence, but show people that they can say and do things that they thought were not possible before.’ (Snowden, 1983, p. 8) The program found that the act of speaking in the presence of others brings a distinctive self into reality (Arendt, 1958).

In ‘Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film’ (1974) Eric Barnouw suggests that the programme resulted in shifting public opinion, stimulating community communication and creating a bridge between community and government. Corneil suggests that the programme was also remembered in documentary and film studies as having *overcome* the ethical dilemma of representation – a dilemma for film and documentary studies but also for media and democracy more generally– and calls for a re-interrogation of this claim (Waugh et al., 2010).

The distribution model within Challenge for Change was unique. Production and distribution were connected through the process of showing the raw footage to the community while the process was underway, and screening the finished film to other activist groups, the government or other communities. Audience reactions would be recorded and played back to the community, thus providing a mechanism for two-way communication between audience and producer before the film was released for mass distribution.

In this way the spaces between production, exhibition and widespread distribution were utilised for processes of speaking and listening, challenging dominant modes of production and mainstream media ideologies. The physicality of these spaces enabled a different type of conversation to those enabled through online conversation. Winston and Garrison point out that today’s virtual model of distribution loses the face-to-face connectivity among audience members and between the audience and the filmmakers, ‘the experience of elbow-to-elbow audiences and the space of shared social experience collapse in virtual distribution, replaced with isolated individuals looking at private screens’ (Waugh et al., 2010, p 421). These spaces are still as relevant today. In interactive documentaries like *The Quipu Project* (2015) that I will go on to discuss, we

can see these spaces being reutilised, with the welding together of production and distribution in a way foreshadowed by Challenge for Change.

## **Participatory video and photography**

While the Fogo Process was firmly embedded within the professional media sector, conceptualised and delivered through the NFB, the principles behind it went on to influence other fields. This section introduces participatory video and participatory photography, their origins in the community development sector, and the ways in which they are practiced today.

### *Participatory video*

Shirley White's publication, "*Participatory Video: Images that transform and empower*" (2003) looks at the emergence of participatory video as a media form throughout the world. She finds that while there has been no uniform movement to promote and practice participatory video since the work on Fogo Island, different individuals and groups have set up pockets of participatory video work moulding it to specific needs and situations.

Drawing heavily on Colin Low's methodology, participatory video also drew on participatory rural appraisal (PRA) (Chambers, 1994) as an alternative to 'top-down' development, which began to shape the way in which community development was conceptualised and delivered from the 1980s onwards. PRA was born from a frustration among international development practitioners with the power imbalance and biases inherent in research methods such as surveys and interviews. Initially conceived as Rapid Rural Appraisal, this new positioning towards the practice of international development was based on philosophical underpinnings of empowerment, joint decision-making and local ownership of process (Paulo Freire, 2000). Established techniques were replaced with methodologies including matrix scoring, community mapping, modelling, and the drawing of diagrams, enabling local communities to be part of the research process (Chambers, 1994).

In PRA visual and oral research techniques were prioritised to ensure equal participation. It is therefore not surprising that the Fogo Process pioneered by Low, with its focus on community ownership, its emphasis on listening, and utilisation of the visual

as a tool for achieving change, was embraced within community development circles grappling with this shift in how community engagement was practiced.

As video began to be used more prominently as a tool for social change and participatory communication, a diversity of approaches and applications came to exist by the 1980s, to the extent where the terms 'Fogo Process' and 'participatory video' could no longer be used interchangeably. This is documented in the South African context by Julia Cain in her PhD thesis on applying participatory video in South Africa (Cain, 2009).

Although participatory video continues to be used and adapted in different ways dependent on the context, several organisations have set out to consolidate and standardise the practice. One of these, Insight Share, describes the difference between traditional documentary and participatory video as;

*"By contrast, in participatory video the subjects make their own film in which they can shape issues according to their own sense of what is important, and they can also control how they will be represented. Additionally, documentary films are often expected to meet stringent aesthetic standards and are usually made with a large audience in mind. The participatory video process on the other hand, is less concerned with appearance than with content, and the films are usually made with particular audiences and objectives in mind."* (Lunch and Lunch, 2006, p. 10)

They describe seven key stages to their practice of participatory video:

- Participants (men, women and youth) rapidly learn how to use video equipment through games and exercises.
- Facilitators help groups to identify and analyse important issues in their community by adapting a range of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)-type tools with participatory video techniques (for example, social mapping, action search, prioritising, etc. See 'Chambers' in Appendix 7, References).
- Short videos and messages are directed and filmed by the participants.
- Footage is shown to the wider community at daily screenings.
- A dynamic process of community-led learning, sharing and exchange is set in motion.
- Completed films can be used to promote awareness and exchange between various different target groups. InsightShare has worked with pastoralists, farmers, marginalised communities and youth in rural and urban settings, street children, refugees and asylum seekers, people with mental health problems, learning difficulties and physical disabilities.

- Participatory video films or video messages can be used to strengthen both horizontal communication (e.g. communicating with other communities) and vertical communication (e.g. communicating with decision-makers).(Lunch and Lunch, 2006, p. 11)

Here we can identify the key tenets of the Fogo Process, horizontal and vertical communication, film screenings, an emphasis on process and collaboration, but offered in a toolkit to community development practitioners to integrate with their existing work. In this way the legacy of the Fogo Process was shifted from mainstream media and broadcasting companies into the field of community development and into partnerships with charities such as Oxfam and Mercy Corps.

Participatory video is characterised by a distinction between a participatory process and the creation of a high-quality audio-visual product. Silvia Balit describes it as a format in which,

*'The fundamental importance of process is stressed.... video programs should be produced with and by the people.... and not just produced by outsiders... when produced by outsiders the professional quality of the communication programs becomes secondary to the content and process involved in the production of a message or a program.'* (White, 2003, p. 10)

At a lecture at Royal Holloway University, Jacqueline Shaw from Real Time Video, a leading participatory video company, described the cycle of shooting and reviewing results in video narratives that communicate what those involved want to communicate in a way that they think is appropriate, rather than a process that results in a high-quality output; "It's not about making a beautiful video, it's about a process."<sup>1</sup> The process of inclusion and participation is prized over any collaboration between skilled media practitioners whose input could help to create a higher 'quality' product and those who have a story to tell.

In incorporating the Fogo Process with the practice and philosophy of PRA participatory video has achieved some notable successes; it has been credited as a tool to promote changes in attitudes and social behaviour, to rescue the culture and heritage of indigenous people, to resolve conflicts, achieve consensus, to expose social justice and to challenge public stereotypes (White, 2003). While participatory video lends itself to processes of public consultation, advocacy, community mobilisation and policy

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<sup>1</sup> Guest Seminar, Royal Holloway Geography Department, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

dialogue, it is also used as a tool for participatory and anthropological research (Berardi and Mistry, 2011), widening the scope of the Fogo Process.

The legacy of the Fogo process has shifted its centre of gravity from media practitioners towards international development practitioners with a continued emphasis on process. This brings to the fore questions around audience and listening which I pick up on at the end of this section.

### *Photovoice*

The methodology of photovoice<sup>2</sup> bears similarities to the Fogo Process that inspired participatory video, but cannot be said to draw on it or be adapted from it in the same way.

The term *photovoice* was coined by Caroline Wang, of the University of Michigan and Mary Ann Burris, Programme Officer for Women's Health at the Ford Foundation as a re-naming of the methodology they previously referred to as *photo novella* (Wang and Burris, 1997). They describe photovoice as a process by which people can identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique, in doing so 'entrusting cameras' to people to enable them to be the actors for change in their communities. This methodology was influenced by feminist theory, the writings of Paulo Freire (2000) and the work of documentary photographers including Jim Hubbard's project with homeless children (Hubbard, 1992) and Wendy Ewald's *Portraits and Dreams* (1985) with Appalachian youth portraying their own lives (Sutton-Brown, 2014). The process of empowerment is a crucial element of participatory photography's feminist approach integrated within an awareness of issues of power and control in the photographer-object relationship as well as the ways that women, immigrants and other oppressed groups are portrayed or ignored by the media (Gallo, 2016, p. 110).

In an article published in *The Journal of Women's Health* in 1999 they introduce photovoice as an innovative Participatory Action Research method developed in order to enable village Chinese women in Yunnan Province to photograph their health and work realities, offering unique contributions to women's health, through the case study of their project with rural women in Yunnan Province, China (Wang, 1999). In an earlier

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis I make a distinction between *photovoice*, the methodology developed by Wang and Burris, and *PhotoVoice* as the specific type of photovoice methodology promoted by the organisation PhotoVoice.

article they describe the three goals of photovoice: to enable people to record their community's strengths and concerns, to promote critical dialogue and knowledge of community issues through the discussion of photographs, and to engage policy makers with community issues through the use of these photographs. (Wang and Burris, 1997).

Crucially, photovoice was understood as a tool for needs assessment and community-based participatory appraisal (CBPA) within community development. In their article re-defining photovoice Wang and Burris describe photovoice as a technique comparable to tools including community inventory community assessment or focus groups, with the ultimate objective being to gain understanding about the needs and concerns faced by a community with very few ways of advocating for themselves or communicating about their concerns. They specifically refer to the value of photography in a culture of illiteracy; 'photovoice is accessible to anyone who can learn to handle an instamatic camera; and, what is more, it does not presume the ability to read or write.' (Wang and Burris, 1997, p. 372)

Photovoice isn't just about the image itself as the captioning of images is integral to the process; understood as VOICE – Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experience. Through discussion and the narration of photographs meaning is given to images through either issues, themes or theories which then form the basis of collective community action (Wang and Burris, 1997, p. 381).

Photovoice has been adopted by practitioners within community development as well as activists, by documentary photographers and those new to the visual image, and in rural and urban contexts. A large-scale five country project *Transforming Cash Transfers* (2014) launched by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in May 2012 funded by the Department for International Development (DfID) illustrates the extent to which photovoice methodology has become embedded within international development. Implemented in partnership with the organisation PhotoVoice (distinct from the methodology itself photovoice), the project used participatory photography alongside other participatory research approaches to attempt to understand beneficiary and community perspectives on cash transfer programmes in Kenya, Mozambique, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (both Gaza and West Bank), Uganda and Yemen.

The Figure below shows a photograph by Stalla Mueni, a project participant. The caption she wrote to accompany the image is "Before I had my smart uniform I used to wear this

dress to school. There was no money to buy a school uniform for me.” The voice behind the image is arresting; the PhotoVoice method has brought the subject’s perspective to the fore.



*Figure 2: Photography by Stalla Mueni 2012 / ODI / PhotoVoice*

Another key aspect of photovoice is the educational process as participants are guided by a facilitator to record and reflect their needs to each other and to others, to promote dialogue and build confidence. In her analysis of two participatory photography projects in Canada, Darlene Clover describes it as ‘a vibrant form of transformative, imaginative learning and visual narrative because it demands creativity, risk, and skill from its artists’ (Clover, 2006, p. 289).

### *An emphasis on voice and a narrow framework for listening*

In creating a dichotomy between process and product and ascribing value primarily to the process of participation, participatory video and photography present an inherent challenge to audience reception. On Day One of a Participatory Photography course that the author took, Arnstein’s ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969) was drawn on a large piece of paper, stuck on the wall, and referred to throughout the training as a constant reminder of the ultimate goal of this methodology; ‘citizen control’. Success, it was deemed, is to achieve ‘full’ participation. A simplistic evaluation from full to partial participation is problematic as the relationship between producer and participants is

constantly evolving; the new term 'co-creation' as developed by Kat Cizek, Mandy Rose and others directly brings these relationships to view and offers them as a valuable node for study rather than pointing to a simple sliding scale of participation.

Another challenge with this process-oriented way of working is that voice tends to be privileged over examining audiences and reception. In celebrating and emphasising the process of participation, the end product can easily become disengaged from audiences and from facilitating the connection and conversation that is required in order to see change. Participatory video has historically emphasised process over product, to the extent where the audio-visual quality of the end product is not of importance. If not implemented carefully, this approach can easily write off audience as of secondary importance and put up barriers to entry for those who wish to engage with the end product. In his analysis of two participatory media projects in Belgium entitled *Participation is Not Enough* (2009) Nico Carpentier discovers that,

*“mediated participation is not enough for a programme to be valued positively. In order to be appreciated, there are a number of conditions that have to be met. (...) the basic conventions about aesthetic, narrative and technical quality, as defined by the professionalized mainstream media system, are deeply rooted within the taste cultures of these (north Belgian) audience members.” (Carpentier, 2009, p.418)*

He finds that when viewing participation as an object of celebration, as is the tendency with practitioners, it easily becomes decontextualised from its 'political-ideological, communicative-cultural and communicative structural' contexts (Carpentier, 2011, p407), and, crucially, detached from the reception of its audiences.

At best these projects are carefully designed to target niche audiences, in the form of policy makers or governments, but in focusing on the value of the process and not recognising the potential that a constructive upskilling 'co-creative' partnership could hold for the finished product, participatory media risks reducing communication simply to voice rather than acts of meaningful listening. Jean Burgess asks, 'The question that we ask about democratic media participation can no longer be limited to 'who gets to speak?', we must also ask 'who is heard, and to what end?' (Burgess, 2006, p3, see also Couldry, 2010 ).

Participatory photography and video both involve bringing new or unavailable technology to marginalised communities in an easily accessible way which often involves little technical training through a careful process of facilitation. The advancement of digital

technology and connectivity in these same cultures and contexts therefore raises questions about how the methodology will adapt. With the rise of user generated content and citizen journalism, how will processes that do not value the finished audio-visual product or include technical training be received by future participants?

## **Digital Storytelling in mainstream media: Capture Wales and the BBC**

We now turn to Digital Storytelling as the method upon which the UK's first inclusive media project in mainstream media was created. Digital Storytelling originated in the United States as an alternative media form with an ethos of participation and democratisation. It developed throughout the 1970s and 1980s as arts practitioners wanted to make art accessible to those traditionally left behind, and worked to increase access to artistic expression alongside expanding the scope of creative endeavour. The workshop movement was started by Joe Lambert building on the work of Dana Atchely of a form of communication that others wanted to participate in. In 1998 Joe co-founded the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California, which remains a leader in the field.

The Centre for Digital Storytelling cites seven core values as underpinning their work, reflected in their curriculum that became the basis for community workshops teaching digital storytelling skills, adopted by other organisations such as the BBC. These seven values are: Everyone has many stories to tell; people need to be heard; listening is hard; people see, hear and perceive the world in different ways; creative activity is human activity; technology is a powerful instrument of creativity; sharing stories can lead to positive change (Centre for Digital Storytelling, n.d.).

Taught most often in workshops, digital storytelling participants combine the moving image, still image, audio and text into digital stories, thereby 'crafting an agentive self' (Hull & Katz, 2006). These outputs are then broadcast on television or uploaded to be streamed online. Jean Burgess argues that digital storytelling should be understood, "as a 'movement (that) is explicitly designed to amplify the ordinary voice. It aims not only to remediate vernacular creativity, but to legitimate it as a relatively autonomous and worthwhile contribution to public culture. This marks it as an important departure from even the most empathetic 'social documentary' traditions." (Burgess, 2006, p. 6)

In 2000 Daniel Meadows visited the Center for Digital Storytelling and borrowed their methodology, developing it as a new way of making broadcast television in partnership with a team at BBC Wales. BBC Capture Wales, as it became known, ran monthly workshops all around Wales from 2001 – February 2008. Jenny Kidd's PhD research (2005) on Capture Wales revealed that workshop participants were representative of the population of Wales, and that "more so than in any other archive produced within the mainstream media, real "Welsh" people of all ages are getting their opportunity to speak... " (Kidd, 2006, p 8). This is seen as an antidote to the media hegemony of authority being associated with white male voices. *Capture Wales* sought to challenge norms around the type of person who is able to speak to a wider audience and the type of stories that were told;

*"The form deals with creative expression; promotes democratic processes of production and distribution; blurs the distinction between producers and those uninspiringly referred to as 'consumers'; shows a commitment to innovation and experimentation; often deals with the opinions of minorities and subject matter that is not given regular coverage; and even allows people to express attitudes that are hostile to widely held beliefs."*  
(Kidd, 2006, p 5)

In 2000 the UK's public service broadcaster the BBC embarked on an ambitious interactive media project, designed initially as a one-year pilot to connect with communities, open up new lines of talent, build an archive of the 'real' Wales, and to provide training opportunities. The project, *Capture Wales*, ran monthly workshops around Wales from 2001 to 2008 resulting in over 500 digital stories accessible online under the BBC's New Media strand. Daniel Meadows, Creative Director of the project saw it as an opportunity to create a nation of storytellers who were doing media projects themselves not being 'done to' by a mass media (Kidd, 2006, p. 7).

During the storytelling workshops participants learned scripting and storytelling skills and how to use software including Adobe Photoshop and Premiere; uniquely to the movements that went before it, in Capture Wales participants not only provided the raw materials but edited the final video, therefore having complete technical control over their representation. The opportunity to develop a new technical skillset that would enable them to keep up with technology was cited by participants interviewed as a key motivator for their participation in the project (Kidd, 2006; Thumin, 2008). The acquisition of these skills can be understood to contribute to the development of media literacy and an active citizenship (Livingstone et al., 2005). In learning how to construct stories themselves participants gained the ability to analyse media and to think about the ways in which

voices are represented (Kidd, 2005, p. 302). Figure 9 shows stills from the video produced by Capture Wales participant Susie Pratt (2007).



Figure 3: Stills from *Sparring Partners* by Susie Pratt, October 2007, Capture Wales

### *The interplay between communities and the individual*

While Challenge for Change films were the focus of community mobilising efforts around a particular social problem and fitted into a wider project to raise awareness of an issue, Digital Storytelling's emphasis on the 'story circle' and helping participants to find their true voice and story idea turns the focus on individual voices. However, through bringing together these individual self-representations alongside others on the website, communities are represented. This is not unique to Capture Wales, as other Digital Storytelling projects also focus on individuals due to their membership of a specific community, such as refugee youth or an ethnic minority. It is also important to note that these individual self-representations were made in group settings and so are as a result of the interplay between individuals, groups and their wider communities. The process can also serve to build communities, as one participant remarked, "Well it does in a way bring the community together, which is really what the BBC's about I suppose, isn't it." (Thumin, 2008, p. 95). In facilitating cultural representation individuals are representing themselves but then are also assumed to a wider audience to represent others like them, which raises the question, "So who can legitimately speak for whom and how can the interests of the least powerful and most marginal be represented as well as the interests of the most articulate?" (Mayo, 2006, p. 394) This tension between individual and group representations is something I consider throughout the thesis and my practice work.

### *The process of digital storytelling*

In interviews with participants conducted by Thumin, the quality of the project was defined by the quality of the process itself, the quality of the output, and also as inherent to the content of the self-representation; one respondent describes this as “Because if you’re looking for the quality story, they don’t come along very often... Because they’re like leaves on a tree, they’re all the same, but they’re all different.... Some particular leaves will stand out from the other leaves.” (Thumin, 2008, p. 100). In this articulation quality is not about the process facilitated by the institution or the final product and the way that audiences engage with it, but is innate to the story itself.

A quarter (27%) of participants interviewed by Kidd volunteered that the workshops were therapeutic. When asked by Kidd why they had chosen to tell their particular story, the answers revealed the value they ascribed to this method of media production. Some answers emphasised the hope that their message would influence others, “If my story can help anyone to come to terms with their depression, then it has been well worthwhile”, while some pointed to the value in the process itself, “Telling and making the story was a kind of a catharsis”, and some wanted to commemorate a life or showcase a particular passion such as yoga or motorbikes (Kidd, 2006, p. 9). The process itself, rather than necessarily the outputs, as the fact that a public service broadcaster was creating spaces for the storytelling of average lives by normal community members transformed the relationship between a corporate media outlet and a community. One member of the Capture Wales team, Gilly Adams, interviewed by Kidd described it as “actually about changing the relationship between the media and the people outside” (Kidd, 2005, p. 214).

### *Audience engagement*

The process of production remains important Digital Storytelling, but alongside a greater emphasis on the quality of the end product than participatory video or photovoice, through “an aesthetic that aims to maximise relevance and impact” (Burgess, 2006, p. 6). The stories that resulted from Capture Wales were located on the BBC’s New Media website and were also broadcast on BBC 2 Wales in a stand-alone slot and within Wales Today’s local news bulletins. While no audience consumption figures are known there are several factors that point to a limited reach, and limited meaningful opportunities for dialogue between both the BBC and the participants and the participants and a wider audience (Kidd, 2006).

Analysing digital storytelling in a different context, Tanja Dreher investigates 'listening' at digital storytelling events in Sydney run by the Information Cultural Exchange in 2009 and 2010. She finds that the 'voice' offered by these projects has found an audience primarily in the community development sector rather than the mainstream, and is limited to niche small audiences (Dreher, 2012). Listening is limited and the celebratory and affirmatory atmosphere of these projects celebrating 'finding voice' is at odds with an environment facilitating the difficult process of listening across difference necessary for political change (Bickford, 1996). Dreher suggests that while there is value in enabling marginalised communities and individuals to speak, "a narrow conception of voice may succeed in democratising speaking – but fail to democratise listening. If we focus only on the thresholds such as access to communication technologies or to skills training or to distribution, we will not guarantee listening or voice that matters." (Dreher, 2012, p. 3)

She goes on to suggest that the model of digital storytelling itself may be flawed in this way, and that the genre itself may contribute to limited listening. For digital storytelling projects to fully ensure voice that matters further innovations in the format are required (Dreher, 2012). This would seem to hold true of Capture Wales. The internet was viewed as the primary distribution model yet only 52% of Welsh households had access to the internet in 2006 (Kidd, 2006). Furthermore, the two-way dialogue engendered during the lifespan of the projects didn't carry through into the online content, despite early optimism about internet democratisation. The project was displayed using Real Player which some participants felt was a drawback as it was both a barrier and a lower quality viewing experience (Thumin, 2008, p. 99). Two-way dialogue is something that later storytelling movements have been able to integrate more successfully enabled by social media and increased technological capabilities, as I go on to discuss.

Tensions also exist in the fact that the methodology held democratising goals yet existed within the confines of a public service broadcaster. In the context of funding cuts, Kidd describes Digital Storytelling as an example of alternative media "struggling within the dictates of a corporation that is not yet willing to throw its weight behind the form" (Kidd, 2005, p. 312), whose success and failure are as a result of it not conforming to the mould of the BBC. The tension between participatory storytelling existing within a commercial framework remains the case, and in fact could be argued to be even more pertinent in today's context when it is social media companies who deliver content rather than mainstream media such as the BBC or Canada's NFB.

## Interactive documentary and The Quipu Project

Interactive documentary is an emerging media form defined in multiple ways (Aston and Gaudenzi, 2012; Galloway et al., 2007; Gifreu, n.d.; Nash et al., 2014). The creators of the i-docs website, conference and forum, a research strand within the Digital Cultures Research Centre at UWE Bristol, define interactive documentary as follows:

*'For us any project that starts with an intention to document the 'real' and that does so by using digital interactive technology can be considered an i-doc. What unites all these projects is this intersection between digital interactive technology and documentary practice. Where these two things come together, the audience become active agents within documentary – making the work unfold through their interaction and often contributing content.'* (i-Docs, n.d.)

This documenting of the real through digital technology that requires audience decision-making and interaction has been implemented in different collaborative ways, with each type of collaboration shaping the final form of the documentary in particular ways. While some documentaries have involved their subjects as collaborators (Out My Window, 2010, Hollow, 2013), it is rare to find a project that a) views the collaborators as both the creators of a documentary and its primary audience, and b) facilitates an encompassing cycle of communication attentive to speaking, listening and responding. *The Quipu Project* (2015) is designed to emphasise both of these aspects.

Twelve years after Capture Wales was initiated Peruvian filmmaker Rosemarie Lerner began investigating the possibility of making a documentary about historic forced sterilisations in Peru, with very similar goals to the Capture Wales team of amplifying previously unheard voices and providing disenfranchised communities with opportunities to speak and to be heard. Like Challenge for Change, it set out to create a unique process for collaborative storytelling rather than drawing on existing tools and methodologies as we've seen in Capture Wales. It took as its starting point the ways in which the target community were already using storytelling technology and adapted the project around their existing capabilities and technologies rather than bringing new technologies or training them in how to use them. The resulting interactive documentary, *The Quipu Project* (2015), demonstrates how advances in technology enabled a vastly different process of online dialogue to that created by Capture Wales.

*The Quipu Project* (2015) is an interactive documentary about Peru's forced sterilisation campaign that prioritises collaboration with the men and women affected. The

sterilisations occurred as part of The Reproductive Health and Family Planning Program introduced in 1995 by the government of President Alberto Fujimori. The program, funded by USAID and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), was initially well received as a means of reducing poverty and increasing access to contraceptives. In Peru's rural indigenous communities, compliance with the program was achieved through systematic intimidation - the threat of police intervention or the loss of health services- and deception. By 2001, 272,028 women and 22,004 men had been sterilised without informed consent (Aguila, 2006). Those affected were disproportionately from Peru's indigenous communities, and have since suffered health problems and associated unemployment, stigmatisation, and emotional trauma. Some have organised in order to seek compensation, but have faced many barriers in achieving recognition and justice for the crimes perpetrated against them, due in part to their geographical isolation, lack of resources, language barriers, and ethnic discrimination. In January 2014, the latest legal investigation into the forced sterilisations was closed, with the public prosecutor Marco Guzmán finding no evidence that crimes had been committed (BBC, 2014).

In 2012, Peruvian filmmaker Rosemarie Lerner met with several NGOs and community advocates working with the women affected, who reported that several women had already participated in documentary films about their experiences but hadn't had the chance to see the completed films and were unsure of the results (if any) of their participation. In response to this, Lerner decided to design a project that would enable indigenous women to have their voices heard on their own terms and in their own words, and as equal partners in the project. *The Quipu Project* (2015) aims to enable indigenous women who have historically been silenced to tell their own stories from the inside, rather than being spoken through the voice of an outsider. The strategy involves using technology that the women already have access to: radio and mobile phones.

The project is inspired by the Quipu/Khipu, an early Inca communication system used to record quantitative data as well as songs, genealogies and other narratives containing historical information, illustrated in Figure 4. Each Quipu was composed of 'pendant strings' made of thin cotton fibres attached to thicker primary chords, with knots tied at different levels.

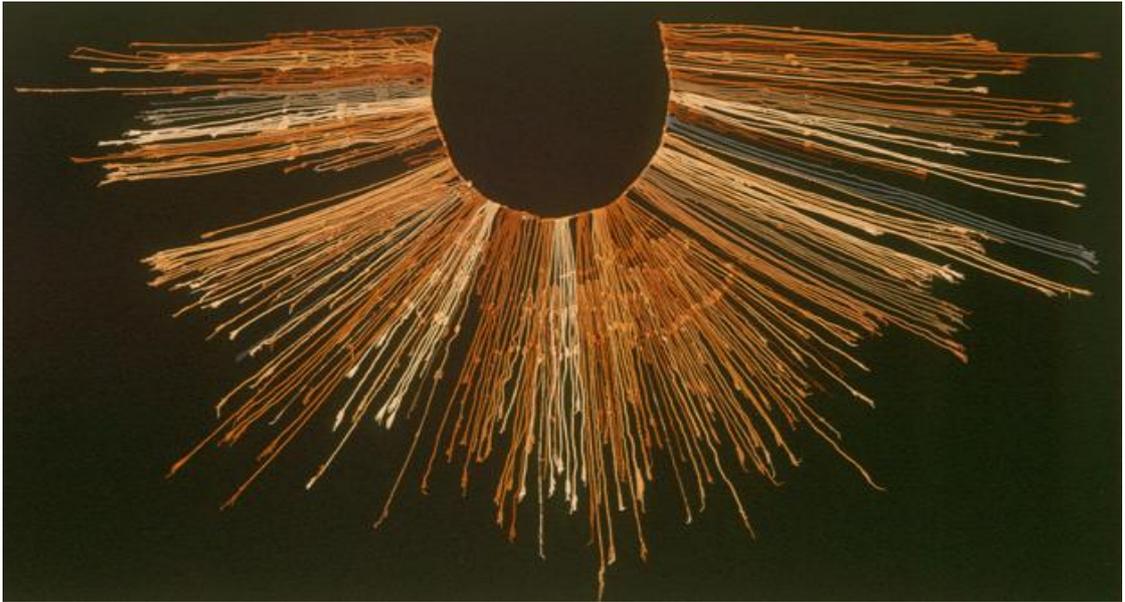


Figure 4 : The Inca Quipu Communication System. From the Larco Museum Collection. Released for free use

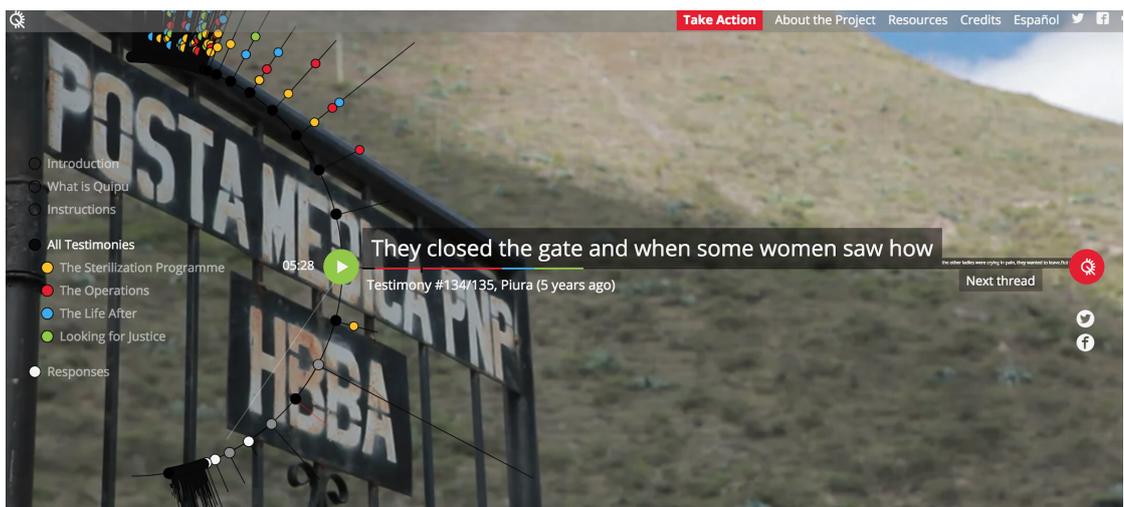


Figure 5: Screenshot from the Quipu interactive documentary

*The Quipu Project* (2015) follows this concept by creating a collective string of oral histories in the original indigenous languages for multiple audiences, including and prioritising the communities producing the stories. This is illustrated in Figure 5. The system facilitates three modes of communication: 1) connection/voice, 2) listening, and 3) response.

The first stage of the project in each new target location is the broadcast of radio invitations for women to leave messages on an answerphone. These invitations consist of the reading of a press release about the project presenting the local organisation partnered with, the project's phone number, and its website. The presenter reads the press release, followed by music specific to *The Quipu Project* (2015) and then a short, anonymised testimony of 2-3 minutes. The radio stations are selected by the local organisations in each area for their popularity and reach, and the invitations are played during and after storytelling workshops conducted in the same region.

The 1990s' Peruvian sterilisation campaign targeted women already isolated from wider society whose experience further silenced them. The act of speaking and process of dialogue can therefore be seen as important elements in order for these women to reclaim their personhood and citizenship in the public sphere.

### *Recording personal narratives on a phone line*

A central tool of *The Quipu Project* (2015) is a free telephone line which women can call in order to record messages about their experiences of sterilisation. Participation -i.e. the recording of personal experiences- is encouraged through workshops, partnerships with local NGOs, and poster and radio campaigns. Collaborators can listen to each others' testimonies and record responses, providing support and solidarity even though in some cases they live in isolated rural communities far away from one another. Some women have also taken on the role of 'story hunters', raising awareness about the project and encouraging others to leave their testimonies.

Once recorded, the testimonies can be listened to from a phone line inside Peru using a testimony line, and also become viewable by a secondary audience via the website, as threads on the Quipu. The project uses VoIP (voice over internet protocol) technology to connect the phone line to the Internet, and the Drupal module VozMob to upload and catalogue all the testimonies. These are translated into Quechua, Spanish and English and uploaded to an online archive where they can be listened to anywhere in the world through an Internet browser. Through this system, illustrated in Figure 6, the community on the ground, the producers, and the online audience are all in a position to collaborate in the creation of an online Quipu, in the form of an interactive documentary.

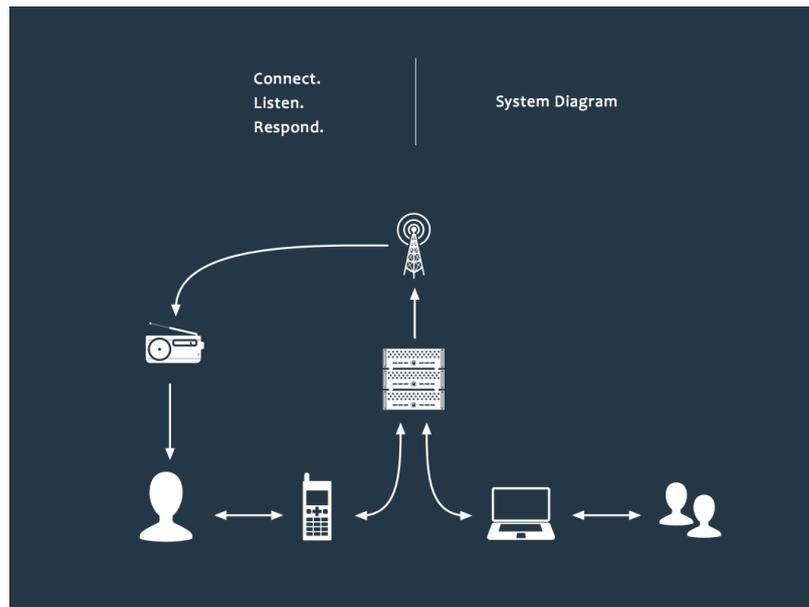


Figure 6: The communication mechanisms behind The Quipu Project (2015)

In *The Quipu Project* (2015), mobile technology plays an important role as a medium through which disenfranchised and historically silenced women can speak out, telling their stories to one another and to the wider community, and thus sharing their experiences of forced sterilisation. However, projects such as this involving self-expression through mobile technology in the developing world are understudied, as noted by anthropologists Osorio and Postill (2010). While the mainstream narrative around the growing penetration of mobile phones in developing countries focuses on their role in economic growth, it is of vital importance to consider other ways in which mobile technology is being used, as this project demonstrates.

After the phone line was put into action, another important role of the project became apparent. A recent visit from a prosecutor had resulted in many women feeling that they had failed to adequately express themselves and to describe their situation; some women began using the Quipu phone line as an opportunity to practice telling their stories for the ongoing investigations into the crimes purported against them. The phone line therefore provided a chance to practice speaking out and to receive feedback.

Workshops play a key role in the project, gathering women together to explain the project and to explain the phone mechanism, and encouraging them to be advocates in their own communities. These workshops explain the project, and provide a space for forcibly sterilised women to talk to and listen to one another, hearing about experiences that mirror their own. The workshop leaders demonstrate how the technology works and

participants practice, building confidence in speaking and listening back to their testimonies.

### *Primary audience and horizontal learning*

The primary audience for *The Quipu Project* (2015) is the participants of the project and the communities to which they belong. The importance of facilitating a process whereby the women participating in the project could listen to one another was initially underestimated until the initial research and development trip. Rosemarie Lerner explains,

“We hadn’t considered how important it was for them to listen back to themselves, and that for many it was probably the first time they had listened to themselves, so with that in mind we made a way where we give them a testimony number and they can easily find their testimony in the listening section later.” (Lerner, interview)

The opportunity for participants to share their story, play it back and give others a number to identify and listen to their specific recording was built into the project as a means for confidence building and recognition. The possibility to playback the recordings is of particular importance given the oral culture that the women are part of, and the misunderstanding faced by those who had been sterilised in their local communities (Boesten, 2010). Matthew Brown, a researcher in *The Quipu Project* (2015), states: “In collecting and making freely available the stories of people who have not been listened to, we are recognize (sic) the power of their oral culture, and the legitimacy and recognition which listening, as opposed to reading, can provide” (Brown, 2015).

The participants’ communities and family members have the opportunity to hear their stories from the phone line and radio, and to better understand their experiences. This fits with Snowden’s description of ‘horizontal learning’ discussed above (Snowden, 1983). By sharing their stories with the phone line, these previously silent and invisible women become audible and visible, and in appearing before others their distinctive selves are brought into reality (Arendt, 1958). “People outside of Peru they are listening to us and they know about what happened to us,” said Esperanza Huayama Aguirre, the main representative of the project in Huancabamba reported by Rosemarie Lerner.

## *Inviting response and co-creating the outcome*

In *The Quipu Project* (2015), the act of listening also invites response. The interactive documentary platform prioritises voice through a simple design where each testimony is a moving thread being wound onto the Quipu. The screen is black, the thread is coloured, and the only other visible feature is the subtitles of the testimonies. The design emphasises the raw stories being told. The screen remains dramatically simple, with the thread winding continuously throughout each testimony. As a testimony is played, the editorial process itself is made visible by each thread moving sharply downwards at the moment when an edit was performed. The viewer can therefore see which parts were edited, where words were cut or added, and where the sentence flow remains unchanged, allowing a unique glimpse into this process which can be understood as an example of co-creation

The production team have tried to create a framework with as little mediation as possible, without a voiceover or presenter putting the narrative into context. In an interview published by Open Democracy, Dr Karen Tucker, an academic working on the project, describes the decision-making process behind not adding in layers of interpretation,

*“The listener hears the women in their own words. It means we could stay true to each individual woman’s vision, as they talk about what sterilisation meant for them. In a world where these stories aren’t being heard, where these voices haven’t been heard, it felt important both politically and ethically to create a space where, as much as possible, no outside voices were mediating between each individual woman and the listener.” (Norris, 2015).*

The prototype facilitates three forms of response. Firstly, simply by choosing a thread on the Quipu and listening to a story, the action is counted and a number is visible on the screen. In this way listening is no longer an individual, private action, but connects to a wider community of listeners and is visible to the public. The second type of listening comes from the opportunity to give a response, by voice recording. Thirdly, the online audience also has the option to share their response on social media. The path of each user is recorded on the Quipu and becomes part of the strings of communication and testimony. The messages from online viewers, and the live number of people who have listened to testimonies, are shared with the women in Peru in a cycle of communication via a phone line where they can find out how many people have heard their (collective) stories, and hear messages from others around the world who have responded to their testimonies.

Kate Nash suggests that in interactive documentary ‘interactivity be conceived of as a multidimensional phenomenon in which the actions of users, documentary markers, subjects and technical systems together constitute a dynamic ecosystem’ (Nash et al., 2014, p51). What is unique about this project, and reflects the possibilities of interactive documentary, is that these two sets of audiences are not only be ‘speaking’ and ‘listening’ respectively. Through interacting with the web, they are co-creating and shaping the Quipu, and communicating with each other, creating a dynamic ecosystem. In the Quipu they are collectively creating a new artefact and building a new bridge as active equal participants (Bickford, 1996).

Where traditional participatory media working with marginalised groups has focused on voice, in interactive documentary there is potential for these collaborators to become listeners, aware of how people are engaging with their stories, and for a circle of communication to occur. In reference to digital storytelling, Tanja Dreher emphasises the importance of circular communication that enables a deeper understanding of voice and listening, arguing that:

*‘In order to redress this imbalance and to develop a more robust understanding of speaking and listening, advocates of a ‘listening’ framework suggest the need to focus analytical attention on processes of receptivity, recognition and response as they connect with more familiar processes of speaking. Listening here is understood not simply as aurality, but rather as a powerful metaphor for analysing ‘the other side’ of voice – that is the importance of attention and response, openness and recognition to complete the circuits of democratic communication’ (Dreher, 2012, p. 4)*

In Quipu, we find an example of a new participatory media form, located within the Fogo Process tenets of both ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ communication while also offering a deep and enriching listening and a framework for interactivity, connection and dialogue.

### *Audience reception*

However, the challenges inherent in the other media production processes discussed in this chapter are still applicable to Quipu and to other interactive documentaries like it that try and create space for marginalised voices being shared on their own terms. Audience reception studies for interactive documentaries are rare. Kate Nash’s study of the NFB’s *Bear 71* illuminates some of the ways that audiences engage with interactive websites. She shows that “just as audiences bring different representational strategies to their engagement with film and television documentary, interactive audiences draw on their

familiarity with interactive media and personal experience in deciding how to interact” (Nash, 2014, p. 23). Nearly a third of participants surveyed didn’t engage with the website at all, thus limiting their participation and any outcome that this engagement might result in. Reasons identified were personal preference, skill level, the tension between narrative and interaction and not understanding how they were meant to interact. Many participants also said they preferred to watch TV (Nash, 2014). In creating new interactive spaces online that creatively position audiences in a space of dialogue with the previously unheard producers, we must note that these forms of interactivity can require new learning from audiences. Increasing study is needed that looks at the relationship between audiences, the call to participate, and the act of interaction itself.

*The Quipu Project* (2015) contains reciprocal listening and multiple layers of engagement within a structure based on Open Source technology tailored to the needs of participants in communities with low connectivity. However, in making the website the focus for engagement and dissemination it places an emphasis on web technology which is costly and outside the realm of the majority of participatory projects.

## **Participatory journalism and Humans of New York**

The final form of media this chapter discusses is that of participatory journalism. Although distinct from the previous methods discussed and in many ways operating along a separate trajectory, it poses useful questions for our study of ‘co-creation’, and points to another point of rupture from traditional roles as storyteller’ and subject.

Social media has broken down the barriers between professional journalism and personal storytelling. Hybrid spaces now exist for the production of journalism, where citizens are engaged in the flow, framing and interpretation of news (Hermida et al., 2012). In their analysis of the emergence of ‘participatory journalism’ as a scholarly object in the field of journalism studies, Borger et al define it broadly as, ‘the idea that digital technologies enable the audience to get involved in making and disseminating news’ p 117 (Borger et al., 2013, p. 117) This takes many different forms, from what Cizek et. al refer to as ‘engagement journalism’ (Cizek et al., 2019b) with collaborations between journalists and the communities they cover (e.g. Guardian journalists combining their own reporting with verified crowdsourced information to highlight the number of people killed by the police in the US in *The Counted* (2015)), to citizen journalism defined broadly by Holton et. al. as ‘A news-oriented version of UGC... one which also refers to sharing and commenting on news, as well as creating content from scratch’ (Holton et

al., 2013, p. 722). Online storytellers are now actively including the audience in their content creation and, by nature of the technology, hosting a discussion in which audiences can contribute (Jenkins et al., 2013).

One of many examples of participatory media, the Humans of New York project provides a useful case study to illuminate the act of participation in production, and the act of participation in reception. I go on to explore the format further through my practice work.

The Humans of New York Facebook page was created on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2011, and at the time of writing has over 18 million page likes. Its creator, Brandon Statton, began by approaching strangers, taking photos of them and then posting these photos of everyday people in New York city paired with textual descriptions in the form of reflections, quotes, or background notes on each character and the context in which they met. In an interview with NPR he discusses the challenges with his method, "It's the rejection that is hard. It's not the interviewing that's hard, it's not the photography that's hard; it's approaching people all day long, and having a good portion of these people reject you and some of them be rude..." (NPR Staff, 2015) The content is also shared on an Instagram account, and in three books.

In Rosemary Girard's 'Neo-Aristotelian Criticism of "Humans of New York" on Facebook' (Girard, n.d.) she argues that Humans of New York has,

*"banded people together online through discourse; brought awareness and empathy to difficult or underrepresented topics like homelessness, mental health, immigration, homosexuality, race, and religion; and even provided an information outlet that some followers have hailed as a more diverse, representative, and informative source than the news." (Girard, n.d., p. 1)*

Jessica Roberts analysed the captions accompanying 5499 photos posted to the Humans of New York page from 2011 to 2014, and additionally viewed posts from 2015-2016 without coding due to their similarities in type. (Roberts, 2017) She identifies a marked shift from 2011 to 2015 in the centrality of the voice of Statton's photograph subjects. In 2011 they suggest that Statton's personal commentary accounts for 30% of photograph captions, for example the following caption, "I'm always interested in the mannerisms, gestures and attitudes that adolescents adopt in their attempts to leapfrog into adulthood" (8 December 2011) (Roberts, 2017, p. 8). In the same year, quotes from the subjects alone were only used in 5% of his posts. By 2013 the voices represented had shifted to 38% of posts containing an exchange between the subject and photographer, and 32% of posts containing quotes alone. Yet by 2015 the form had

evolved such that all content consisted of the subject looking at the camera accompanied by a single quotation from the subject, with no mention of a question from the interviewer or an addition from the interviewer's perspective (Roberts, 2017, pp. 11–12) Statton retained editorial control but had removed himself from the frame without imposing his voice to provide context or commentary. He is no longer visible. For Roberts, this represents a shift from Statton being understood as a street photographer to a journalist in fulfilling the social responsibilities of the press. While Statton has for the most part remained the sole content creator and camera operator, thus not positioning this form within co-creative media as earlier defined in this chapter, the transition he makes from a focus on his voice to the voice of his subjects is nevertheless significant.

What marked Humans of New York out from other online journalism endeavours was the sheer response to the content, with posts regularly receiving upwards of 25 thousand likes, shares and comments. Although in its storytelling mechanism Humans of New York is not immune from the challenges that have beset previous storytelling modes (Erdener, 2016) and instances of collaboration in content creation are limited, the audience engagement with content and the sharing, liking, and connecting with others that it has engendered, points to forms of collaboration and co-creation. Scholars have analysed Facebook comments from Humans of New York investigating both expressions of empathy in the age of the internet (Wheeler and Quinn, 2017) and the emergence of networked narratives (Wang et al., 2017). Whereas previously content was static, it now exists in a network and can take on a life of its own as it is shaped and owned by others, in what Jenkins (2013) terms 'spreadable media'. This points to new possibilities for both practice and research.

## **Research aim**

This research aims to explore the media production process through the lens of co-creation. Through adopting and adapting techniques discussed in the literature review, as well as developing new techniques, this approach will enable a study of multiple layers of co-creation. The practice aims to look at the offline production process and the reflections of different actors involved in it, casting myself as an agentive self in the production process, as well as the mechanisms through which content reaches wider audiences. When online, the practice will investigate the role that networks play in shaping, circulating and adapting content into their own acts of self-representation.

I also aim to shed light on the communicative ecology for co-creation in Rashidieh camp in Lebanon, and to propose initial findings to guide scholars trying to understand the rise of social media and connectivity and its impact on society.

It is intended that the research findings will contribute to the emerging field of co-creation through adding to discussions about power and voice in media production and the roles that different actors play in the process. The practice itself will discover new ways of working that are intended to enrich the toolkit of co-creative practitioners. Research findings will also contribute to scholars of communications and the media in refugee contexts, highlighting the ways in which communications have been shaped by social media in a closed setting and protracted refugee crisis.

## **Research questions**

The written thesis and practice work explore the following questions:

- To what extent can processes informed by co-creation engage audiences? Can process and product be equally valued?
- What form does co-creation through online networks take?
- What does an analysis of collaboratively created outputs of young people affected by displacement tell us about the methods of production and their lived experience vis-a-vis traditional representations of refugees?
- In what ways do refugees in Rashidieh and al-Buss camps use social media and technology to narrate their lives?
- How can methods informed by co-creation adapt to emerging patterns of technology use?

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

*“Co-creation is not for everyone, or every project, or even every stage of every project. But discussing its meaning leads to deeper questions about how media can be, or is created.” (Cizek et. al 2019)*

### Introduction

In this chapter I describe the approach I took in designing the research to answer my research questions. I draw on the methodological approaches of practice as research, co-creation as creative practice, and action research.

### Practice as research

This PhD can be understood first and foremost as practice as research (PaR), a research project ‘in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, a practice (creative writing, dance, musical score/performance, theatre/performance, visual exhibition, film or other cultural practice) is submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquiry’ (Nelson, 2013, p. 9).<sup>3</sup> The creative practice of this enquiry is that of media collaboration: storytelling as a digital art with others. I do not describe myself solely as a filmmaker, but rather a collaborative artist, training, equipping and facilitating others in the art of media creation. This is a skill set that is both an existing, embodied practice, or ‘know-how’ (Nelson, 2013, 2006), and one that I have continued to hone throughout my PhD practice drawing on other collaborative methods.

Robin Nelson’s (2013) book on Practice as Research in the arts serves as a starting point for understanding this method of enquiry. In it he advocates for PaR as a form of multi-modal research enquiry, comprising of multiple modes of evidence which together serve to confirm the findings of a consciously articulated research enquiry (Nelson, 2013, p. 6). Core to Nelson’s understanding of PaR is a model in which the creative artefacts, or performances, sit at the middle of a triangle. The top of the triangle, ‘practitioner knowledge’, represents tacit and embodied knowledge that the practitioner-researcher brings in going about the work. The bottom point of the triangle ‘Critical Reflection’ is described as an action research-based strategy to reflect upon practice through documenting, conducting audience research, or being informed by the lineage of other work using similar methods. The third point of the triangle, the ‘conceptual framework’, marks the broader context of conceptual frameworks and the need to both inform and

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<sup>3</sup> This is distinguished as a methodology when phrased ‘Practice as Research’ or PaR

be informed by them, articulating insights through the lenses they provide. It is through the mutual illumination of one or more points, marked by constant travelling between the three that knowledge is produced. In this articulation of PaR, knowledge is not a 'hard, factual, content-based knowledge but a relational, processual knowledge' (Nelson, 2006, p115).

At the centre of this lies the practice of this PaR. The introduction to this thesis describes the submissions of evidence within this PhD which include training methods, facilitation techniques developed, films created collaboratively, and the online responses created by others in a project the author developed collaboratively. Together these form a practice of 'co-creation' described below.

## **Co-creation as a creative practice**

The creative outputs which provide evidence of the artistic practice of this PhD do not fit neatly within a well-defined artistic medium – they are not simply a set of films and images – but are representative of the act of making media with others as a creative practice.

In the course of developing the creative work that forms this PhD I have engaged with a spectrum of collaborative media practices, including participatory photography, collaborative filmmaking and the Humans of New York format for captioned photography on Facebook, introduced in the previous chapter. These form a core part of the methodology of PaR.

The nature of this medium of co-creation involves the creation of living artefacts with participants in a way that is not simply controlled by "the practitioner" (in this case me). The mutuality of the co-creation process, bringing others into the process of creation, and the differing interpretations that arise from it, are inherent to the practice.

The act of co-creation as a creative art form has been present for millennia, from the petroglyphs (Cizek et al., 2019a) added to over time to the classical epic poetry traditionally ascribed to Homer but likely the product of many authors, composed orally over centuries (Parry and Parry, 1987). More recently this is reflected in the work of collaborative performance artists such as Marina Abramovic and interactive documentary filmmakers such as Hank Willis Thomas.

The contested borders of performance, film and social media are demonstrated in the performative collaboration of Marina Abramovic with visitors in *The Artist Is Present* (2010). The performance art (whether referred to as a work, event, happening or collaboration) is captured and disseminated in film and consumed online and through social media, secondarily and tertiarily by the fans of celebrity “sitters” (such as Lou Reed, Sharon Stone, Christiane Amanpour, James Franco). This digital co-creation has a further life as it is copied, remixed and appropriated online by others, such as *Picasso Baby* by Jay-Z *Waiting for the Artist*, by “Documentary Now!” The irony of the distance of the audiences from the original presence of *The Artist is Present* (2010) informs the context for co-creation as artistic and creative practice.

Hank Willis Thomas’ practice similarly views collaboration as essential to the act of creation. In *Question Bridge* (2011), Thomas facilitates a dialogue between black men from diverse backgrounds around the US and a platform for representing and defining black male identity. The production team toured the country to record nearly 1500 question and answer exchanges between self-identifying black men, and developed a video art installation which enabled the audience to ask and respond to questions themselves. Both audience and producers engaged in rich dialogue, co-creating the final outcome of increased understanding and a more holistic picture of black male identity.

Locating my practice within this trajectory of artists whose work consists of the act of collaboration by others, shifts the focus away from the artefacts themselves in this case film or photography, and onto the act of co-creation. In this light, the comments and engagement with the Facebook page created in one of my projects (discussed in Chapter Five) are therefore as much evidence of the act of co-creation as the films produced.

## **Co-creation and action research**

Within the framework of PaR, this PhD draws on the principles of action research, and uses action research methods in order to interrogate the context for creative practice and shape its design. Action research ‘focuses on simultaneous action and research in a participative manner’ (Nelson, 2006, p. 115). Action research thus has a reflexive relationship with the exploratory nature of the practice-as-research approach. Where PaR moves through a constant cycle of knowledge and creative practice, action research moves from evidence to research process to action with the objective of understanding a problem alongside *provoking change*. Reason and Bradbury’s definition of action research is, ‘a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical

knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile purposes... it seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities' (Reason and Bradbury, 2001).

The selection of action research as a methodology enabled me to position myself as an activist, seeking to *bring about change* in the ways in which young refugees and asylum seekers were able to have their voices heard, as well as a creative practitioner. It also provided me with research methods that enabled me to add a deeper layer of contextual knowledge to guide my creative practice.

This adoption of action research methodology led me to my creative practices as acts of advocacy with others as well as to activities such as seeking opportunities for individuals within the research context to pursue their own goals of self-representation. For example in 2015 I facilitated the publishing of two articles by residents of Al Rashidiya in an Index on Citizenship publication about the ways in which their life stories are told and understood by others in contrast to their realities. (Moneim and Maarouf, 2015) I also connected project participants with journalists, resulting in a story in Lebanon's English Language newspaper The Daily Star featuring an interview with Mohammed Al Assad, the main project collaborator. I exhibited work from one of the projects discussed here in an exhibition organised by Counterpoints Arts, showcasing refugee perspectives.<sup>4</sup> The very act of sharing work from the projects created was in essence an act of advocacy and wanting the voices of participants to be heard by wider audiences, rather than simply an act of research.

In *Action Research and New Media* (2009) Hearn, Tacchi, Foth and Lennie describe importance of understanding the specific and unique communication and information ecology in each context before the design of any interventions. They argue that any new connections and networks (social and technical) will be more effective if connected with existing systems and structures and term the focus of this research the 'communicative ecology' (Hearn et al., 2009). The communicative ecology is different from the media ecology described by Neil Postman in 1968, as "media ecology looks into the matter of how media communication affects human perception, understanding, feeling and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival" (Media Ecology Association, n.d.). While a media ecology approach looks at the ways in which

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B, List of Press and Exhibitions for further detail

media structure our lives, a communicative ecology approach looks at each instance of the use of media technologies within a complex media environment as culturally and socially framed (Hearn et al., 2009, p. 33). This approach avoids a technological determinist reading of the communications environment.

In the second context of enquiry in Lebanon, I adopted this approach and used a series of research methods prior to, and alongside my creative practice, to better understand the communicative ecology of the camps in Lebanon. The questions I asked followed those suggested by Hearn et al. including what kinds of communication activities do local people carry out or want to carry out? What communications resources are available to them? Who do they communicate with and why? How does a particular medium fit within existing social networks? Does it expand these networks? (Hearn et al., 2009, p. 31). I also sought to answer wider questions about perceived shortcomings of social media. These insights informed the creative practice and contributed to understandings about both the media-making process, and the communicative environment that young refugees and asylum seekers operate within.

The methods I used to answer some of these questions were focus groups and interviews, participant observation, film screenings and internet related ethnography (Postill and Pink, 2012). Field work was carried out during two trips in 2014 and 2015, totalling six weeks, while digital ethnography was conducted from 2015 to 2018. As I conducted these prior to and alongside the creative practice they also enabled me to interrogate the creative practice itself, in the process outlined by Nelson (Nelson, 2013). In the following section, I discuss each of these methods in more depth.

### *Focus groups and interviews*

I carried out 4 focus groups throughout this research. One of the focus groups with women was conducted with volunteers and employees of the charity Interpal from five camps around Lebanon, while the second consisted solely of inhabitants of Rashidieh. The decision to conduct single gender focus groups was borne from witnessing the fact that women were often outnumbered and generally remained quiet in other group settings. In addition to focus groups guided by a list of questions I was also invited to participate in a discussion held by the PLO in Rashidieh camp about an upcoming film production. I recorded this discussion, with permission, and am including it below as the insights gathered are discussed later in this thesis.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>CODE</b>
<b>15/04/15</b>	Sawaed youth centre, Rashidieh camp	6 males aged 30-35	6	FGD1
<b>16/04/15</b>	Café, Rashidieh camp	5 males aged 20-23	5	FGD2
<b>25/04/15</b>	Youth centre, al-Buss	12 women aged 20-35	12	FGD3
<b>28/04/15</b>	Café, Sour City	20 women aged 17-30	20	FGD4
<b>08/04/15</b>	PLO Headquarters, Rashidieh camp	25 males, 5 females, aged 30-60	30	FGD5

*Figure 7: An overview of focus groups and recorded discussions*

Focus groups were conducted in Arabic, and facilitated by a member of the Sawaed leadership team, occasionally with simultaneous translation but largely dependent on my conversational ability in Arabic. While this meant that I was not able to interject with follow up questions and was not managing the process, it meant I was less visible as a female outsider and that the discussion was owned and managed by people from the camp themselves. I recorded all the focus groups, and they were translated and transcribed by a Palestinian translator.

Interviews were set up through personal connections. I carried out eight semi-structured interviews, continuing via Skype and WhatsApp call once in London. They were conducted in a mix of Arabic and English, and recorded, then translated and transcribed in London.

### *Participant Observation*

In the course of my research, I developed relationships with participants and members of communities in Rashidieh and al-Buss. In living with a family in Rashidieh and visiting families and young people in a youth group setting in al-Buss I witnessed the way in which communications technology was embedded in people's lives. I made daily field notes of these experiences as a participant observer, defined by Whyte (1979, p. 56) as

'a researcher who participates in social activities with the subjects of study over an extended period of time'. This data was combined with that of interviews and focus groups, in line with the perspective that various methods of research 'from the most 'objective' quantitative surveys to the most 'subjective' qualitative methods, can be effectively combined and should not be regarded as mutually exclusive alternatives (Jackson, 1983, p. 44). In Participant Observation (PO) the researcher is immersed in the research environment, negotiating their role as it shifts from neutral observer to active partner. This approach is a natural fit for PaR focused on co-creation, as the development of each project is a constant renegotiation of roles switching from facilitating, to leading, to listening and observing.

### *Film Screenings as a tool for practice and research*

Film screenings are often a conclusion to participatory storytelling projects celebrating the work of individual participants, though are rarely the focus of research on the process as a whole. Tanja Dreher's (Jackson, 1983, p. 44) analysis of public launch events for 'mini-films' produced in digital storytelling projects in Sydney's western suburbs is a rare exception to this. Film screenings can also be a component of media literacy initiatives, increasing the ability of participants to analyse, evaluate and understand different representations (Reia-Baptista, 2009).

I selected film screenings as a research tool in the process of media making, rather than as a final launch event of the finished products, in order to facilitate discussion, bring people together around a neutral non-camp related topic, and to provide space for reflection on the topic being explored. These screenings also involved Q&As via Skype with the Directors where possible, though this proved difficult to facilitate due to poor connectivity. Given the isolation experienced by those living in Rashidieh and al-Buss the aim for the Q&As was to connect potential project participants with others in the Palestinian diaspora and to instil confidence in their ability to engage in creative media production. I intentionally selected films directed by Palestinians so as to reinforce the importance of the Palestinian experience being told in the first-person.

These events were held alongside the training sessions I delivered as part of the video production project, with some participants attending both. In total I held 5 film screenings in locations inside 2 camps throughout April 2015, drawing 116 participants. The screenings were advertised and discussions were facilitated by leaders from the

Rashidieh youth group Sawaed who became a partner organisation to my research. These discussions lasted between 20 minutes and an hour. The four films screened were selected from eight options by members of Sawaed. The film screenings became an important component of the practice work as they generated discussion, community engagement and participation with the collaborative media projects being developed. The screenings and conversations after them also enhanced my knowledge about media consumption and practice within the camps. The table below outlines each of these screenings in more detail.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>CODE</b>
<b>10/04/15</b>	Sawaed youth centre, Rashidieh camp	9 females, 26 males, aged 15-25	35	FS1
<b>10/04/15</b>	Shajarah school, al-Buss camp	8 females, 27 males, aged 13-80	36	FS2
<b>13/04/15</b>	Sanabil Centre for the Elderly, Rashidieh camp	15 females, 6 males, aged 15-80	21	FS3
<b>13/04/15</b>	Café, Rashidieh camp	13 males aged 12- 18	13	FS4
<b>17/04/15</b>	Sawaed, Rashidieh camp	1 female, 10 males, aged 20-50	11	FS5

*Figure 8: Overview of film screenings and facilitated discussions*

The next section provides an overview of these four films, representing three different elements of the Palestinian experience; the conflict lived through by PRS, the ongoing experiences of Palestinians in the West Bank, and membership of a wider Palestinian diaspora in search of a unified national symbol of pride. They are also different formats; two are long form documentary distributed by international production companies while two are short films hosted on YouTube.

*Blue* (2014) and *Siege* (2015) were both produced by the Syrian non-profit production company *Bedayyat*. Formed in 2013 to support and produce documentaries, short and

experimental films, and to organise specialised training courses on documentary filmmaking. Their website states,

*“With the onset of the Syrian revolution, ordinary Syrians were suddenly acquainted with themselves through the very images they created with their own hands. This, after long decades during which the authorities had monopolized both the right to speak in their name and the right to create the image it wanted of and for them.... The image, in its creation, reception and interpretation, was at the heart of the Syrian revolution: creating events as it recorded them, consigning them to oblivion if it couldn’t. Between these two extremes the documentary film reclaimed its importance as a means of restoring to life the untold stories of those people who live the revolution just as much as they create it.” (Bidayyat, n.d.)*

The fact that a Syrian production company facilitates films produced by Palestinians is indicative of the integration that Palestinian refugees have benefitted from in Syria in contrast to the isolation experienced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. This theme is recurring throughout this thesis and the practice work it discusses.

*Blue* (2014) and *Siege* (2015) were screened the most often, selected by representatives from Sawaed due to their length and the importance of the topic to the PRS residing in the camps. In total 70 people came to screenings of *Blue* (2014) and *Siege* (2015), showed back to back. These films and the subject area also provoked the most debate and discussion.

The following pages provide an overview of each of these films.

**Blue, Abo Gabi,  
Bedayyat, Rad Fael,  
Syria, 2014, 12 min 15  
sec**

**Siege, al-Khatib et al,  
Bidayyat, Syria, 2015,  
9 min 14 sec**

*Figure 10: A still from Siege*

*(al-Khatib et al. 2015)*

**5 Broken Cameras,  
Burnat, Davidi,  
France, Israel, Middle  
East, Palestine,  
Alegria Productions,  
Burnat Films 2011**

**Goal Dreams, Sanbar,  
Saunders, Clarity  
Productions, France,  
2006, 1hr 24 min**

INCLUDEPICTURE

### *Internet related ethnography*

As early as 2006, around the time Facebook became publicly accessible outside of elite American universities, scholars were arguing for a blended combination of physical and digital ethnography in order to increase the pool of data but also to demarginalise the voice of respondents (Murthy, 2008; Silverman, 2006). In 2014 ethnographers Hallett and Barber (2014) stated that “it is no longer imaginable to conduct ethnography without considering online spaces” (2014, p. 307) arguing that online spaces were necessary in order to more fully understand the physical environments and issues that they studied.

Postill and Pink (2012) propose internet related ethnography as distinct from internet ethnography; ethnography that engages with internet practices and content directly, but not exclusively, crossing offline and online worlds. This lends itself to multi-sited research across web platforms and implicating physical as well as digital localities. Their work follows the thought of Hine, whose later writing suggested that a researcher cannot study bounded units, suggesting that ‘Ethnography of the Internet can, then, usually be about mobility between contexts of production and use, and between online and offline, and it can creatively deploy forms of engagement to look at how these sites are socially constructed and, at the same time, are social conduits’ (Hine, 2009, p. 11).

I conducted internet related ethnography prior to, during, and after the delivery of practice work. While I was physically present in the camps it added a new dimension to the offline experiences of the research, yielding valuable insights about interactions with each project. The routine practices I engaged in included moderating and managing the Facebook page developed through this work, and coding and saving comments and engagement from the page. This process is described in more detail below. I also

regularly viewed online content produced by contacts from the camps on Facebook and YouTube, logging notable interactions and performances of self-representation. In addition, I engaged with relevant websites with local news, and several public Facebook pages from both camps. In doing so I found myself in numerous interrelated digital contexts, for example looking at an image shared on social media on a smartphone while sitting with project participants or discussing someone's recent Facebook status and the thought process behind it over a cup of coffee. While online engagement could be described as communities or networks (Jenkins et al., 2013; Page et al., 2013), these field situations can be understood as ways in which both ethnographer and research participants are connecting offline through the online mediation of content (Amit and Rapport, 2002)

## **Data analysis**

My orientation to the context was guided by a field log. Throughout the PhD process I kept an electronic journal, with daily responses logged when I was conducting field research in Lebanon, and during my practice delivery in the UK. These were used as a tool for analysis and insight, as data was captured to be reflected on at a later stage and in conjunction with other data points. All research activities (focus groups, interviews and film screening discussions) were recorded and then translated. In the case of focus groups and film screenings, where facilitated by a native Arabic speaker, I discussed the translation with them to ensure the full meaning of specific points was grasped. I then input this data into NVivo, which enabled me to identify different themes for discussion.

## **Position of the researcher**

This PhD is just as much about me as it is about the processes I am studying and those who have worked with me to shape them, and it will carry me into the future in a process of remembrance through narrative (Arendt, 1958).

My research is shaped by a number of different experiences which I outline in the introduction to this thesis. I have been engaged in the community I work with in Lebanon for over ten years, with my role constantly shifting from volunteer, to academic, to media trainer, to activist, to friend.

Alongside my work in Lebanon I have worked professionally as an aid worker, communications consultant for the not for profit sector, Communications Director for a charity, filmmaker and documentary researcher, strategist for government clients, and now as a management consultant in the public sector. I continue to discover the ways in which my professional experience shapes my perspectives, my motivation for social change, and the way in which I view my privilege and voice.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE PILOT PROJECT

*“I enjoy taking photos because I believe it changes the way you see things. It is actually quite an incredible transformation to experience. With a photo you can capture a moment which you can have forever to experience.” – Rangina, project participant*

### Introduction

*Captured: Capturing Moments, Sharing Perspectives* (2013) was a project I ran with the support of the charity Refugee Support Network designed to facilitate young asylum seekers and refugees facing difficulties accessing university to create photographs about their experiences, using participatory photography methods.

Refugee Support Network (RSN) provides a range of services across the UK which help 15-25-year olds seeking safety in the UK to access, remain in, and progress in education. This includes educational mentoring, specialist educational and wellbeing support, access to higher education, and the delivery of a youth leadership programme. Like many refugee support charities, they operate as an advocate and intermediary for new arrivals to the UK in their efforts to integrate within a new, complex, education system, and a system that requires young people to communicate in specific ways and condense their narratives into categories in order to fit in and progress (Kohli, 2006). The idea of setting up a new project focused on developing the communication skills and confidence of young people therefore fitted within RSN’s mission and added an extra dimension of reflective storytelling to their other face to face work with young people.

I conceptualised and delivered the project voluntarily and outside of the scope of my role as Communications Director of the charity. However, my role gave me greater insight into some of the challenges in project delivery with UASCs, and into the sensitivities involved in acts of storytelling and communication with young asylum seekers living in limbo. I had previously run art sessions and informal interviews with young people for stories to include into the charity’s regular communication materials.

I selected photovoice methodology for this project for two reasons. Of the methods described in Chapter Two it is the one with the most fixed methodology and established school of thought, and it therefore seemed a natural starting point, as I was able to learn from the wealth of resources available and simultaneously probe both the empowering promise (PhotoVoice, n.d.; Sutton-Brown, 2014; Wang and Burris, 1997; Wang, 1999) and critiques levelled against it (De Lange et al., 2016; Liebenberg, 2018; C. Mitchell,

2015). I completed a certified training course run by PhotoVoice in London which gave me a deeper understanding of how it was intended to be practiced. Secondly, as I was working with a partner charity it was easier to adopt a standardised methodology that many within the charity sector were aware of, rather than designing my own. In delivering a photovoice project I hoped to engage others within the PhotoVoice community as supporters or interested parties, and to reflect on the method as a whole rather than just my experience with it.

The goals I set out for the project were to upskill in photography techniques and visual literacy and provide a context for young people to represent themselves and to participate in the debates surrounding their futures. I was interested in exploring how photovoice could increase self-competence, self-awareness, enhance relational networks, and increase awareness of being an agent of change, as proposed in the PhotoVoice training manual (PhotoVoice, n.d.) As well as the process itself and its impact on participants, I wanted to analyse the creative outputs as artefacts in their own right, understanding what they can tell us about the lived experiences of young asylum seekers and refugees. I also wanted to look at listening as the corollary to voice; how were audiences able to engage with the project outputs, and what impact did the work have in wider circles e.g. policy or advocacy. There were therefore three sites for research; the process itself, the creative outputs, and audience engagement with them.

I close by discussing how this pilot project shaped the other practice that this PhD explores, and the learning I was able to apply to the second research site in Lebanon.

## **Recruitment and network building**

Participants for the course were recruited via the charity partner, Refugee Support Network, and Praxis, a charity working with young asylum seekers. I designed a leaflet which was circulated by the two charities explaining the parameters of the project and inviting involvement. For young people out of formal education, or those in school holidays, the course was articulated as a fun summer activity with a learning component that could help them to progress with their goals. Participants were reimbursed for their travel expenses; some travelled for over an hour to attend the sessions.

# CAPTURED

Capturing moments,  
sharing perspectives.

A photography course for young people aged 18 - 25 whose immigration status is making it difficult for them to access university or other higher education.

Through practical exercises, discussions and games, the course will be a chance to explore new ways of sharing opinions and perspectives.

- > Each session will last for 3 hours
- > The course is free, travel costs will be paid and cameras will be provided
- > Photos from the course will either be used in an exhibition, book, or website
- > Photographers can remain anonymous.

To find out more or register your interest, email Mary - [mmitchell@refugeesupportnetwork.org](mailto:mmitchell@refugeesupportnetwork.org) or call 07738 598347.

## LOCATION:

The Albert, 5 Albert Road,  
NW6 5DT (opposite  
Queen's Park Underground  
and Overground stations).

## DATES:

Monday 15th July 3-5pm  
Monday 22nd July 3-5pm  
Monday 29th July 3-5pm  
Wednesday 7th August  
2-5pm  
Monday 12th August 3-5pm  
Friday 16th August 3-5pm  
Monday 19th August 3-8pm



Figure 13: Recruitment leaflet, Captured

In line with photovoice methodology and the principles of the charity partners, participants were not identified based on existing skill or enthusiasm and no official selection process took place. The course ran with the 10 participants who turned up on the first session, dropping to 5 by the end of the course. In addition to the project sessions, I created a community of stakeholders who were not participants in the storytelling but were invested in and contributing to its success. This included the partner charity, a researcher from Oxford University's Social Policy Department who facilitated each session with me, the team at the UCL Art Museum, and a community of online supporters. To raise money for equipment, venue hire, and participants travel expenses, I ran a crowdfunding campaign on Sponsume, generating £2000 in support for the project from 36 backers. The video from this crowdfunding campaign which elucidates the objectives is submitted alongside this thesis as submission A.

## Creating a space for participation

The mutual setting of behavioural expectations and outcomes is an essential activity within the photovoice method (Wang and Burris, 1997; Wang, 1999), borne from an awareness of the inherent power imbalance between the facilitator and participants, and the problematic legacy of representation of the other. In *Captured* (2013), we spent the first session establishing some ground rules of participation. Two large pieces of paper were set on the floor in the middle of the group, and two different project participants wrote down the guidelines agreed upon, for the two facilitators and for the participants. The resulting artefacts are shown below in Figure 14. Participants decided that the principles of respect, support, punctuality, team work and feedback were important for facilitators and participants. These pieces of paper were stuck on the wall as a visual reminder throughout the course of the commitments that we had made to one another and the behavioural code that we had established.

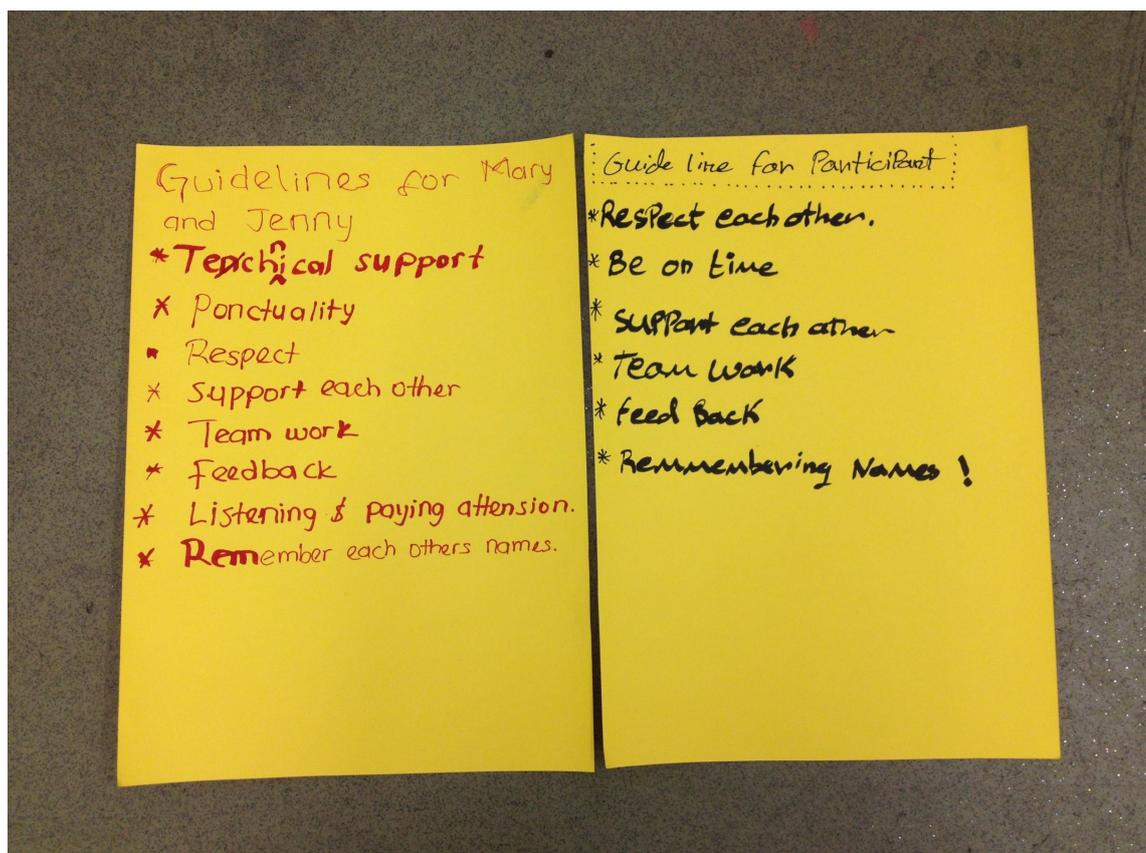


Figure 14: Guidelines for participation, *Captured*

In addition to these guidelines, I also drew up an additional set of facilitator guidelines for me and my co-facilitator to follow. These covered wider issues including safeguarding

and were signed off and contributed to by Refugee Support Network. These are submitted as part of the practice material as Submission H.

As well as placing clear boundaries around the content that could be used for future outputs, and content that couldn't, in accordance with PhotoVoice guidelines we signed to indicate that any royalties gained from selling their work would be divided between them and the charity partner Refugee Support Network.

## **An overview of the process**

The course centred on access to higher education, as a core theme of Refugee Support Network's work and advocacy. Alongside the photography activities, discussions were facilitated about their individual journeys and aspirations for education; this was a common ground between participants and remained a theme of the work produced. Therefore, while the individual narratives were authored by the young people themselves, the editorial parameters of the project as focusing on access to higher education were already set.

Sessions were held at a community centre in North West London throughout July and August 2013, with a field trip to the UCL Art Museum. The course was designed for eight sessions rather than the PhotoVoice recommendation of ten as sessions were held weekly rather than daily and it needed to take place during the summer holiday period. Each session was two hours in length.

In each session a new photographic technique was introduced, alongside consolidating learning from previous sessions, and creating space for discussion of the techniques and their work. Every session began with a time for participants to share photographs they had taken during the week, and to discuss why they took them and what they told about their lives. The flow of sessions and activities within them are based on those outlined in the PhotoVoice Manual (PhotoVoice, n.d.), but I amended them to work within a shorter time frame. The table below details the sequencing of sessions and the activities that they included.

<b>Session Title</b>	<b>Overview of activities</b>
<i>Introductions and Photo Treasure Hunt</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ice-breaker activities to ensure participants felt comfortable with one another <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Setting of guidelines by both participants and trainers</li> <li>● Establishing mutual objectives within the categories of photography as, ‘a tool for public communication’, a means for ‘self-expression and record making’, a way to enhance ‘visual and digital skills’ and a way to build ‘community and relationship.’</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Photo treasure hunt to build confidence behind the camera</li> </ul>
<i>Visual Literacy and Landscape/Portrait Shots</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discussion of representation and examples of portraits</li> <li>● Activities showing how objects can be represented in different ways through decisions made about framing and composition.</li> <li>● Self-portrait activity using their belongings, hands and feet and discussion about what the photo represented and what story it tells about their lives</li> </ul>
<i>Composition, captioning, model release and consent</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explanation of model consent and ownership</li> <li>● Introduction to captioning, and examples of captions through matching activities</li> <li>● Discussion of options for captioning (e.g. lyrics from a song, a quote, explanation of feelings)</li> </ul>
<i>Colour vs. Black and White Photography</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduction of sequencing and telling a story through multiple photos</li> <li>● Discussion of role of colour in photography, what different colours can represent about personal narratives</li> </ul>
<i>Field Trip to UCL Museum of Art</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Outshoot at a university to build portfolios and further discussions about education</li> <li>● Activities and tasks based around the visit consolidating learning so far including sequencing, portraiture and black and white photography</li> </ul>
<i>One-to-ones</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Individual participants reviewing and discussing their work with the two course facilitators</li> <li>● Initial decision making about final selection of photographs</li> </ul>
<i>Collecting and Captioning Photos</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Uploading all photos taken during the course</li> <li>● Captioning activities including the Sense Poem – “I hear... I smell... I see... I taste.... I touch... I feel...”</li> </ul>
<i>Final Portfolio Selection and Celebration</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Presentation of final portfolio selection to each other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Completion of release forms</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Discussion about project outputs, reviewing expectations against original expectations set</li> <li>● Next steps presentation to ensure participants know about outputs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Presentation of cameras and certificates</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Figure 15: Session titles and a summary of activities, Captured



The (2005) study of a photovoice project by Foster-Fishman et al is one of few within community psychology to investigate the impact of the photovoice process on participants. The authors find that the photovoice process increases self-competence and self-awareness, enhances relational networks and increases an awareness of being an agent of change. These themes were also identified in *Captured* (2013) in the discussions with young people held throughout the course, and their completed evaluation forms.

Several participants reported heightened awareness about representation and the power dynamics that govern photography; “I’ve seen that there are many different ways of viewing things. For example, I thought that there was only one way of seeing ‘inside and outside but now I think of it in a different way, inside and outside myself.”, “I’m always going to look behind a photo from now on.” The knowledge that the process imparted of the ways in which images are subject to a variety of subjective decisions and are therefore not neutral or representative of the whole truth, can be aligned with the participatory competence that Kieffer’s (1984) work on personal empowerment defines as, “the combination of attitudes, understandings and abilities required to play a conscious and assertive role in the ongoing social construction of one’s political environment” (1984, p. 31). One participant commented, “I enjoy taking photos because I believe that it changes the way you see things. It is actually quite an incredible transformation.”

Another layer of transformation lay in the relational networks forged by young people through the project. For many young people claiming asylum a lack of support networks and reduced mobility due to prohibitive travel costs can result in isolation. In identifying and bringing together young people who were facing the same challenges the project brought together disparate individuals and created a cohesive shared identity where their collective voice was stronger. *Captured* (2013) participants recognised this in their feedback; “It was great to meet other young people who are going through the same problems because at least now we all know we aren’t the only ones.”

## **The narrative outputs**

These photos represent moments of normality rather than crisis, experiences of coping and survival rather than fear and despair, and speak to humanity and the agency of the young people involved. In a world where the most common images of refugees fit a traditional pattern of pain, vulnerability and passivity, the value of these images lies in this normality, in the rarity of photographs like these and the extent to which they

represent the voices of the young people who took them and their normal everyday lives. The struggles represented in these photographs of integrating into a new environment, processing the loss of family and homeland, aspiring for a better education, are in fact more representative of the experiences of displacement than the moments of crisis and pain themselves.

## **Audience engagement**

One of the critiques of photovoice, discussed in the previous chapter, is that in prizing participation voice can become detached from listening and any impact with audiences beyond participants themselves (Burgess, 2006; Carpentier, 2009). The photovoice model for outputs is based on a traditional photography model, whereby they are intended to be printed, framed and hung on a wall alongside the caption in order to have their full meaning communicated. This is generally done within a careful 'framing' of the images, telling the context for the project, the project objectives, and an overview of the participants' specific situations.

However, by setting up a structure for the creation of photography but intentionally not providing any feedback or input into the photographs, the photographs and captions created during *Captured* (2013) were not of the technical quality expected by audiences when engaging with imagery. The resulting images and captions did not fit within an existing genre, placing them out of the reach of both mainstream audiences and even niche interest audiences. They don't fit within any current style or format that audiences have for images; the self-portraits are not 'selfies', the shots of home aren't carefully curated like images we see on Pinterest, but neither do they represent the grittiness of documentary photography. Taken on a traditional point and shoot camera they don't have the shallow depth of field we expect of DSLR cameras, the colour isn't bright, and they don't fit within the Instagram aesthetic.

The subject of the imagery is also hard to engage audiences with. The project outputs are not likely to engage and evoke the same emotional response, or 'social impact' objectives as photographs taken by professionals, as they are simply more mundane than what the public is attuned to expect from refugee imagery. Whether focusing on exceptional individuals as victims or achievers or portraying refugees as a group devoid of personal agency and a threat to be feared, the majority of portrayals of refugees focus on the moments of crisis: the rupture and dislocation from home, the journey, the hunger in refugee camps. Very few focus on the slow processes of integration, of coping, of day-

to-day survival beyond the journey itself and the crisis points. Refugee Action's slogan is 'We survived. Now help us live'. Yet portrayals by advocacy and humanitarian organisations, and the media, focus on these moments of crisis and survival rather than the living that continues (Johnson, 2011; Pupavac, 2008; Szörényi, 2006; Turton, 2003). Further research into audience reception of refugee imagery developed during participatory work would help to test these assumptions, echoing calls from scholars including Liebenberg (2018) and Mitchell (2015) on the importance of 'looking at showing' and studying audience engagement.

## **Participating in the creation of project artefacts**

Having witnessed the process of creating these photographs and their captions, and heard the personal stories that accompanied them, I was acutely aware of the value that they held as a window into the lived experience of young refugees and a product of their own self-expression. I therefore found myself playing a curious role of intermediary, spending time and energy designing ways of framing the images in a context that would engage audiences, for example through creating a consistent brand identity and content strategy for the website.

If adhering to the levels of participation outlined by Arnstein (1969) one could argue that the images themselves were created within a context of the highest level of participation, or 'citizen control' with little outsider involvement. Yet the ways in which I used these outputs to communicate about the project still involved decisions about representation that did not involve the participants. Over the following year I built a website featuring the photos and captions from the young people who participated, I designed and distributed a series of rewards for the backers of the crowdfunding campaign, and I presented their work at Oxford University's Refugee Voices conference.<sup>5</sup> In each of these situations the photographs and captions sat within another frame, which I created without input from participants, that helped to tell the story.

I designed and built the website for the project (Mitchell, 2015), as a lasting artefact for those interested in the project to engage with. It has three sections. The website homepage offers navigation to the captions and photos, using circles in bold colours as a button for each young person's work. This design places equal emphasis on the story of each individual, with the page for each participant displaying their photo and caption

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<sup>5</sup> The Refugee Studies Centre International Conference 'Refugee Voices' was held from 24-25 March 2014, and explored the voices and aesthetic expressions of those dispossessed, displaced and marginalised by the pre-eminence of the nation-state.

side by side, telling their story in a sequence that they chose. Each image is surrounded by a white frame in order to give it emphasis. The about page introduces the context and the project partners (Refugee Support Network, UCL Art Museum, Sponsume project backers). I also created a 'Leave a Message' page inviting users to send a message to the young people who created the photograph in an attempt to create a feedback loop between the audience and the creators of content, similar to the mechanism designed by Quipu Project, discussed in Chapter One. Due to funding constraints the site was not widely publicised beyond the initial network of Refugee Support Network and has remained static since publication.



*Figure 17: Captured website screenshot (Mitchell 2015)*

**LEAVE A MESSAGE**

If you'd like to pass on a message to the young people whose stories feature here then fill in the form below.

Name

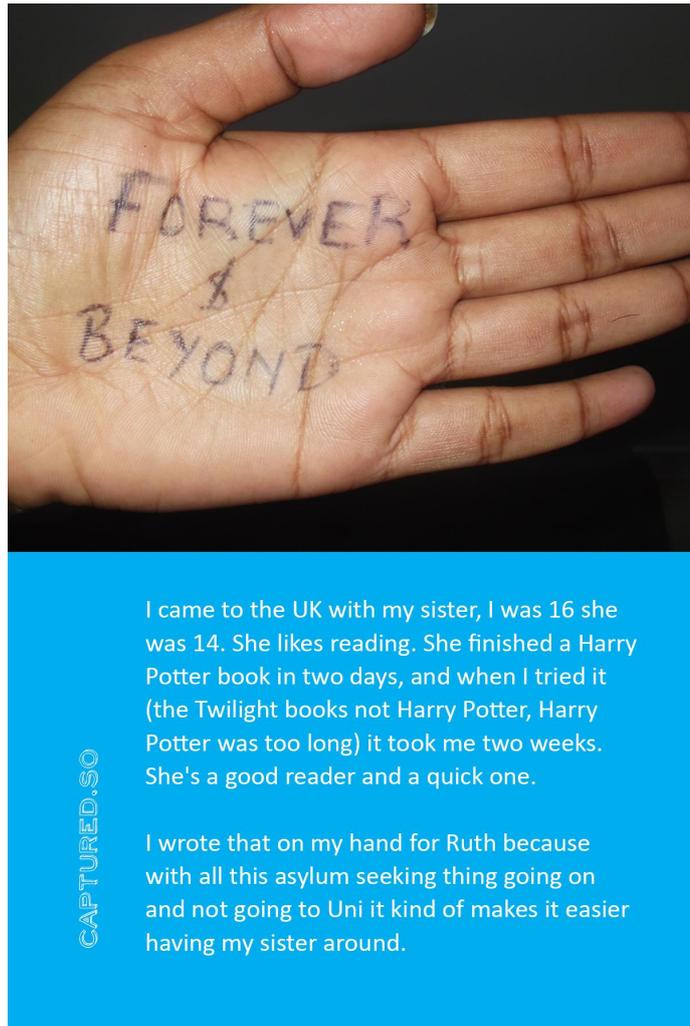
Email

Subject

Message

*Figure 18: Captured website screenshot (Mitchell, 2015)*

I decided on the rewards to be offered to project backers even before meeting project participants. They were therefore aware that the project backers would be receiving copies of their work in different formats, but they weren't involved in the decision making around what these formats and artefacts would be. Rewards for the crowdfunding backers included postcards and photo books. Again, I faced a set of decisions about how I shared these outputs and represented project participants, even while using their own work. In the book I opted to have a section for each photographer with their name followed by their photographs, but chose not to include the captions due to the size of the book. The book also contained photographs of the workshops themselves.



*Figure 19: Image and caption from the Captured project, designed as a postcard to be sent to project backers*

For the conference I developed a presentation of 10 images from the project. I then printed the captions and distributed them among the audience. I remained silent. As each photo was projected on the screen a different member of the audience would stand up and say the caption. This was an intentional act to bring first-hand refugee voices to the fore in an academic context, yet I was still acting alone as the decision-maker for how these images and captions were presented to a wider audience.

The process of designing these three points for audience engagement demonstrated to me the challenges of following a model that prizes participation above the communication potential of the resulting outputs (in this case photographs and captions), when the project itself is still established in an inherently un-participatory manner, by an

individual or organisation with power making the decision to set it up, finding the resources and controlling any advocacy or communication that results.

## Conclusion

*Captured* (2013) created a space for participation and facilitated the young asylum-seeking participants to create their own stories and recognise some of the hidden ways in which images are created and distributed. This can be understood as an act of narrative and self-reflection (Arendt, 2013). Furthermore, the images and captures they created provide a valuable insight into the day to day experiences they face, the daily survival rather than moments of trauma. These images are in stark contrast to those audiences are used to seeing.

However, several questions are raised by photovoice that I probe further in my future projects and second research context in Lebanon. Firstly, that of a distinction between participation and co-creation or collaboration, secondly the question of audience engagement and impact, thirdly the suitability of photovoice to the context with regard to its heavy time requirements and finally a lack of intersection with the ways in which young people are already using media to represent themselves.

In an interview with Mandy Rose for the book, *i-docs, The Evolving Practice of Interactive Documentary*, Kat Cizek makes a distinction between participation and co-creation. She positions co-creation on the one hand as “a very broad term that implies a thoughtful process, which involves a collaboration with the intent to make quality media *with* partners instead of just *about* them...”, but then makes a distinction between participatory and co-creative media, “Co-creation is about having a broader sense of the co-design and the spirit behind making something. Participation is only one specific methodology that is appropriate for certain contexts and not others” (Wiehl, 2017, p. 38)

In designing and running *Captured* (2013), I became increasingly aware of the structure and boundaries that photovoice establishes and necessitates. Paradoxically, to achieve a process whereby participants create photographs and captions in a way that is entirely theirs, based on their own stories and experiences and their own technical skills without outside input but simply facilitating them through a process, the facilitator needs to set up a controlled environment. This leaves little room for co-ownership or collaboration.

The parameters are set in advance from the selection of participants to the outputs for their work and the editorial focus. Participants are invited in on a specific set of terms. Every session is dictated by a set of activities, punctuated by 'open space' for sharing and reflection. Even within a long-term, emancipatory storytelling project seeking to achieve maximum participation, as the architect of the project I was still impacting the ways in which participants were represented to wider audiences. To return to Cizek's distinction above, in adopting the photovoice process it did not feel that the participants and I were co-designing something, rather that I was still pulling the strings and setting the stage upon which they could perform.

Secondly, the ways that photovoice projects engage and impact audiences remains another vital area for study (Liebenberg, 2018; C. Mitchell, 2015). If an intended outcome of the project is to reach audiences with the power to make changes that impact the lives of participants on the issues that they articulate throughout the process, the outputs themselves must be of a familiar format and quality. Wang, one of the founders of photovoice, advocates for including influencers and policy makers right from the start of each project in order to achieve this (Wang, 1999).

The emphasis on process in PhotoVoice methodology ensures each initiative is time intensive. It requires that people return, whether daily or weekly in the case of *Captured* (2013), and each session is an investment of time and energy. The total time invested by each participant in *Captured* (2013), excluding homework and personal photography time, was 17 hours. The PhotoVoice manual details ten five-hour sessions; if followed then the total time invested would be 50 hours. Due to the objectives of PhotoVoice, participants are often those on the margins of society struggling to be heard. Recent projects on the PhotoVoice website include working with underrepresented communities in Myanmar, farmers in Ghana, women from the BAME community in the UK living with HIV, young people affected by sexual exploitation and trafficking. It may be that the circumstances of these participants mean that they are time-rich and can afford to engage in a long storytelling project, and there are advantages to them doing so as highlighted above.

However, there are likely others whose stories could be told and who would like to learn digital storytelling skills who have busy lives involving work and childcare or are also simply not prepared to commit to the time necessary to fulfil the demands of a PhotoVoice project. This was borne out through *Captured* (2013); the project started with 10 participants with only 5 completing the course. It could also be argued that this

commitment to slow storytelling is at odds with a fast-moving social media world, with even those in the most marginalised communities having access to camera phones and participating in the rapid creation and consumption of content.

*Captured* (2013) took place on the cusp of the relative availability and affordability of smartphones. Several participants had phones that could take photographs, but the majority didn't; it was therefore necessary to introduce new technology in the form of a simple point and shoot camera. These cameras were given to participants at the end of the course. However, this analogue experience was divorced from the 'selfie' social media culture of representation that young people were starting to be involved with. Including the equipment that young people had access to and modes of photography they were familiar with, such as filters, could result in a more natural process with a longer-term uptake. Furthermore, the new layers for creation, sharing, and re-mixing of content offered by the internet and specifically social media would go on to provide valuable opportunities for collaborative storytelling, in a more open and collaborative manner than that offered by photovoice. The possibilities of connecting this smartphone access with internet culture is something I go on to explore in my future practice work.

# CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCHING THE COMMUNICATIVE ECOLOGY FOR CO-CREATION

*“Before, Mohammed used to write poems but no one knew about them, now he can publish them online and become famous.” – Hussein, 23, Rashidieh camp*

## Introduction

In designing *Captured* (2013) I worked with an established and inflexible methodology used in numerous contexts around the world, enabling practitioners to ‘pick up and go’ without prior knowledge of the context. While the organisation PhotoVoice only delivers projects alongside partner organisations who are embedded within the community and culture, the method itself is not tailored to the ways in which participants communicate with one another and the world around them. This approach ignores and undermines the fact that even without access to digital storytelling technology or the opportunities provided by an outside project facilitator, storytelling is coded and continually being performed as a part of culture and representation both to insiders and outsiders.

Co-creative practice by producers including Kat Cizek (Highrise, 2008-2015), Rosemarie Lerner/Chaka Films (The Quipu Project, 2015), and Elaine McMillian (Hollow, 2013), has since evolved in recognition of the many multi-faceted ways in which communities and individuals communicate, and the need to tailor projects to them. Kat Cizek describes how this principle outworked itself in the development of the collaborative documentary project HighRise (2008-2015),

*“We kept wondering, what are the digital lives of the people in this building?... We assumed that if people have recently arrived in Canada, digital media must be an important part of their lives. So we decided to put together a survey of the buildings... We did this in fourteen languages, as the idea was to represent as many languages in the building as possible...that information then helped define what the media project would be. That’s the difference: it is not going in and saying, I’m going to make a film about your ideas’ It’s more like, ‘We’re interested in seeing how media might work to advance some of the ideas and knowledge that exist in this community.’” (Wiehl, 2017, pp. 42–43)*

Similarly, when Chaka Films began exploring the idea of making a collaborative project about the forced sterilisation of women in Peru, their starting point was to gain an understanding of the technologies that project participants had access to and were

comfortable using. The interface for project participants became radio and mobile phone, with respected older women acting as 'story hunters', and the ability to listen back to their own stories was woven in, utilising both the technologies and cultural aspects of the communicative ecology that participants were embedded within (Mitchell, 2015).

In approaching the second context for my practice, the Palestinian refugee camp of Rashidieh, I therefore wanted to understand the communicative ecology, defined as 'the whole structure of communication and information in people's everyday lives' (Hearn et al., 2009, p. 30) This approach 'entails taking the wider social and cultural context and existing local communication networks into account' (ibid. p. 30) A deeper understanding of this would enable me to work more collaboratively and using tools and methods that were native to those I was partnering with.

Although notable research has been undertaken to understand the communications and media practices that shape Palestinian communities in Lebanon, most recently that of Miriam Aouragh (2011), the rapid uptake of smartphones and internet access in the past decade remains relatively unexplored. This chapter introduces research findings that help to shine light on this and pave the way for the design of my practice projects discussed in Chapter Five and Six In this chapter I introduce the term 'networked narrative' and demonstrate how it applies to the way in which Palestinians in Lebanon are engaged in self-representation, circulated and re-mixed through an online network of connections (Page et al., 2013). In doing so, I refer to wider debates around the issue of self-representation and social media and join an emerging body of work calling for further analysis of the ways in which a legacy of empire and imperialism structure the new communications environment (Aouragh and Chakravartty, 2016; Tufekci, 2017).

In this chapter I discuss three key research findings that shaped the design of subsequent projects and continued to be key themes as I moved between action and reflection, theory and practice. Firstly, in a departure from previous ethnographic research conducted in camps in Lebanon I discovered that social media was now a dominant communication platform, overshadowing yet supplementing TV and websites. Secondly this research reveals the tensions experienced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon between individual narratives and a wider narrative of Palestinian suffering. This initial research also highlighted several instances of acts of self-representation through content creation on social media from individuals within Rashidieh, but notes that this is not the norm. Finally, the online experiences of many are discovered to be

marked by 'networked narratives'; an online network sometimes but not always reflecting offline relationships, creating collectively new identities and relationships in a digital age.

## **The dominance of social media**

This section aims to understand the rise of social media in Rashidieh camp in Southern Lebanon. For the most part the research was undertaken in Rashidieh, although some film screenings were carried out in al-Buss. I do not suggest that these findings can be extrapolated to other camps, though there are likely similarities.

Before looking at the arrival of the internet, social networks, and smartphones as the present-day tools that facilitate self-expression, it is important to consider the historical trajectory of communication and the different ways in which Palestinians have been communicating with one another and outsiders (Hearn et al., 2009). This position also recognises that the refugee camps in Lebanon have been *assembled* gradually over the process of exile, and can best be understood as a 'camp-society' influenced by multiple transnational and international networks and relationships. Legal statuses, relationships, institutions, technologies, infrastructure and the built environment all co-author a space in which values, identities and practices are produced and reproduced (Ramadan, 2013).

The media has long acted as a discursive space for shared notions of Palestine and 'Palestinianness' (Aouragh, 2011; Fincham, 2012). Prior to the arrival of the internet and operating alongside it, offline mechanisms of communication include graffiti, posters, banners and flyers which dominate the camps projecting messages. These offline sites also serve as an arena in which Palestinian factions compete for the support of the community. In this way the landscape itself can be viewed as a space of communication, competition and contestation (Ramadan, 2009).

In 2012 the researcher Kathleen Fincham reported that TV was the most dominant medium through which identity was produced. These TV stations are operated by different political parties including Hamas, Fatah and Hezbollah and all share different and often conflicting representations of Palestinian identity, which contribute to the shaping of identities and political understandings (Fincham, 2012).

Two websites are particularly significant for Palestinians in Rashidieh; *Racamp* ("موقع مخيم الرشيدية", n.d.) and *Ya Sour* ("موقع يا صور", n.d.) These websites contain updates on life in Rashidieh camp, and Southern Lebanon respectively, including current affairs and

personal updates. They have a large audience among the diaspora. Despite the rise in new storytelling technology these two websites continue to co-structure the communicative environment.

Field trips in 2014 and 2015 indicate that while TV is still a dominant media form, social networks now play an increasingly prominent role in providing communities with a tool for building connections across the diaspora and constructing identity. Community-dominated forms of media consumption, for example watching TV with one's family or in the family home or looking at a website in an internet café, have been replaced by an individualised experience prescribed by an individual smartphone and personalised networks and connections that mediate the experience of communication.

In 2015 an internet infrastructure was established by a resident of the camp enabling individuals to pay \$5 per month to switch from router to router throughout the camp, avoiding using 3G which remains prohibitively expensive. This unique system resulted in almost universal internet coverage throughout the camp through an automated password system, supplemented by home Wi-Fi networks at the cost of \$10 per month. In this way social networks became ubiquitous as a tool for communicating within the camp and to family members and connections in the diaspora.

The past decade has seen a transformation in the communications and information environment within Rashidieh camp with the ways in which people access the internet moving away from using internet cafes to read websites and watch TV, discussed in detail by Aouragh (2011), towards using social networks on smartphones. However, TV and websites still remain significant forums for information sharing, identity formation, connecting camp residents with outside perspectives and enabling them to communicate to a broader audience (Aouragh, 2011).

In focus groups and field notes from Rashidieh and al-Buss camps the most popular social networks used by young people aged 15-35 were Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. In discussions with 43 people in 2015, only one young person did not have a Facebook account. This is higher than Lebanon's official Facebook penetration of 77% (Statistica, 2017). Facebook penetration would also appear to be high among elderly members of the camp, with stories reported of illiterate grandparents who learned to use Facebook for the viewing of images and keeping up with children and grandchildren in the diaspora.

When young people were asked what they used Facebook for, answers fell within two categories; a tool for research and gathering knowledge, and a tool for sharing information themselves. The majority of replies fell within the former category; “Picture, post. Most use it to find information, they research through Facebook.”, “I use it to update statuses and post pictures. I check pages for general knowledge, but I check pages with religious content the most.”, “Any news you want to find you can find it more easily on Facebook. You won’t find such specific news on websites.”, “We mostly use it to find information.” Answers related to using it as a tool for communication included, “Everyone has a different purpose. Some people log in just to check what others post, others like to publish posts.”, “I use it to deliver specific messages to certain people.” This supports my analysis of content shared which indicates that there are few people in the camps generating original video photo or text content, who could be viewed as ‘content creators’. The majority of online engagement involves the re-circulation of other content and liking or commenting on others’ posts. I will explore the significance of this later in this chapter.

## **Individual narratives within a communal narrative**

Representation and self-representation must be understood in the context of the highly-contested political debates about the validity of refugee experiences, immigration policy and the right to asylum. Indeed, ‘our practices of recognition, and so our practices of voice, are limited by the histories of the spaces in which we find ourselves: the histories of others’ struggles for recognition before us, the history of our own struggle to be recognised in contrast to the struggles of particular others (Couldry, 2010, p. 130). Through running film screenings of four Palestinian-directed films *Blue* (2014), *Siege* (2015), *5 Broken Cameras* (2011) and *Goal Dreams* (2006) and focus groups and interviews, I discovered a tension between individual narratives and a macro Palestinian narrative.

The majority of participants were pleased to see films produced by other Palestinians, “Although we are used to foreigners making these kinds of movies it is not surprising. Palestinians can do everything” commented an elderly man at a screening at Sanabil Centre for the Elderly in Rashidieh camp. At a screening of *Siege* (2015) for teenage boys, a boy who had fled from Syria commented, “Another beautiful thing: we are besieged yet able to give our voice out to the world. This does not happen anywhere and in any society.”

Recognition of the value of 'giving our voice out to the world' was accompanied by debates around whose narrative should be represented. Who gets to speak on behalf of others? Which narrative is the Palestinian narrative, or can there be space for multiple individual narratives?

In the first screening of *Blue* (2014) and *Siege* (2015) held at Sawaed youth centre in Rashidieh camp there was heated discussion about the representation of the situation of Yarmouk and the choices the filmmakers had made over what to include and what to exclude from the films. The following exchange illustrates this:

*"The events that happen inside the camps are more than what was shown in the films. The film shows guys who look for cigarettes, it's a normal case. There are events are more tragic. They didn't film the kids, the famine, the fear and horror that's inside the camp. The film wasn't special." -FS1, Male*

*"I disagree with him. I'm Mohammad Saleh from Sbene camp next to Yarmouk camp. Despite the tragedy and suffering, guys are trying to spread happiness. There is a tragedy, violence, killing, death, siege.... I think that the film is influential and important. It reflects something specific. Don't forget that the group who worked on this project didn't have much to work with. They didn't have more things to work with and they were limited. In the way they made the film, they were creative. They couldn't cover more things." - FS1, Male*

While the first comment indicates dissatisfaction with the extent of suffering portrayed in the film, an additional young person felt that the film *Siege* (2015) did not tell the full story due to excluding Palestinians from other camps in Syria. His comment clearly links visibility in the media with visibility before aid and development organisations providing assistance to those suffering in Syria:

*"My name is Abdelsalam Majed. I'd like to ask the person who made the film. Everything is about Yarmouk. There is 18 thousand Palestinian in Yarmouk camp. You can't find a thousand person who is originally from Yarmouk. They don't mention Sbene or Huseniye camps. I'm one of the people, when ISIS entered Yarmouk camp, they killed 14 people from my family in a week. They only mention Yarmouk. Palestinians are not just there. There is Sbene camp and Huseniye. The martyrs who died in Yarmouk camp are originally from different camps from Sbene and Huseniye. The majority and these camps are not mentioned. Everything is about Yarmouk. Today, Italy donated 1.5 million euro to the people of Yarmouk. And the money is only given to the people of Yarmouk. The people who are sieged outside the camp don't receive anything." – FS1, Male*

At the end of this discussion of competing representations I was asked to stop the recording, as the facilitator explained that this part of the conversation was 'for

Palestinian ears only'. When I explained that this was just for me and it wouldn't be shared with the wider public I was allowed to continue recording. For Palestinians, the power of representation is a vital tool for maintaining survival and limiting the erasure of identity forced on them by colonisation and an international regime that has largely ignored them.

This debate around competing individual narratives and the validity of the experience of those in Sbene camp vis a vis those in Yarmouk or Rashidieh is further complicated by the idea of an overarching Palestinian narrative projected to outsiders in order to maintain the Right to Return and keep memories alive (Khalili, 2010). Palestinians from Lebanon and from Syria have had completely different experiences that are in many ways alien from one another, yet they must all find their place underneath a shared Palestinian narrative.

Scholars of Palestinian identity in the diaspora have recognised the diversity of individual experience contrasted with an overarching Palestinian identity in which the right to return, notions of home and belonging are wrapped up (Aouragh, 2011; Khalidi, 2010; Sayigh, 1995 2013). Denial of Palestinian identity is bound up with colonisation of the land and erasure of memory, and maintaining a transcending universal Palestinian narrative is therefore of utmost importance. Within the camps in Lebanon the scope of these individual narratives has broadened with the inclusion of Palestinians from Syria, who have a very different experience of what it means to be a Palestinian refugee. Yet all of these diverse individual narratives are also required to find their place within a larger pan-Palestinian narrative and identity. In his field research with Palestinians from Yarmouk camp now in Lebanon, Stefano Fogliata finds both a fixed collective identity and an individual narration shifting according to the current situation and the constraints and opportunities present. He describes those experiencing misalignment "between the urgencies of the ordinary and a pure orthodox narration" that pervades the literature related to Palestinian refugees. Palestinians from Syria now in Lebanon are "experiencing new forms of explicit disaffiliation against a nationalist discourse mainly focused on an all-embracing past and far from daily contingencies" (Fogliata, 2017, p. 47).

Each Palestinian who speaks and shares his one story is subject to scrutiny for how it fits within the wider narrative – a Palestinian sharing his story is seen as speaking for the whole community, as indicated by a focus group respondent who works for UNRWA, noting "I've posted Korea's flag as a profile and cover picture for two years now. Until

now they keep asking me why I haven't posted the flag of Palestine because I'm Palestinian. I'm free, it's none of your business."

This communal projection of a specific narrative was also present in a closed-door discussion between senior representatives in the camp about an upcoming film production led by a Lebanese crew for international broadcast. Participants noted that it was important that they only carried the Palestinian flag rather than any party flags for Hamas or Fatah. The leader of the conversation commented,

*"I can't tell you not to have a political favourite, but Palestine is bigger than the parties. For us to claim we're Palestinians it's important to only have the Palestinian flag. It's like we're saying this is our Jerusalem this is our city. Because Jerusalem is for all Palestinians Christians and Muslims and for the whole world."*

The conversation also recognised common stereotypes about Palestinians in Lebanon that the camps were places to be feared, noting, "It is important that we continue to be disciplined because that way we encourage the Lebanese to make videos about Palestine."

In the absence of physical territory and in the face of erasure of identity and memory, an overarching narrative is a means of survival. How can many individual narratives be heard within this larger narrative in a way that doesn't contradict or invalidate it? How can micro narratives be celebrated and encouraged while still keeping alive the larger narrative? These exchanges reveal tensions between the one overarching Palestinian narrative and the multiple important narratives, and the struggle for them to co-exist.

## **Social media as a site for self-representation**

Mobile accessibility and connectivity have proven vital as a motivator and facilitator of migration as well as enabling the continuation of relationships within the diaspora. What has been less researched is the impact of mobile technology on self-expression and storytelling, with some exceptions (Godin and Doná, 2016; Kaufmann, 2018). Smartphones and social media have facilitated the taking and sharing of snapshots and videos, making possible a daily reflection on life within a wider network through which new connections can be created. These user-led, often spontaneous, representations can be understood as distinct from project-led narratives mediated and owned by the journalists, humanitarian organisations, or filmmakers who ideate and initiate them.

Despite acts of self-expression being rare, they do exist, and can tell us much about the perspectives and hope of young people living in Rashidieh, as well as the potential of social media platforms for hosting this content and connecting it to a wider audience.

I focus first on the work of an emerging poet, Mohammed Al Assad, whom I first met ten years ago, and who became my collaborator for the *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2014) project discussed in the following chapter. My research about digital self-expression and storytelling in this section has been conducted with him, focused on his work. This has enabled a collaborative research process which has given Al Assad control over the representation of his voice throughout, including through the co-authorship of an article in an *Index on Citizenship* special issue on refugee voice (Mitchell and Al Assad, 2015)

Al Assad is a 23-year-old business management and accounting graduate, and third-generation Palestinian refugee living in Rashidieh camp in Lebanon. From March 2015 to 2018 he shared 95 posts on Facebook using the hashtag #In the camp ( في المخيم #, *fi al-mukhayyam*), documenting his reality in Lebanon, and hopes and dreams of a return to his homeland or escape from his immobility. He posts his poems alongside images he has taken on his iPhone or images or videos he has downloaded from Facebook, finding and creating meaning through the re-circulation and distribution of content created and shared previously by others.

Writing in *Index on Citizenship* magazine, Al Assad notes that, “It’s difficult to be a child here because there are so few opportunities. You are told to work hard in school, but then you graduate and realise that there are no jobs. We want to bring out the voices of these children and the frustrations of the youth. Although our families have been exiled from our country for nearly 70 years, we will never forget the right to return, and it is our job to communicate our existence to the outside world” (Mitchell and Al Assad, 2015). Al Assad writes to reflect his reality of the camp in the face of stereotypes imposed upon him and his community by both their Lebanese hosts and the wider global community. In a conversation with Al Assad in March 2018, he emphasised this, noting “Lebanese people are scared of the camps and call it a *time bomb* [قنبلة موقوتة - *qanbala mauquta*]. These poems challenge them to see the real image, to see that we are outside the image that they have of us and that we real people with dreams and hopes, good people, and not terrorists.” Though his reflections are both personal and political, he is cognisant of his wider audience and writing under a hashtag as a deliberate act of ensuring that his poems can be found by others. “I saw some people using it before, once or twice, someone from Gaza used it. When you search using the hashtag you find poems that

reflect the suffering. When my friends share my poems, they use the hashtag too. Many others have shared it including the website *Ya Sour*.”

The two most dominant themes in Al Assad’s poems are political protest and a sense of confinement through articulating both the day-to-day monotony and the beauty of camp life. On the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2015 Al Assad uploaded a video he had seen in his Facebook news feed alongside a poem commenting on the irony and comedy of war. The origin of the video is unclear. Shot in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and seven seconds long, it shows a protestor mocking security forces with laughing in the background. His caption, translated from Arabic is below:

*Also in our war there is peace...  
In our war there is laughter...  
In our war there is fun...  
In our war there is pleasure...  
Imagine that we are the caresses of death.  
Imagine playing with missiles.  
Imagine and imagine and imagine...  
Imagine you’re imagining people like them.  
Don’t imagine people like me because I’ve already fallen asleep.  
In our war peace does not know peace...  
In our war peace is drawn with debris...  
Youth like the prophets have gone  
Volcanoes have been left behind  
The youth and the angels have celebrated  
The Lord loves them and loves their trembling eyes  
A child then a prophet and then a martyr...  
This is how...  
Thus the Canaanites grow...  
This is how...  
The smile keeps our war...  
We smile for the shells as for life  
#uprising  
#in the camp  
#martyr  
#Al Aqsa  
#Al Quds  
#Mohammed Al Assad (Al Assad, 2015a)*

In writing this post Al Assad adds his own meaning to a widely circulated video and connects the experience of a Palestinian in Lebanon with the violence faced by Palestinians in the Occupied territories. Both integrated with their experiences, ‘our war’, and identifying from afar, ‘imagine playing with missiles’, this reflection shows the extent to which his identity is bound up with his homeland and those who reside in it. The social network he is part of enables him not only to understand and identify more fully with the

experiences of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, but to integrate his own experiences into a new product which can in turn be re-purposed and shared by others.

Other poems focus more explicitly on the camp experience, displaying both the pain of exile and the mundanity and joy he experiences in everyday moments (Al Assad, 2015b).

Figure 17 shows the original post. Translation below.

*When calm prevails over my camp*

*It's ugly*

*It is beautiful with the laughter of children and their voices*

*It is beautiful with the sound of the vegetable seller calling in the morning*

*It is lovely to talk to women whose coffee cups touch together*

*The volcano of a volcano does not seem to be as calm as the bird who doesn't set his limits to  
the tones of his voice and chirps whenever he wants*

*#morning success in the camp*

*#in the camp*

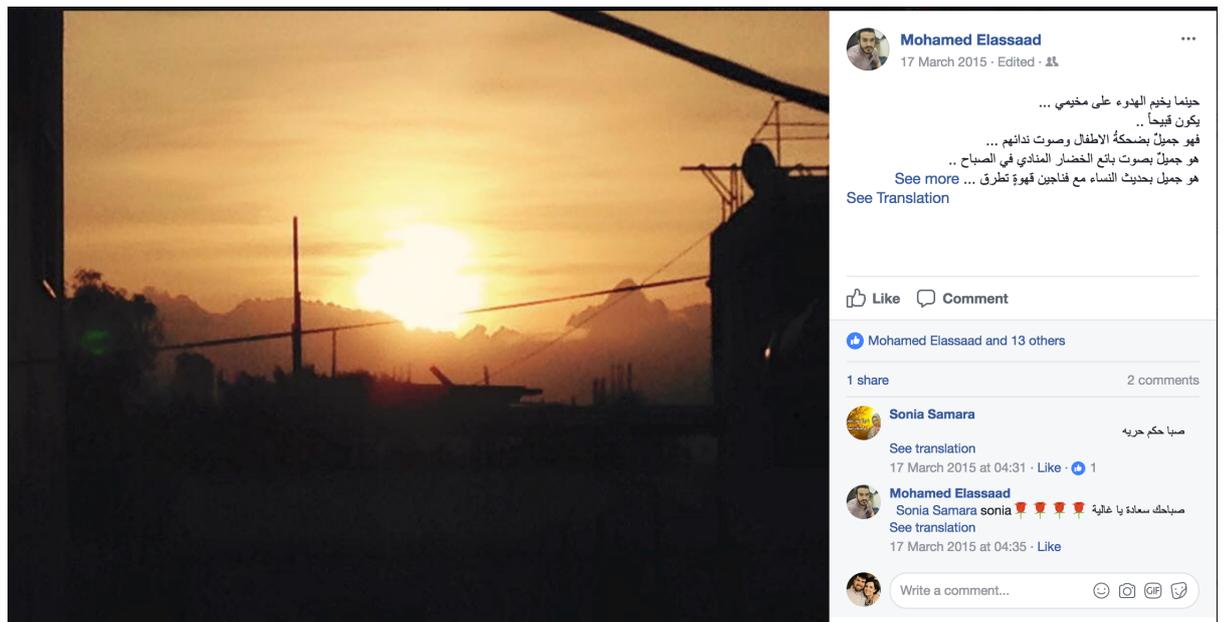


Figure 20: The original Facebook post for Mohammed's poem 'When calm prevails over my camp' (Al Assad, 2015b)

In creating these narratives and publishing them within his friends, family and wider online community, Al Assad is becoming visible on his own terms and inviting others to participate in these acts of self-expression, reflection and protest. The medium facilitates a telling of his immediate and intimate daily reality which enables others to not only act as an audience and to see his content, but to actively engage through commenting, liking and sharing. The audience participates in the co-construction of meaning of his

narratives as they navigate the cultural boundaries and physical borders that separate the author from those outside the camp.

Another example of content creation within Rashidieh can be found in the work of Walaa Taleb, Alaa Ghatith, Hosam Salem, and their YouTube channel Forward (Forward, n.d.). Walaa, an employee of UNRWA, describes the goal of the channel as

*“To help others in our Palestinian camps in Lebanon and all camps in Lebanon to accept the reality, review their thoughts and change their mentality of the issues around them through showing them educational materials and positive historical stories. We want to use different references, not just from Arab and Islamic books.”* (Personal correspondence, 2018)

The channel began creating content in January 2018 and now has 867 subscribers with 17,000 video views. They have two formats, the first *For Life* (presented by Walaa) talks about misconceptions that have been accepted within society without understanding their basis in truth, and the second *For Tech* (presented by Alaa) discusses technology and how individuals can protect themselves from spam, hackers and other elements of online safety. In conjunction these two formats offer a valuable media literacy programme, and one that has been initiated entirely from within the camp without outside support.



Figure 21: Screenshot of the YouTube channel Forward (Forward, n.d.)

Though rare, acts of digital storytelling within social media have shifted the production of narratives away from those who report *from* refugee camps to those who live *in* refugee camps. Through activating previously unheard voices online the stories, poems or even

mundane thoughts of individuals are made visible without requiring the mediation of outside storytellers in the form of journalists, aid workers or Western acquaintances. When sought out and engaged with, these stories have the potential to challenge top-down narratives about refugees, to contextualise, politicise and humanise those so easily presented as the other.

Despite individual moments of self-expression, one respondent suggested that, “As a community of camps we are not active. There is nothing we can do, it’s all useless slogans. So Facebook here for the people living in these camps is only quotations. It’s about stealing pictures from different places or quotations and sharing them” – *FGD2, Female*. This indicates a recognition that there is not much original content produced by Palestinians in Lebanon, and that rather than social media facilitating this Palestinians have filled the void by sharing content produced by others. This was linked to a lack of political impact and a tangible shift in the lives of Palestinians in Lebanon, “We need actual movement in reality not electronically. That’s what I think. Because everything is just talk behind screens. We see everything on our phones. We might get excited internally but in reality nothing happens.” – *FGD2, Male*

## **Networked narrative**

One of the key findings from this research into the communicative ecology of Rashidieh camp is the significance of online networks that shape and mediate content and identity. This goes on to be a focus of the next practice project, *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2014), discussed in Chapter Five.

For refugee and diaspora communities, social networking can uniquely allow them to continue to shape meaning and build relationships from afar (Aouragh, 2011; Godin and Doná, 2016; Halilovich, 2013; Walton, 2016). Social media enhance the possibilities of migrants maintaining strong ties with families and friends, provide a means of communication with weak ties that are relevant when organising the process of migration and settlement, and establish a new infrastructure consisting of latent ties (Dekker and Engbersen, 2012). Facebook offers a chance to build a community that transcends restriction on movement and the borders that separate friends and family. Through wider community participation, however peripheral, narratives are mediated and shaped into a site of meaning for a group rather than solely for an individual publisher, as an understanding of the content takes us beyond reception and production towards its circulation within networks (Jenkins et al., 2013). Harper and Frobenius term this co-

construction of story worlds by multiple narrators ‘networked narrative’ (Page et al., 2013). Networked communities play a role “not as simply consumers of pre-constructed messages but as people who are shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined” (Jenkins, 2008, p.2). Furthermore, online communities are able to produce content collaboratively, creating, correcting and filtering each other’s narratives for the first time *outside* of institutions or markets; as a result of the organisation of groups through the social web (Shirky, 2009).

For refugee communities and those in the diaspora, this mediation of identities, places, and memories is of particular significance. In the context of loss and dislocation, co-creating, co-remembering and mediating each other’s experiences contributes to a collective memory and identity. The study of refugee narratives within networked media is therefore a rich area for exploration, posing questions about memory-making, the interplay between physical and online geographies, and the virtual permeability of borders. These questions cut across divisions within migration categories, and have been addressed by scholars working with diaspora, transnational, migrant and refugee communities in ways that often intersect. In her study of photo blogging among the Iranian diaspora, Walton (2016) finds that perceptions of place, identity and community are negotiated online through digital photography, while Halilovich (2013) discusses the ways in which Bosnian refugees in Austria reconstruct, reimagine and sustain identities and memories online while making new homes in the diaspora. In their research with Congolese activists Godin and Dona (2016) find young people around the world participating in politics through the creation of new online territories in which the local, national, transnational, diasporic and virtual intersect and overlap.

With findings from multi-sited ethnographic research conducted in Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) beginning from 2001 to 2005 and internet-based ethnography, Aouragh analyses Palestinian internet production and consumption and illustrates the phenomenon of virtual mobility. She recounts how those in the camps in Lebanon were, for the first time, able to access the land lost, with virtual space enabling physical attachment. Interactive chat rooms, forums, and an emerging blogosphere against the background of the Al Aqsa Intifada in 2000 were mediating spaces through which the nation of Palestine was conceptualised, with Palestinians living in Israel and the OPT and Palestinians in exile contributing to this process. (Aouragh, 2011) An analysis of production and consumption over the past decade reveals that virtual mobility has been further enabled by the immediacy and personal nature of social media platforms and messaging apps over websites and chat forums.

Historically connections between villages and families were facilitated physically through the establishment of settlements within camps. Inhabitants of Bourj al Barajneh, Ein al Hilweh and Rashidieh camps established their settlements based on patterns of village life, with different areas being occupied by different villages and being named accordingly (Roberts, 1999). Rosemary Sayigh explains that village-based ties were reconstructed in Shatila camp through the work of individuals such as Abu Kamalto who recruited villagers originating from Majd al-Kroom (Sayigh, 1994, p. 61). In this context we can view the internet and the establishing of online connections based on families and villages as an additional layer of community building, as well as the enablement of a virtual physicality. The ties provided by Facebook build on the history of an individual physically travelling and building connections through word of mouth, with this responsibility being picked up again in a new context but as the role of a technological artefact.

Memes, defined as an element of culture or system of behaviour passed from one individual to another by imitation, shared on Facebook provide a site for analysis that demonstrates the way in which Facebook has facilitated connections between national borders. In 2015 images began circulating on Facebook of places in Palestine with a handwritten note featuring a name and sometimes a message, as illustrated in Figure 13 below. Initiated by Jerusalem-based journalist Fatima Bakri (Bakri, n.d.) these photos provide a link between the diaspora community and the physical land from which they are separated. Those replicating the meme would take a photo at the request of an individual unable to visit Palestine, typically Palestinians in the diaspora, with their handwritten name on paper displayed prominently alongside landmarks from the territory that the subject is unable to visit. Occasionally the two participating in the meme had a pre-existing relationship, but in the majority of cases they were strangers who had connected by Facebook and were joined solely by their shared national identity.

Bakri's Facebook page alone contains hundreds of these images, tagging people from the Palestinian diaspora and beyond, including Germany and the UK as well as Jordan and Lebanon (Bakri, n.d.). The virtual territory of the internet thus allows diasporic users to both lay claim to a grounded sense of identity and attachment to geophysical space, and to 'travel' to locations they cannot access physically.



Figure 22: Screenshot from Fatima Bakri's Facebook page (Bakri, n.d.). Content posted in November 2015.

The invitation Bakri extends to Palestinians in the diaspora via Facebook echoes the work of Palestinian artist Emily Jacir in *Where we come from* (Jacir, 2001). In a pre-Facebook era, Jacir asked the question “If I could do something for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?” to Palestinians living both within or outside Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories who face travel restrictions. Answers included, “Go to my mother’s grave in Jerusalem on her birthday and put flowers and pray”, and “do something on a normal day in Haifa”. Able to travel due to her American passport, Jacir fulfils these wishes and documents them in photograph form. However, rather than making visible those who answered her question within the final exhibition, she makes their *absence* the primary feature of the art pointing to their erasure from the land and confronting the ‘oppressive apparatus of spatial control in which these Palestinian subjects are enmeshed’ (Demos, 2013, p. 104). Bakri’s work confronts the same injustice but in the networked collaborative context of Facebook she adopts *presence* rather than absence as the focus of her photographs. She fulfils the desire of those in the diaspora to be physically present in Palestine through the act of naming and creating an artefact which they can own and share online. The images become personal identifiers that individuals can use to represent themselves before others online, with Palestinians from Lebanon able to be connected to the land from which their ancestors were exiled. A respondent in Rashidieh who participated in this and asked Bakri to share an image with his name written in front of Al Quds explains;

“Many people shared these images, especially Palestinian refugees in Lebanon because they... don’t have any human rights... In Israel they have a phrase ‘the old will die and the

*young will forget'. When we share these photos we are saying that we won't forget."*  
*(Personal correspondence, September 2015)*

Bakri's photos are almost all taken at the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif, a site holy to Muslims, Christians and Jews and a vital pillar of Palestinian identity (Khalidi, 2010). The online act of being named is to be present, albeit virtually, and thus to lay claim to the land lost. These photographs act both as a document of belonging and a virtual presence transcending the lack of physical presence that displacement entails.

This meme initiated by Bakri contains instances of content creation and sharing that can also be characterised as acts of political resistance, bringing dispossessed and immobile Palestinians from camps in Lebanon into online communities built on a shared sense of national identity. While virtual space is a reminder of the absence of shared territorial space it offers displaced Palestinians with no right to the land, and no land of their own, an opportunity to stake their claim through the sharing and re-purposing of narratives within online communities.

In a focus group with women from five different camps in Lebanon, they discussed a Facebook page "where you write your name and your family and your grandfather's name, you send it to them and they find your family tree.... The job of the admins of this page is to go to the grandfather and ask questions, in order to bring relatives closer together." They reported the story of a family of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and another family in Palestine who had previously been unaware of one another, but their family trees were so similar that the Facebook page connected them. They then discovered they were related and remained in close contact after the initial connection was made. Marriages between Palestinians in Lebanon and Gaza facilitated by Facebook are also reported. Where previously isolated from the occupied territories and Palestinians living in the diaspora, Palestinians in Lebanon now have access to a wider community and the tools to forge connections. Abo Abdullah, a PLO representative in Rashidieh camp, comments,

*"The internet has many benefits because now the whole world is in one room. This a new thing because now the whole world is at the refugee camps. Our families in Palestine - they can see us, and we can see them. We can see the people in Diaspora. Those working abroad. We have a lot of conversations on messenger as if we are sitting with one another in one room: this is the main benefit of the internet."* -  
*Interview*

Facebook is credited with 'allowing us to travel', 'shortening the distances and making us closer to one another', 'making the world a small village' 'maybe through Facebook I can see the world'; the significance of these actions, and opportunities to 'move freely' in an isolated and immobile community, blocked in by barriers and checkpoints, cannot be underestimated.

Following opportunities facilitated by websites and chat rooms (Aouragh, 2011) Facebook has enabled Palestinians in Rashidieh to build connections with and participate in networks comprised of other Palestinians from the diaspora resulting in a shared identity located in virtual territory.

## **Conclusion**

The findings in this chapter help to ground the next stage of practice work in a contextual understanding of media habits, and to guide the way it is shaped. My research suggests that Facebook and other social networks dominate the communicative ecology of Rashidieh camp, and that to develop co-creative media practice in line with the tools and techniques that young people are familiar with social media and smartphones should be explored.

The acts of individual self-expression and circulation of content between Palestinians in the diaspora point to the prevalence of networked narrative as a new focus for making meaning and shaping identity. Individuals who previously have not been able to create and share content with wide audiences are self-publishing and engaging audiences both internal and external to the camp. This highlights the potential for a media project that is not simply co-creative in the sense of initial content creation, but is embedded within a wider network of collaborators commenting, sharing, and re-mixing content as it relates to their own lives (Jenkins et al., 2013)

Alongside these changes in individual self-expression, awareness of the different representations of Palestinians continues to drive the projected images in the political arena given the ongoing information battleground around Palestinian identity. This tension highlights a struggle for co-existence between individual narratives and an overarching Palestinian narrative which acts as a means of survival in the face of erasure of identity and memory.

As well as these findings being able to guide the practice work, they are useful in their own right building on existing scholarship about media usage and the rise of the internet in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon.

## CHAPTER FIVE: HUMANS OF AL RASHIDIYA

*“The camera is yours. The microphone is yours. Now tell the bastards exactly what it’s like to live in the slums” Ruby Grierson, in the production of Housing Problems (1935) (Hardy, 1946, p. 148)*

### Introduction

My experiences in bringing *Captured* (2013) to life documented in Chapter Three and the initial findings from my research into the communicative ecology of Rashidieh camp led me to a different approach for collaborative storytelling. I wanted to find a method that would integrate with the quick, instant storytelling that communities in Rashidieh were engaged in on a regular basis online, and one that would facilitate connections between people in the camp and outside of it.

The Humans of New York concept is introduced in the literature review as a method of participatory journalism which has had success in reaching wide audiences with a uniform concept, and in evoking expressions of empathy among audiences (Wheeler and Quinn, 2017). In September 2014 I embarked on a two-year process of content creation and moderation, developing the project *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2014), with a group of co-creators in Rashidieh camp. This became my second site for practice as research.

At the time of creation, September 2014, there were at least 40 spin-off projects from Humans of New York, but this was the first project to focus specifically on a refugee camp. In October 2014 the second Humans of New York project from a refugee camp was founded from Jerash Camp in Jordan, home to over 30,000 refugees who left the Gaza Strip (Papadopoulou, n.d.). The project went on to create and publish 68 pieces of content over a three-year period.

This chapter outlines the process and the outputs of the project *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2014) finding that a project existing within an already familiar format can serve to frame individual stories and reach new audiences, and highlights the potential of networked narrative (Page et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2017). This adds a new layer to the vertical and horizontal communication developed through the Fogo Process (Snowden, 1983).

## The process of content creation

My primary collaborator for Humans of Al Rashidiya was Mohammed el Assad, whose poetry is discussed in Chapter Four, a young graduate living in Rashidieh camp who I had first met five years before. Our discussions over the years had revolved around a lack of understanding by others about the precarious situation that Palestinians in Lebanon were living in, and a desire to communicate from the camps to an 'outside world'. On a trip in August 2014 I showed him the Humans of New York page and we began to discuss the idea of doing a similar project in Rashidieh following the same format. There were four factors that made the Humans of New York format relevant to this context: by sharing content on Facebook it would enable us to engage a wider audience of collaborators and an audience in the camps, Lebanon and beyond, it emphasised individual narratives rather than representations of groups, it was an immediate format that prioritised the fast way in which users of Facebook in the camps were used to engaging with content, and it enabled us to tell stories from inside a camp with borders and checkpoints, using the internet to transcend physical boundaries.

We decided to use snowball sampling in order to identify interviewees (Goodman, 1961) allowing us to speak to those whose social networks would encourage them to speak openly and candidly. In beginning with those known to Mohammed we reduced suspicion and removed the need for formal requests to acquaintances, though this also meant that we were engaging only a subsection of the camp. After the first few days we began walking outwards from Mohammed's house and we approached strangers to explain the project and ask if they would feature in it. Very few people refused.

Initially I took the photographs and asked the majority of the questions, with Mohammed translating, and then Mohammed and I worked together on the crafting of the posts. It took a few days for Mohammed to be confident in the project and in approaching people, but as it grew and became a topic of conversation in the camp he became more confident and would approach and interview people himself. We gathered a bank of stories and began posting them daily throughout the autumn and winter of 2014, while I was in the UK and Mohammed was still in Lebanon.

When I returned to Rashidieh in April 2015 we tried to recruit others to join the project. In the end five of Mohammed's friends agreed to join us, and we held an informal training session in Mohammed's living room to discuss the project. Mohammed and I drew up a list of questions based on the type of questions we think had been asked to elicit

responses we had seen on Humans of New York. We also thought about what would be interesting to our multiple audiences. This list of questions was then used by him and the wider team to approach people within the camp.

All the posts following this trip were gathered and written by Mohammed or submitted by others, and my involvement began to shift to that of editor rather than providing the energy to drive the project forwards. We would edit the posts within the Facebook app; Mohammed would upload the photo and translated story and I would reply with comments and a suggested English translation. Sometimes stories would go through three or four iterations. Once we agreed on the final version in English he would translate it back into Arabic. I made editorial decisions constantly about what would be most engaging to audiences. In this way, even though the words attributed to each person were correct, long monologues would be edited to shorter sections, occasionally detail would be removed, and I would decide on the final phrasing.

Figure 23 overleaf shows this process in action, as the different iterations of a post. First Mohammed uploads it as “We are friends, he is my best friend, also I know I’m his best friend, we are playing together here and all the time.” I then log in to the Facebook page and rephrase so it sounds native to an English language speaker, as “We are friends, he is my best friend and I know I’m his best friend too. We play here together all the time.” The final post and image can be seen at the bottom.



**Humans of Al Rashidiya** الانسان في الرشيديه

Edited by Alasaad A Mo [?] · 28 May 2015 at 00:26

"We are friends , he is my best friend , also i know I'm his best friend , we are playing together here and all the time . "

- Added 1 media item to this post.



**Humans of Al Rashidiya** الانسان في الرشيديه

Edited by Mary Mitchell [?] · 17 September 2015 at 20:53

"We are friends , he is my best friend and I know I'm his best friend too. We play here together all the time."



**Humans of Al Rashidiya** الانسان في الرشيديه

Just now · 🌐



"We are friends , he is my best friend and I know I'm his best friend too. We play here together all the time."

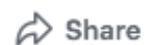


Figure 23: The collaborative process for content production, Humans of Al Rashidiya

Figure 24 below shows another post in 'edit' mode in the Facebook admin app. Mohammed has written a first draft of the post in English and Arabic, and commented "Don't share this I want to edit it". I have commented underneath probing further about the interview and content, and making a judgement about how engaging the post will be for an audience. In this we can see the mechanics of co-creation at play as Mohammed and I work together to develop the final product; my role as an active shaper of content and his as the story gatherer with contextual insight.



The screenshot shows a Facebook post from the page 'Humans of Al Rashidiya' (الانسان في الرشيدية). The post is in 'edit' mode, indicated by a small gear icon. The text of the post is in both English and Arabic. The English text reads: "I was live in bierut before i came to alrachideyah , i came because the living situation in beirut us very hard , and i was have an accident there , and i was live 7 months between the life and death in the hospital .". The Arabic text reads: "انا كنت ساكن ببيروت قبل ما احي عل رشيديه ، اجيت عل رشيدية لانو المعيشه ببيروت صعبه ، وانا عملت حادث هناك ، وضليت سبع اشهر بل مستشفى ما بين الحياة والموت .". Below the text, there is a comment in English: "(Don't share this i want to edit it) 😊 (Ok sure - does he say anything else though? About what it was like when he lived between life and death? Or how he felt about the accident? Otherwise it is not very interesting I think...)" and a link to "See Translation". Below the text and comment is a photograph of a man sitting at a desk in what appears to be a grocery store or a small shop. He is wearing a maroon hoodie with 'Winnipeg' and the number '45' on it. He is looking at the camera. On the desk in front of him is a calculator and some food items. The background shows shelves stocked with various products.

Humans of Al Rashidiya الرشيدية في الانسان Just now · 🌐

I was live in bierut before i came to alrachideyah , i came because the living situation in beirut us very hard , and i was have an accident there , and i was live 7 months between the life and death in the hospital .  
انا كنت ساكن ببيروت قبل ما احي عل رشيديه ، اجيت عل رشيدية لانو المعيشه ببيروت صعبه ، وانا عملت حادث هناك ، وضليت سبع اشهر بل مستشفى ما بين الحياة والموت . "

(Don't share this i want to edit it) 😊  
(Ok sure - does he say anything else though? About what it was like when he lived between life and death? Or how he felt about the accident? Otherwise it is not very interesting I think...)

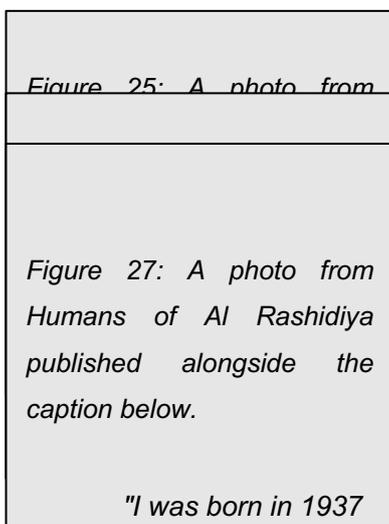
[See Translation](#)



👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share    📁 Buffer

Figure 24: The collaborative process for content production, Humans of Al Rashidiya

Working alongside El Assad, a total of 68 photo stories and one video story were published. Each story featured a personal narrative from within the camp, and was written in the first hand based on a short interview. Some stories featured groups. All these stories and a translation of the comments they generated can be found in the work submitted alongside this thesis as submission G. Three high resolution images and captions are shown in the thesis as Figures 26, 27 and 28. A selection of other images can be found as submission F.



The images we see in *Humans of Al Rashidiya* are not traditional depictions of refugees, or Palestinians. When refugees have the technology and skills to represent their own lives the images they take are often different to dominant portrayals of refugees that focus on the crisis points of conflict or borders (Mannik, 2012). Elderly couples talk about marriage, children talk about

their favourite food, mothers discuss being proud of their children. Instead of dramatic narratives, the images and their captions facilitate a slow reflective storytelling that documents the daily life and lived experience of the men women and children of Rashidieh camp. The Facebook page also gave an opportunity for these small individual narratives to be widely heard and received beyond the remit of the subjects' social network connections.

In Lynda Mannik's paper analysing photographs taken by Estonian refugees fleeing the Soviet Union in 1948 on board the ship *The Walnut*, she argues that in contrast to pervasive refugee imagery, the work by photographer Mainvald Sein provides,

*"a body of work that visually represents the positive attributes of being a refugee, as well as the agency and strength it takes to survive such an ordeal. These photographs show others that the decision to migrants, relocate and survive atrocities is based on the desire to protect one's family. They also visually demonstrate how the search for a better life is undertaken with dignity and determination"* (Mannik, 2012, p. 273)

The images and stories we find in *Humans of Al Rashidiya* are also images that highlight the strength and resilience of a population undergoing the day to day oppression of injustice rather than visually arresting moments of conflict.

Despite requests for users to send photos to the page directly to be shared, only 6 were sent. 4 of these were too poor quality or didn't come with accompanying captions. Figure 25 shows one of the published photos that was sent by a resident, criticising the living conditions and the work of UNRWA, the organisation responsible for overseeing facilities in the camps. This theme of criticising UNRWA continued in the production of *A Big Failure* (2015), discussed in the next chapter.



Figure 28: A photo and caption submitted to the page by a resident of Rashidieh, *Humans of Al Rashidiya*

Early on in the project an online exchange brought to the fore the complexities of collaborative storytelling, and my position as an outsider to the community. A member uploaded a photo of me taking a photo with Mohammed captioned with “British student makes a University project in Rashidieh camp” which received 9 likes and 4 comments in 4 minutes. A debate ensued, and Mohammed Zaki, the leader of Sawaed, asked the individual to take the photograph down. I was only informed two days later. This demonstrates the ethical challenges of being an outsider engaged in documentary, the

use of Facebook as public community conversation tool, and the way in which I was 'protected' by those operating as my gatekeepers into the community.

## **Networked narratives**

In sharing content online within a pre-existing community and online network, the narratives are intertwined with networks of liking, sharing and commenting. Page, Harper and Frobenius term these 'networked narrative' (Page et al., 2013). While there have been several notable participatory media projects with refugees equipping them with the skills to express themselves and their opinions through text, film and image such as *We are Not Numbers* (2015) in Gaza or *Voices Beyond Walls* (2006) in the West Bank, few of these have been created in the context of a networked culture. Sharing content in a network enables a participation through sharing, re-mixing and co-creating involving both the media creators and the wider community.

With Facebook as the distribution platform the content was able to take on new meanings and engagement by members of the camp community itself as well as outsiders. Multiple audiences including representatives from aid and development organisations who structure the day-to-day living of Palestinians in camps such as UNRWA, members of the diaspora, Palestinian activists, and people in the camp were all able to engage with the content in multiple ways. This can be seen as an extension of Snowden's Fogo Process which enabled horizontal learning and vertical communication (Snowden, 1983).

By May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 the page had attracted 948 likes from users from 44 countries. This had grown to 2500 by May 2018. The global extent of this audience engagement points to the wide-reaching relationships held within this small refugee camp in Lebanon, with page likes in June 2018 from 46 different countries, with the largest audiences in the USA (658), Lebanon (377), the UK (303), and Canada (133). Data from the top 10 countries is detailed in Figure 29. Facebook data is unable to tell us what percentage of these likes are Palestinians from Lebanon in the diaspora, but even if so, the potential geographic communicative reach from a refugee camp in Lebanon less than 2.5km square in size is remarkable. Facebook analytics reveal that the majority of users who like the page are aged between 18-34, with 68% women and only 30% men, illustrated in Figure 30. Men appear to be more vocal in commenting than women.

Country	Your Fans	City	Your Fans	Language	Your Fans
United States of America	658	Tyre, South Governorate	193	English (US)	1,436
Lebanon	377	London, England	152	English (UK)	550
United Kingdom	303	Beirut, Beirut Governor...	88	Arabic	261
Canada	133	New York, New York	45	German	44
Australia	106	Berlin, Berlin	42	French (France)	27
Germany	91	Dubai, Dubai	41	Portuguese (Brazil)	27
United Arab Emirates	60	Saïda, South Governor...	37	Dutch	26
Netherlands	56	Sydney, New South W...	35	Italian	25
Sweden	42	Melbourne, Victoria	34	Swedish	20
Israel	41	Chicago, Illinois	31	Danish	14

Figure 29: Facebook data from Humans of Al Rashidiya showing the top 10 audience locations

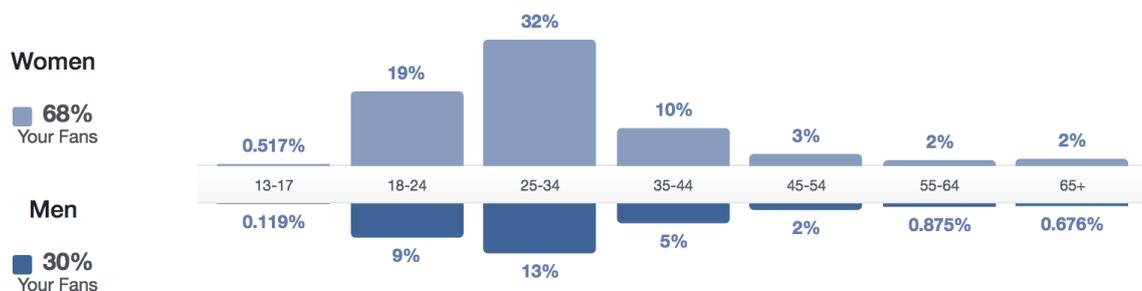


Figure 30: Facebook data from Humans of Al Rashidiya showing audience breakdown by age and gender

On the Facebook page *Humans of Al Rashidiya* the community mediates memories and engages in the formation of identities through the content the project creates. Individuals living in the camp and in the diaspora use ‘tagging’, ‘commenting’ and ‘liking’ to engage with narratives that speak of their experiences and family history. When an elderly man shares his experience of fleeing Safed when he was 11 years old and coming to Lebanon, three relatives comment below the post. “*Think (sic) you for sharing your story. You are a courageous, kind and compassionate man. May Allah bless you and your family. Inshallah!*” writes one user. ‘*Thank you all. Ms Sandia, I appreciate your really emotions*’ replies a relative of the man who is quoted in the story. Underneath another post, a man living in London writes, ‘*so proud of my Dad.*’ One family member of an older man who featured in a story saved and uploaded the photo from the post as his header picture on Facebook in an act that can be understood within the new era of spreadable media (Jenkins et al., 2013).

Many of the posts featured stories about the *nakba* and memories of Palestine, engaging with the physical land lost and their right to return, supporting Miriam Aouragh's assertion that in the case of Palestine, a mediated national consciousness does not depend on possessing sovereign territory (Aouragh, 2011). Comments also echoed the right to return, *'If God wants you will come back and we will all go back, we are the owners of the earth with the right'*, *'We will go back to our homeland inshallah'*. For those viewing the page from the diaspora rather than within the camp, the page also facilitated a recollection of the camp itself as the 'land lost'. In response to a post about a barber who opened his salon in the camp in 1990, a user from London says *'huh nice Ayman. I remember when my dad he was take me to Ayman salon when I was young I was 4 years or 5 years.'* The 'home' around which memories and belonging can be centred is twofold; land in Palestine lost by exile and the camp itself lost through emigration.

The most popular posts were those about older people in the camp sharing their stories of the *nakba*, with the most popular generating 2,084 page views, 13 shares, 77 likes, and 17 comments. Focus groups and interviews with Facebook users showed that it is used as a tool to relate to, create, and share a Palestinian identity that still retains ownership of land in Palestine, and the *nakba* narratives play an important role in this. These stories also relate to Palestinian identity more broadly, rather than just speaking of the experience of Palestinians in Lebanon.

Through *Humans of al Rashidiya* Palestinians from Rashidieh and the diaspora are both the audience and active participants in the storytelling, engaging with the representation of them online just as outsiders can. They are co-contributors to a shared sense of space and belonging facilitated by a virtual platform. Much of this active participation can also be characterised by the lending of support, particularly when stories feature dreams and aspirations. Beneath a post about a Syrian girl who had never been to school is the comment *'Dear beautiful young lady, please do not give up. Your dream of going to school will come true. Your life now is very hard, and for all of the brave courageous Syrians. We pray for you, to have a happy future filled with peace, and the opportunity to go to school. Inshallah!'* Elsewhere, other comments included, *'I hope your dream becomes true'* and *'May God prolong your age and your wish come true to return to beloved Palestine.'* In some cases, the individual in the story engaged directly with those who commented encouragingly, facilitating a direct two-way conversation between the 'subject' and the 'audience'.

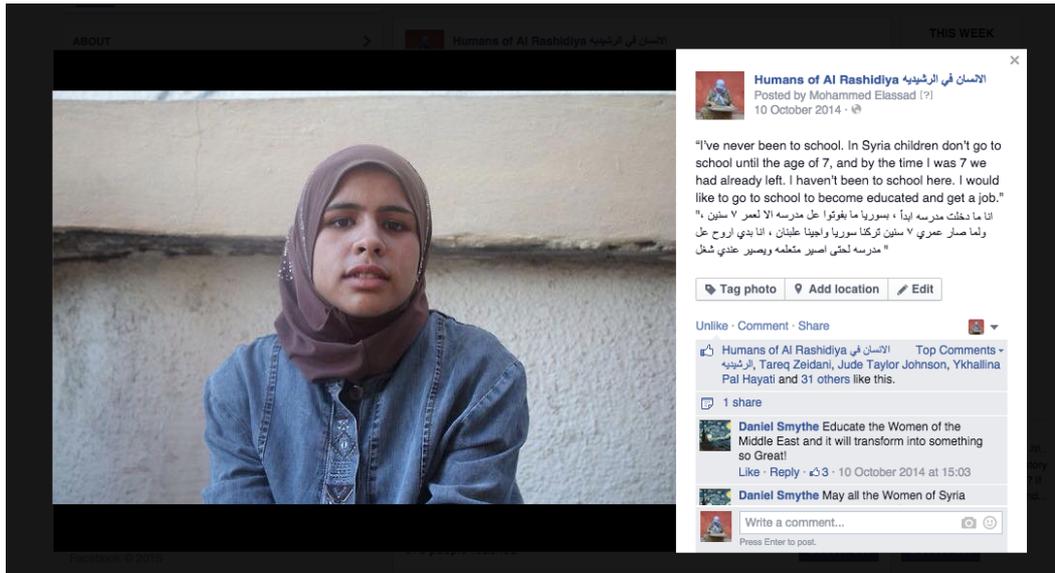


Figure 31: Post from Humans of Al Rashidiya, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2014

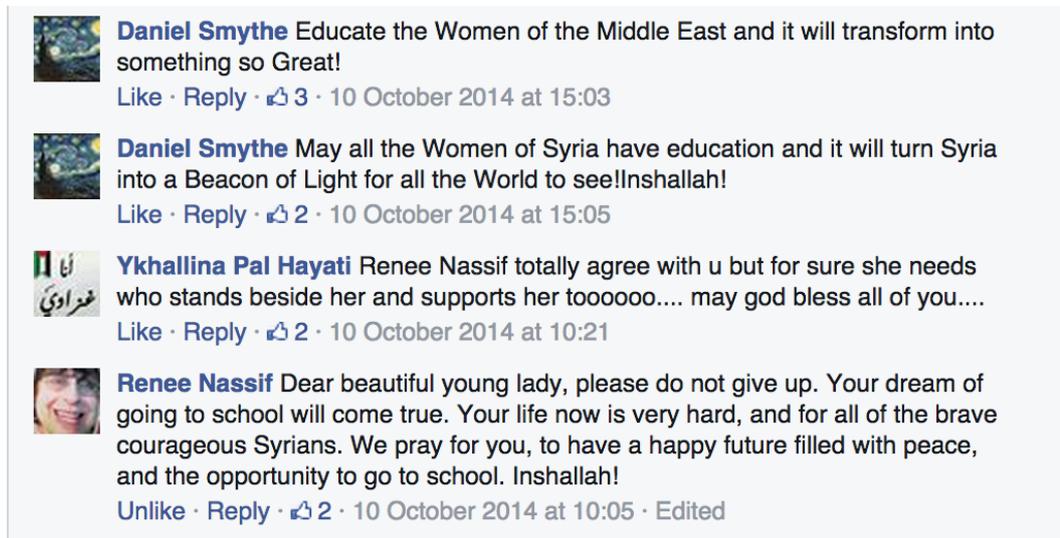


Figure 32: Responses from Humans of Al Rashidiya post 10<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Prohibitions upon employment and the resulting unemployment are one of the biggest challenges facing Palestinians in Lebanon, and many posts referenced this. In the post below, Ahmed receives encouragement and support and thanks users for their messages, in a cycle of response. This functionality is unique. In all the ways in which refugees have historically been represented, and continue to be, there has been no ability for the subject to engage directly with the audience at the point of message reception.



Figure 33: Post from Humans of Al Rashidiya, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2014

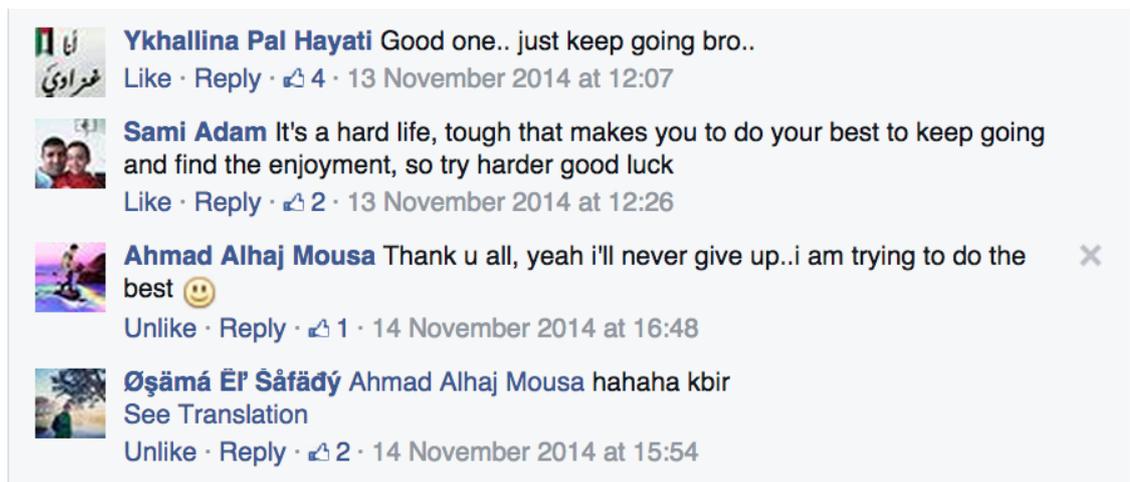


Figure 34: Responses from Humans of Al Rashidiya post 14<sup>th</sup> November 2014

In focusing on the collaborative aspect of networked documentary with production, likes, comments and shares being investigated, it is vitally important not to neglect users who are simply 'listening.' In 'Following you: Disciplines of Listening in Social Media' Helen Crawford proposes three types of listening: background listening, reciprocal listening and delegated listening (Crawford, 2009). She argues that,

*"Listening is not a common metaphor for online activity. In fact, online participation has tended to be conflated with contributing a 'voice'. 'Speaking up' has become the dominant metaphor for participation in online spaces such as blogs, wikis, news sites and discussion lists (Karaganis 2007; Bruns 2008). Little research has been done into other forms of participation, such as private email discussions or behind-the-scenes direct messaging in social media environments (Nonnecke and Preece 2001, 2), and even less to the act of simply witnessing the comments of others."- (Crawford, 2009, p 526)*

Furthermore, those who are on the fringes of a project and who do practice only light public activity may be of even more value to the project goals of raising awareness among new communities and with people of diverse opinions. The act of being and witnessing, gathering knowledge rather than contributing, is a vital area for study, and may have significant gender implications given the underrepresentation of women in commenting on *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2014).

In addition to these online interactions, we were able to speak with those who had been subjects in the photos to understand their perspectives on how they had been represented and their interactions with the audience. One elderly man who shared his story of the *nakba* was shown it live on Facebook by his grandson, who reported “he is very happy to tell his story and to promote the Palestinian cause.” However, some subjects faced problems as a result of their stories being published. A man who shared his story of unemployment and despair reported around 100 people talking to him afterwards, concerned that he was depressed. He asked our team to remove the photograph.

As well as audience engagement on Facebook, the project reached a wider audience through the press and exhibitions. *Humans of Rashidiya* (2014) exhibited at the exhibition *dis/placed* run by Counterpoints Arts in June 2015 in London, shown in Figures 355 and 36 overleaf. It was also reported on by journalists with articles published in blogs and in the *Lebanon Daily Star*, Lebanon’s English language newspaper. A full list can be found in Appendix A.



*Figures 35 and 36: An exhibition of Humans of Al Rashidiya at Dis/Placed, June 2015, Shoreditch Town Hall, London*

During project implementation, the page received several requests via messages and in comments for the page to expand to include other camps, for example, “why not collect (stories from) all the Palestinian refugee camps?” This reinforced findings gathered during the research phase pointing to a tension between individual narratives vis-à-vis community narratives, and the story of one community representing all Palestinians in Lebanon. Our response was to invite stories from other camps, but none were sent to the page for publication. This points to the theme that emerged during the communicative ecology phase of the problems inherent with one narrative being seen to speak for an entire community, in this case residents of Rashidieh speaking on behalf of Palestinians in Lebanon.

## Conclusion

*Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2014) is an example of the emerging understanding of ‘networked narrative’, providing possibilities for multiple audiences and multiple layers of engagement. These micro-narratives about individuals were able to reach wide international audiences in a process of conversation and dialogue. The images and captions tell stories of their immobility, perceived injustices that could find space under the broad Palestinian narrative yet away from the incursion of Israeli soldiers in the West Bank or war in Gaza.

The use of a familiar storytelling device, *Humans of New York*, the high quality of the photographs and captions, and the networked online environment, enabled the project to attract a wide, diverse and global audience in a way that methodologies such as photovoice are unable to attract.

However, I remained the driver of the project from conception to completion, despite developing a close working relationship with Mohammed. To return to the MIT Co-Creation Lab’s definition of co-creation, they describe projects emerging ‘out of process, and evol(ing) from within communities and with people, rather than being made for or about them’ (Cizek et al., 2019a). Against this measure, the process felt less like co-creation and more like a traditional outsider-led project. While the community were active in engaging with content online, there were few audience submissions from others within the camp, and without encouragement from me Mohammed and his collaborators were not sufficiently motivated to continue the project.

This led me to question the role that technical upskilling could play in processes of co-creation, and whether inviting collaborators into a more open format could engender a greater level of enthusiasm and long-term ownership. I go on to explore this in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX: COLLABORATIVE FILMMAKING

*“I want to make films because media are the new guns.” – training participant, Rashidieh*

### Introduction

The final practice project took learnings from *Captured* (2015) and *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (year) and also drew on the principles and methods of participatory video. There were three features of co-creation that I wanted to investigate that hitherto had remained unexplored, to; to deepen the technical skill transfer between me and participants which had been minimal in previous projects, to widen the scope of collaboration so that participants were involved in setting the format, the agenda, and the editorial scope of the project, and to run the project in an immersive, short, time intensive environment.

This chapter discusses the processes behind the production of the three resulting films, *A Big Failure* (2015), *Child Protection* (2018), *As Best They Can* (2015), and the outputs themselves as objects of study.

### Recruitment and training

To identify project participants, I partnered with two youth groups, Sawaed in Rashidieh camp, and Ful in al-Buss. Sawaed are a legally registered youth group established in Rashidieh camp in 2013 in order to promote learning and volunteerism among young people. They regularly host community events including providing assistance to new Palestinian Refugee from Syria (PRS) arrivals and events to clean up litter. I selected Sawaed as my research and practice partner due to their political neutrality, focus on bringing about social change within the camps and their dynamic leader who was able to bring enthusiasm and energy to the project. In al-Buss I worked with Ful, a smaller and newer youth activism group, comprised half of Palestinian refugees from Syria.

Through the project partners and word of mouth 20 young people from Rashidieh and al-Buss came to three training sessions I held in April 2015 in both camps. Of the 20 young people that participated in the training and production process, 14 were PRS. The sessions were advertised widely throughout the camps via the youth groups, and it was surprising to note that PRS were over-represented. Two young people, Khalil and Anas, were from Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus, which was at the time under siege and the subject of widespread media attention.

Ensuring the inclusion of women and girls as both filmmakers and subjects in control of the narrative they are telling poses a challenge when working in public spaces and with public organisations in a culture where women's participation is on the whole limited to the private domain (while recognising that these domestic activities are politicised and that a complete distinction is hard to draw (Sayigh and Peteet, 1986)). Only 5 of those who attended the filmmaking training were girls, and presence was not indicative of participation. In the training session conducted in al-Buss, 4 of the attendees out of 9 were girls and despite my attempts to direct questions at them and set up activities so they could work together they remained detached and were having private conversations throughout. When we were establishing production roles I ensured that a girl was able to take a role, she took the role of sound, but even so the most dominant voices in the group were male. These then drowned out the voices of women and the resulting teams that went on to produce the films were all male. As an experienced training facilitator keen to enable all participants to participate equally I struggled to do this in a mixed gender environment, which suggests that implementing activities in a single-gender environment may be more successful in the future. However, as an outsider implementing activities through the gatekeepers of two youth organisations which are by nature male dominated the challenge will be to seek out public gatekeepers that are in a network with women and girls.

Rather than spreading activities out over weekly workshops, as with *Captured*, I initially aimed to conduct the bulk of training and filming in one day. I hoped that this would ensure enthusiasm was maintained and would also show participants that they can produce content throughout a learning experience. I did not want to divorce the learning from the act of production itself.

In participatory photography and video production skills are taught through a process of reflection and the emphasis is on making the process as easy and accessible as possible. There is very little technical training beyond how to use the equipment itself, and the facilitator is as hands-off as possible in order to ensure an autonomous act of production that could be understood to rank highly on Arnstein's ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969). Taking a different approach, I wanted to set up the beginning half of the project as a training session covering specific technical skills such as how to frame a shot, the rule of thirds, best practice when interviewing and cutaways. Within photovoice if photos are produced and they are out of focus or framed poorly, this is seen to be a valued output because of the process that the participant went through to produce

them. In contrast to this I wanted to transfer technical skills quickly that would enable participants to create a product that had a high chance of engaging an audience used to high quality outputs. The training session was pedagogical, with knowledge transfer as the goal rather than the creation of a safe environment for reflection and discussion. Some of the training materials I developed are included with this submission as submission I.

This process was enabled because in 2015 the young people I was working with had access to smartphones with video making capabilities. We used my iPhone 6 and participants' own Android smartphones and iPhones. In the case of *Child Protection* (2018) the team had footage they had shot on their phones previously that we integrated into the edit. I provided additional equipment, selected due to its compatibility with participants own mobile phones or cameras, which was left with Sawaed in Rashidieh camp for participants to use for their own projects moving forwards. It consisted of a hard drive, rode clip on mics, lenses and mini tripods. Each of these were divided into three kits so that participants could come and take one away with them.

## The production process

In the most part, production sessions followed on directly from the training sessions Each of these sessions led to the production of one film; while one group of young people went on to produce two films. Three films were created through this process; *Child Protection* (2018), *As Best They Can* (2015), and *A Big Failure* (2015). In *Captured* and *Humans of Rashidiya* the storytelling device and editorial focus were fixed without input from the project collaborators. I approached this collaborative filmmaking process with the intention of keeping the editorial scope open, and facilitated a discussion in which each filmmaking team decided what to focus their film on.

In the case of *Child Protection* (2018), the group decided after only a short discussion that they wanted to focus on two issues that impacted children in al-Buss. One participant suggested,

*“Maybe we can make a film about both electricity and speed, under the name of Child Protection. We can start with the problems and what they did to fix them and then discuss the speeding problems and lack of speed bumps. We’ll talk about a story we accomplished and one we wish to accomplish which is road bumps. This is more powerful.”*

This was helped by the fact that they had already worked together as part of a youth group solving these problems. I then facilitated a discussion about who they could interview for this film and what shots they would like to include, which we wrote into a shot list. The dialogue below illustrates this process:

*Participant one: "We need someone saying this is a problem faced by children in Rashidieh and we need a shot of children playing or electricity."*

*Participant two: "We can start by showing the electricity pole or footage of someone on a motorcycle speeding in the camp . Should we decide the names of who to interview now?"*

*Participant three: "I think at the very beginning we need to say percentages, ,like in Al-Bus there are 10 thousand children as an introduction to the situation. We can decide later"*

*Participant one: "So the first video is a clip about children playing in the camp, a clip for someone riding the motorcycle in a high speed, or it could be a child riding the motorcycle"*

*Participant three: "What should we have after this?"*

*Participant two: "A clip of a roof where the electricity wires pass it , which is my house, everything that is related to electricity, like poles or wires"*

Each film was the product of a team in which I was a member, shaping discussions and bringing my technical expertise into the process, rather than the products in *Captured* being representative of one individual and the way they choose to present themselves to others. The films that were produced by PRS teams it could be argued, were also the way that they wanted to be portrayed not just as a team but as a community as a whole. In the film *As Best They Can*, the team wanted to describe their experiences in Lebanon in a way that emphasised the support the Palestinians had shown to them yet also criticised their situation and shone a light on the challenges they faced.

Relationships between Palestinians in Lebanon and PRS at this time were fraught. On the surface there was a solidarity borne from a shared identity, but individuals from both communities were fast to point out that their lived experiences had been very different.

Where Palestinians in Syria were able to naturalise, to have employment and live anywhere they wanted, Palestinians in Lebanon had none of these opportunities. There were tensions over sharing already scarce resources, and also over the fact that the suffering of Palestinians in Syria had eclipsed that of the Palestinians in Lebanon who have never been news-worthy. This film was therefore a careful curation of how they wanted PRS to be represented both internally and externally. The sea became the focal point for the film with the subject being filmed on the beach that encircles one edge of the camp. I had suggested several options for a shooting location and the group unanimously decided that the sea was the best, in direct contrast to the media depictions they see; “We always see Palestinian refugees from Syria in camps or in their homes – the sea will be a new idea.”



Figure 37: The final production team for *As Best They Can* (2015) author bottom centre.

Figure 38: The final production team for *Child Protection* (2018), al-Buss camp

I did not seek to remove myself from the process in the belief that a higher rung on the ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969) must be reached, rather I included myself in the process and guided it to completion. This meant accompanying them when filming, checking the composition before most shots, adjusting the framing where necessary and advising them on sound, lighting and where interviewees were positioned before the camera. While in each film the participants selected the contributors and interviewed them with no input from me, I ensured someone was making notes about each shot and interview, and produced the shoot to ensure we had enough B roll and that shots were consistent.

While I was an insider in the filmmaking process, I was nevertheless an outsider to the community. There were several points where I was acutely aware of this. In filming *A Big Failure* (2015) highlighting the failings in the infrastructure project we walked past a group of women animatedly saying how brilliant the infrastructure work was and what a difference it would make to their lives; the two people I was filming with were quick to point out that they said this for my benefit as they believed I was there monitoring the progress and they wanted to keep the aid and donor community on side. This demonstrates the concept of stories being told differently for different audiences.

The process of editing *Child Protection* (2018) illustrates the reality of creating a film in the context of a community. We edited the film over three afternoons and evenings. On the third evening Khalil, Hamze and Ahmed, three core members of the team and I were joined by Ahmed's girlfriend, and Hamze's brother, and Mouna came and went throughout. We had a table set up with the laptop and two chairs, and Ahmed and Kahlil and Hamze alternated at the table. Hamze's mother came in and out with drinks, shisha was smoked throughout, and everyone else sat around the edge of the room on the sofas. We waited for people to arrive for the first half an hour, and then spent half an hour watching the first edit; in this process we were able to discuss the importance of writing a script. We then spent an hour and a half going through the rushes, writing a script including voiceovers. After a half hour break we recorded the voiceover, but poor internet connectivity meant that we couldn't upload the voiceover, so the film remained unedited. One member of the group took responsibility for finishing the editing process, and kept the hard drive to do this, but was then unable to access a laptop with the video editing software we had begun the process on. A year and a half later I obtained the hard drive from a friend that was travelling and contacted one of the production team who was now studying in the UK. Over a week in 2018 we went through the film together, and I edited it using an edit script written by the team in Lebanon. The film was therefore

shot in April 2015, but not completed until May 2018. In the latter stage of the process I was the sole collaborator concerned with completion; to me the film represented part of a long-term research process, whereas for the other participants it was simply a few days of their life several years ago. In this three-year period two of the team members left Lebanon and had since made new lives in Europe, one studying filmmaking and communication.

As well as a lack of female representation behind the camera, women were reluctant to be filmed. The only two women to appear on film throughout all the films produced were doing so due to their status as mother; *Child Protection* (2018) features the mother of a son who died due to unsafe electricity, and *A Big Failure* (2015) features the mother of one of the filmmakers. This remains an important issue to address in subsequent work.

## An overview of the films

***A Big Failure* (2015), Rashidieh camp, Lebanon, 2 min 52 sec**



Figure 39: Behind the scenes of *A Big Failure* in production

The film (submission C) is borne from ongoing frustrations with the UNRWA led infrastructure project; a project that was launched in 2013 at the cost of \$4.5 million to upgrade the water supply network. It was funded through Germany's Federal Bank for Development (KfW). The film brings together the voices of four inhabitants of the camp with images of the elements of the infrastructure project they are talking about. In particular the film illustrates the challenges that the project has caused for disabled and elderly residents of the camp. Unlike *As Best They Can* (2015), *A Big Failure* (2015) represents a community perspective. Individual voices are subsumed within the wider narrative of failure and the concerns that others have about the work being undertaken.

Refugees are rarely portrayed within the context of their everyday survival, focusing instead on the moments of crisis, rupture and journey. Palestinians in Lebanon remain characterised by the crises they have faced, such as the Sabra and Shatila massacres, or the occasional violence in the camps that makes its way into mainstream Lebanese media. *A Big Failure* (2015) takes a completely different starting point. It doesn't begin with the *nakba* in 1948 or posit Israel as its adversary, but instead focuses on the daily oppression caused by sub-standard living conditions and perceived incompetence from the outside actors (UNRWA) who govern their existence. It points to the humility of remaining cut off from the outside world and being embroiled in a complex system of control involving the Lebanese government, international aid organisations, and Palestinian political parties. To an outside audience this tells a new story of daily monotony and survival, and one in which Palestinians themselves are narrating their challenges and advocating for their rights. These depictions are rare.

From a static, privileged position, a refugee's duty is assumed to be gratitude to those who assist. Films made by refugees therefore rarely directly criticise aid and development organisations, or governments who provide them a home. While 2018 has seen criticism of the sector with revelations about widespread sexual abuse, these criticisms are levelled by media outlets, advocacy organisations or concerned donors rather than the communities that these organisations assist. In choosing to focus on the infrastructure project, the film criticises UNRWA and by extension the aid and development infrastructure that maintains it, adding previously unheard voices to these conversations. It can therefore be understood as similar in form to the outputs of the Fogo Process, enabling horizontal learning and vertical communication to those with power (Snowden, 1983).

***Child Protection (2018), al-Buss camp, Lebanon, 3 min 56 sec***



*Figure 40: Screenshot from Child Protection (2018)*

*Child Protection (2018)* (submission D) was similarly focused on the challenges of living in the camp. The film is in a news report format with a voiceover, the preferred format of the group, and includes interviews with members of the community and focuses on two safety concerns for children; the electricity system, and vehicles and motorbikes speeding in the camp. The team wanted to focus on a problem that both showed how progress had been made yet identified the challenges that still needed addressing.

The group that created this film had already been working on the issue of child protection, as is evident in the film, and it therefore demonstrates activism and advocacy from the community itself; challenging depictions of refugees as victims. There is a sense of injustice flowing through the film, located in the tragedy of the loss of life of a young boy and the focus on children who are portrayed as vulnerable and the most worthy of protection. However, this shows young people within a community who are active agents and are not dependent on outside actors to bring about change.

This is another image of refugees rarely portrayed. When painted as talented achievers, this tends to be within the realm of individual talent or determination rather than advocates or activists for their own communities. When painted as victims, they are devoid of all agency. Here we see young people actively trying to change their communities to make day-to-day living safer for all.

***As Best They Can* (2015), Rashidieh camp, Lebanon, 3 min 16 sec**



*Figure 41: Screenshot from As Best They Can (2015)*

This film (submission B) is based on an interview with a single man from Yarmouk camp in Syria. He tells the story of his forced displacement juxtaposed with the stillness of the sea. The film was shot to ensure his anonymity in case of his eventual return to Syria. His words were scripted by him and the team that shot it, enabling a high level of control from the entire team. It is worth highlighting that this was a mixed team comprising of PRS and Palestinians from Lebanon, and the finished film should be seen as a collaborative process with messages woven in that are representative of both communities.

In their ethnographic research of two online modes of storytelling with young Congolese in the diaspora, Godin and Dona (2016) argue that mainstream constructions of refugee voices are problematic for three reasons. Firstly, personal accounts have a tendency to become de-politicised, with the personal and human side of the story eclipsing their political lives. Secondly, refugee voices can be homogenised as one voice with an individual experience slotting into pre-existing categories often represented through the idea of the journey – pre-flight, flight, and post-flight. Finally, this de-politicisation and individualisation of voices leaves little room for collective histories, thus excluding the collective dimension of the refugee experience and reducing the magnitude of the persecution.

This act of storytelling from Rashidieh camp in Lebanon tells a personal account within the political context of the Syrian crisis. It conforms to common categories represented in the media of the refugee experience – pre-flight, flight, and post-flight (Godin and Doná, 2016) – yet it also deconstructs this by shining light on an underexplored element of the refugee experience, that of integrating within other refugee communities. In the film the protagonist pays tribute to the Palestinians who welcomed him in Lebanon, yet in focusing on the journey the film recognises that the PRS experience varies dramatically from that of their hosts. While for Palestinians in Lebanon, the camp experience is the most dominant (and for many the only) framework for their status as refugees, for PRS the journey is a real and live ongoing experience.

Two of the films were published on the Sawaed You Tube channel, yet the lack of regular content on this channel and no sense of ownership from the wider Sawaed team resulted in a low amount of engagement. I see this as indicative of a dislocation between the content that these filmmaking sessions produced and the needs and priorities of Sawaed more broadly. A longer period of immersion with Sawaed team members would have enabled the project to have been designed in a more collaborative way that ensured that outputs were better tailored to their communications needs and concerns and the channels they already use.

## **Conclusion**

Smartphone access and the increasing video camera capability that they offer hold new possibilities for self-representation and online participation (Amalia Sabiescu, 2009; Godin and Doná, 2016). In the projects discussed in this chapter I brought new filmmaking equipment to the context to enhance the equipment they already had (their phones) and trained participants in how to use it, recognising that in collaboration we could make a higher quality end product than if I stepped back and simply facilitated a process. The technical training and guidance I provided throughout in both shooting and editing resulted in films of a much higher professional standard than the photographs produced in *Captured* (2015).

Also unique about this way of working was the collaboration in determining the style of each film and the editorial scope; I was part of the process through facilitating a discussion but I did not suggest topics. It felt like we were a team, me providing my communications expertise and the other participants sharing their ideas on the most important topics for their films to address, the impact they may have on audiences and

what they wanted audiences to hear. While in *Humans of Al Rashidiya* this relationship existed between Mohammed and me, as we both identified stories that we shouldn't share or that we should emphasise and the reasons behind this, this was a different process happening faster and with more participants.

Collectively, the three films that resulted from this process challenge dominant portrayals of Palestinian refugees in four key ways. They show young people as community advocates and active agents for change in their communities, rather than victims. Secondly, they focus on the camp experience rather than depicting the journey itself. In film *As Best They Can* (2015) there is a focus on the integration process and coming to terms with the situation, which can be contrasted with refugee depictions focusing on moments of crisis. The films also show the challenges faced by Palestinians in Lebanon that result from being embedded in complex power structures and subject to an inefficient aid infrastructure. These films show individual, politicised experiences, rather than portraying large groups of dehumanised refugees.

The lens of co-creation enables us to ask about shared ownership and concern regarding the finished product. In the case of these three films, and particularly *Child Protection* (2018), despite enthusiasm during the filming and initial editing stages, it became apparent that I was leading the drive to finish the films and the team dwindled the later down the process we went. In the case of *Child Protection* (2018) the fact that one of the team members didn't finish editing the film caused considerable delay to finalising it.

Crucially, these projects made me reflect on the relational investments that underpin collaboration. The majority of documentary filmmaking is conducted in a fast, in and out, manner, and even participatory media production processes tend to delegate the longer-term relationships to project partners on the ground. This means that it is possible to pre-determine a format and an objective, even if this objective is to create a space for participants to share their own stories without outsider input. It also generally ensures control over the editing process and the distribution of outputs. The ground-breaking collaborative media projects such as the Fogo Process or the Quipu Project are the result of a time intensive process, of embedding within a community and finding collaborators equally invested in the process. *Humans of Al Rashidiya* (2015) could only maintain momentum as long as Mohammed was interested, and was only successful due to the relationship that we had established outside of the project. Project initiation, delivery and follow up of outputs and distribution must be shared in order for the project to truly be co-created and to not revert to standard producer/participant roles.

# CHAPTER SEVEN: NEXT STEPS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

*Relinquishing control is a challenge to western filmmakers. People can't believe that by giving up control, there is something greater to be gained. (Elder, 1995, p. 96)*

## Introduction

This chapter introduces initial research findings from a project only partially completed and reflections on wider questions of technology, censorship and authorship raised by this research. Both of these remain important avenues for future enquiry by practitioners and academics alike.

## Initial findings from an interactive documentary

In the course of my PaR I embarked upon a third project, aiming to tie together two strands of my previous co-creative projects by creating an interactive documentary on Facebook consisting of a variety of short-form content. The initial insights from the methodology I developed, and lessons from the fact it was unable to be completed, suggest future avenues for PaR to be explored.

Following on from lessons learnt during the production of *As Best They Can* (2015), *A Big Failure* (2015), and *Child Protection* (2018), I wanted to design a project with a wider editorial structure that could fit smaller pieces of content within it, in the format of an interactive documentary hosted on social media. This format has been explored by Herrero and Garcia (2016) who point to the ways in which social networks open ways for promotion, contribution and personalisation of interactive documentary. This format was also designed to take into account the need for individual representations within a wider community narrative, and to provide space for multiple individuals to speak to prevent one narrative speaking on behalf of everyone.

Unlike previous projects, individuals were *invited* to participate based on enthusiasm and skill identified during participation in training sessions, collaborative production, and film screenings carried out previously through the course of my research. The final group who came to the first planning workshop, which took place over four hours in al-Buss

camp, included Palestinians who had been born in the camps, Palestinians from Syria, and a Lebanese citizen. There were four females present, and eight males.

To set the editorial focus of the project I employed a method to ensure that everyone present would be able to contribute their ideas and that the final topic would be chosen democratically. Participants were asked, “What stories do you want the project to tell?” and were divided into three groups with the task of creating three concepts. This can be seen in Figure 42.



*Figure 42: Participants generating concepts for the project, April 2015*

اسم المشروع	الاهتمام الخارجي west	الاهتمام الداخلي internal	على الادفاعة بمستوياتها	تدعيم السلوات	Some other جدير/مقدم 10	Total
<b>A</b>	9	9	8	9		
1- معاناة الفلسطينيين في لبنان	10	8	5	7	8	
2- عكس صورة الفلسطينيين من الرفض الى القبول (المرحلة)	9	10	10	7	9	
3- هجرة الفلسطينيين عبر الرعي مع الازدحام	10	10	5	10	8	
<b>B</b>						
1- ملك في لبنان (تدعيم وطفاة)		8	10	8	9	
2- الموت		10	10	7	10	
3- تحسين في الخدمات		7	7	9	10	
<b>C</b>						
1- الفلسطينيه وهويتيه		7	7	9	10	
2- طينيه		3	8	6	7	
3- ...			10	10	10	

Figure 43: Participants voting for the final concept, April 2015

The concepts they selected are detailed below:

**Group One: Jamal, Mohammed and Saleh**

1. Struggles faced by Palestinians in Lebanon

- the number of camps
- number of gatherings
- problems suffered in the camps
- checkpoints
- civil rights
- population growth
- criticisms of UNRWA
- construction methods

2. Welcome 'Ahlan wa Sahlan'

- life inside the house
- life inside the school
- life on the streets
- hospitality
- communication with the outside

3. Illegal emigration

- reasons - no work, psychological stress
- stories

**Group Two:** *Hamze, Ahmed, and Fawziya*

1. The Palestinian child and identity

- schools, home, family
- friends, relationships with neighbours and older people
- relationship and identify with Palestine

2. Palestinian women

- life in the community
- life in the family
- children
- culture

3. Our camps to where?

- the future
- how armed conflicts affect the camps
- domestic violence
- early marriage

**Group Three:** *Khalil, Anas, Hanan*

1. Yarmouk in Lebanon

- everyone considers Yarmouk the 'idea' the home of the Palestinians
- the emigration process, how people escaped and the difficulties they went through
- the reality of the services that people from Yarmouk are receiving
- a summary of the suffering of Palestinians in Lebanon

2. NGOs in the camps

- NGOs getting funding from 'suspect' places
- 'The people's perspective' – promising change but no impact
- the misuse of funds

3. Death Boats

- People who have left the camps in Lebanon to travel to Europe on dangerous boats across the Mediterranean Sea

After a discussion of the merits and criticisms of each story, one of the participants suggested a voting exercise and mapped out criteria on the board. Each member then voted, giving each idea a number from 1 -10. This process is shown in Figure 43. The process resulted in "Death Boats" being selected as the topic to move forwards with.

This concept focused on the perilous journeys that people from the camps in Lebanon were making across the Mediterranean Sea to come to Europe, those that they leave behind, and the dangers they submit themselves to at the hands of people traffickers. This was prior to the rise in European media covering the topic. There was a large amount of interest in the topic and commitment to engaging with it as these comments demonstrate;

*“It’s difficult for me to see what’s happened to my people. Half the people I knew have died in Syria and half have died in the sea on the way to Europe. I am unable to create a change because I am without the resources. I’ve searched for a lot of ways and now I’ve found this project and I can use my voice for change.”,*

*“This is a new experience for me and the subject is dangerous. Unfortunately in our community we don’t highlight important things unless disaster happens, and when it does we talk about the issue for two days and then forget about it.”,*

*“It’s important to do this documentary to keep it on the mind of the people and so they can remember the risk of such problems. Most of the people who are using this way to travel are immature. So if we provide this film in the hands of their parents then they can also prevent them from going in that way. Let’s solve the problem from the roots instead of crying when it happens.”*

*“I am interested to participate in this project because we need more education in the camps about the journey that people take, also to promote collaboration between the two youth groups involved and to have a shared goal.”*

Once the topic had been selected, the group discussed the types of content the project could feature. I was more involved at this stage, in suggesting the types of content I had seen in other similar projects or the types of production I perceived to be more feasible than others. We designed three content strands. Firstly, User Generated Content; these are films already available on Facebook or YouTube, uploaded by people who have carried out the journey. The production team gathered these and found out any related information that was unavailable. Secondly, Skype interviews with people who are on the journey or have arrived in Europe. Finally, films shot in the camp. The group had ideas of people to feature in the films, including families who have lost family members, the man responsible for arranging the journey in El Buss, and leaders of the community explaining why people need to migrate and the history of Palestinian migration since the *nakba*.

This four-hour design process created a topic and structure for a collaborative project in a way that included different communities from the camps in Lebanon. There were two

youth groups and two camps represented, and members of the PRS community alongside Palestinians in Lebanon, as well as a Lebanese participant. The process placed equal value on each of these perspectives and resulted in a framework for production designed by young people themselves. This in-depth planning process resulted in a shared understanding of the concept, collective decision-making about the editorial focus, and a tangible framework for delivery.

However the project ultimately failed to progress for three reasons. The time-intensive efforts of documentary production, especially at the editing stage, proves a high barrier for any aspiring documentarian. However, this barrier became insurmountable in the 'Death Boats' project with the added factors of participatory input in the editorial process, relative inexperience in editing and editorial decision-making, and a lack of leadership/ownership over this specific element of the creation process. My personal involvement and encouragement helped to surmount these issues, but other priorities soon became more pressing for the participants once I was not physically present.

The collaborative nature of the project also created several logistical issues in planning and executing the remainder of the project, given that the group of participants was male and female, living in both camps in Sour, and included some participants whose parents placed limitations on their movements outside their camp. This meant that physically meeting up was a challenge, and maintaining the social network among producers was not feasible given the restrictions on movement faced culturally and legally by the participants. This was an issue which the participant-creators were able to surmount in the initial planning phase, but it became more difficult without the presence of the researcher, as a focus of the collective attention was not present to draw the users together. While the project had multiple collaborators, it required one or two consistent individuals to drive the project and bring it together. None of the collaborators were able or willing to step into this role.

The final factor which disrupted the production was the expectations and aspirations of the participants in creating the work. The exposure of young people to films and documentaries with very high production values meant that they had a fairly high bar of expectation in mind for the documentary. This led them to take the project seriously and invest a significant amount of time at the beginning. However, as the experimental nature of the project began to take shape, the aesthetics of unfinished and unpolished inputs (such as user-generated content and found footage) undermined the idealised vision of a traditional documentary, which the users had exposure to through their video

consumption habits. While the users did not explicitly state that they were unhappy with the direction of the documentary from an aesthetic perspective, the emerging picture of an experimental product, likely with 'rough edges' played a role in the de-prioritisation of the process by the participants, alongside the other barriers and preventing factors.

Death Boats, although not completed, demonstrated a unique methodology for collaborative documentary in terms of process and structure. The process of ideation integrated the ambitions and concerns of the young people participating through enabling them to generate ideas, rank the ideas of others' and arrive at a consensus. This was all achieved in a collaborative way, with me contributing ideas about the format and types of content, and the Palestinian participants sharing their ideas about people to film and the types of films they wanted to include. It felt more in line with Cizek et. al's definition of co-creation as emerging out of process and evolving from within communities and with people (Cizek. et al ,2019). Furthermore the structure, an interactive documentary embedded in a social network (Herrero and García, 2016), combined the possibilities of networked narrative with video production training that was tailored to existing technology.

There is further potential here to be explored building upon these initial insights, guiding understandings of co-creation and the promotion of voices from the margins of society as a narrative act of self-representation (Butler, 2005), remembrance (Arendt, 2013) and participation (Arnstein, 1969).

## **Censorship and control in social media**

This thesis is based on the position that spaces for voice are inherently spaces of power (Couldry, 2010). Any attempt to understand the wider spaces and contexts in which voice is used must therefore interrogate the social platforms themselves as the mechanisms for narrative dissemination. While this wasn't a focus of this thesis, the research identified key themes which warrant further research. A co-creative approach also suggests that we interrogate the technology itself as a co-creator.

A growing body of work exists pointing to the power imbalances borne of the neoliberalism that social networks operate from, serving to perpetuate old colonialist structures (Aouragh and Chakravartty, 2016; Tufekci, 2017). While social media have been heralded as a new era for democratic storytelling, it is important to recognise that

the continued dominance of the same capitalist agendas has ensured that the identities, practices and representations that circulate in the old media system have not been lost, and in fact still structure the new media system (Carpentier, 2007).

For Palestinians, embroiled in a complex geopolitical conflict in which they remain occupied, colonised and dispossessed, this is particularly acute. Whether by software or the actions of individuals, social media tend to fall on the side of the powerful. Describing Facebook's censorship of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, Zeynep Tufekci argues that "in almost any country with deep internal conflict, the types of people who are most likely to be employed by Facebook are often from one side of the conflict – the side with more power and privileges." (Tufekci, 2017, p. 151)

This privileging of one side of the conflict over the other can also be seen in the Palestinian case. In October 2017, *The Verge* and others reported that a Palestinian man was arrested by Israeli police when his Facebook post saying "good morning" was translated as "attack them" in Hebrew and "hurt them" in English (Ong, 2017). Though not the result of a decision made by an individual but due to Facebook's AI powered translation service not being programmed for Palestinian-accented Arabic, this occurrence demonstrates that all content shared online is at the mercy of dynamics of centralisation, inclusion and exclusion. A 21-year-old prolific Facebook user in Rashidieh camp identified this lack of neutrality as a factor that commonly interfered in his online activity:

*"Sometimes Facebook closes our pages because people report us but we don't know why... I made a page for Hassan Nasrallah, I was just adding photos of him because I like him, but Facebook closed it because they think he is a terrorist. Facebook can be racist. People must respect others' opinions, and as long as the owner of Facebook is American they will not understand our interests or our religion." – FGD2, Male*

In addition to direct censorship, Facebook's location within a legacy of postcolonial state-control, crisis of capitalism and dictates of empire (Aouragh and Chakravartty, 2016) can also be understood in the context of voice and listening. As discussed in Chapter Two, the value of voice and self-expression is limited if it is not met with opportunities for listening (Couldry, 2010; Dreher, 2012, 2009; Macnamara, 2013) Attention to listening includes patterns of attention and value, and the structures and institutions which shape what is and isn't heard. Fatima, an avid Facebook user in her forties in al-Buss camp, feels this injustice acutely; *"I share on Facebook every day and people like my page but no one listens to me"*.

The power dynamics of this architecture are such that questions must be raised about whether Facebook can be a platform for minorities and those who have traditionally had fewer opportunities to speak and be heard. Tufekci (2017) argues that the structuring of the new media system can result in an environment for minorities which is *less* inclusive and participatory than when public debate and representation was more evenly spread between different mediums and publishers. Through a system she terms 'gatekeeping', those who already have power and are easily understood are privileged over those whose stories have existed on the margins. While gatekeeping used to be broad, now the digital communications gatekeeping ecosystem is reduced to a very few powerful chokepoints who dominate in visible and invisible ways from the availability of languages and fonts, to translation and direct acts of censorship (Tufekci, 2017). The networked public sphere has largely shifted to commercial spaces, where conversations are dictated by commercial priorities through the rendering of opinions and narratives as unreliable (through censorship) or irrelevant (through algorithms).

In the focus groups and interviews that I conducted, concerns were raised about the neutrality of the online space in which they are operating. These included reflections were about external agents (Israel, Saudi Arabia, 'terrorists') and the problematic role of the technology providers themselves in censoring or controlling their interactions.

Participants in both male and female focus groups referenced the challenges that social media posed for girls and women. In focus groups with community outreach workers with *Interpal*, a British aid organisation, from five camps across Lebanon, respondents commented that, "If a girl posts a picture some people might steal it" and "Because her photo is on Facebook, some people do things with it." They also noted that it was common for girls and women to use fake names online for this reason. In a focus group in Sour outside the camps, a girl in her twenties commented, "I think the most problem for women is if a woman posts a picture, because boys or men may steal it and do something bad with it, and because of the traditions and customs, it would cause a problem for her." In the male only focus group, a respondent went one step further, "Guys don't use it (Facebook) to surf or talk. They either look for girls, pictures of girls, or they use it for political attack and psychological war. So it's an open war site instead of social interaction site. Instead of Facebook, it should be called Open War."

While focus group respondents referenced other Palestinians as those causing them problems online, Abo Abdullah a representative of the PLO in Rashidieh camp pointed

to outside malevolent actors as a cause for concern. He articulated suspicion of governments such as Saudi Arabia, terrorists, and individuals,

*“Therefore it's really important to know who goes into the website and hacks it because someone who is in Saudi Arabia can be hacking your website and there is no accountability for that... it is essential to know who monitors the website to be able to tell if the person intends to use it for good or for bad, because you can make a lot of websites from abroad to make conflicts between people... Some people use it to defame other people and that's unfortunate. People who are infidels around the world and who use the internet for terrorist purposes.” - Interview*

Abo Abdullah was the only interviewee to engage directly with the concept of media literacy and the importance of people thinking critically about what they see online,

*“God has put [a] brain in every human being's head. We should be able to be computer-literate, as people in schools might stop using pens and papers and replace that with technology and with the computers. It is very essential to rely on education because there's a lot of people who use the internet and Facebook for bad purposes – this exists everywhere, not just the camp.” - Interview*

One participant put the blame for these problems entirely on Palestinians, saying “The problem isn't Facebook. The problem is that Palestinians don't know how to use it.” This attribution of blame, devoid of any recognition of the role of Facebook itself and the commercial and imperialist interests it represents shows how deeply those interviewed are embedded within a system in which they have no agency.

Despite the important role that Facebook plays for refugee and diaspora communities in sharing memories and negotiating identity, the corporation's control over its content undermines the emancipatory potential of this online space. In publishing stories directly to Facebook, refugees are bypassing those who have traditionally been the owners or mediators of their stories in the form of journalists, aid workers, or others crafting the frameworks for storytelling projects in which refugees participate. Yet in doing so they are not exercising this agency in a neutral space free from influence and outside control. The mediators of the stories are no longer individual storytellers, but the policies and algorithms of social networks that dictate the way in which the story is expressed and communicated. These moments of self-expression are therefore both owned and shaped by the platforms on which they exist. Real tensions therefore exist between the possibilities that such social media platforms offer for activism, connection and self-expression leading to political change, on the one hand, and on the other, the realities

of censorship, failed uprisings and the limitation of 'audience' by algorithms (Tufekci, 2017).

As control of the platforms we use for online conversation continues to be clustered into a smaller number of corporations the importance of studying the dynamics that occur as a result increases. These questions are particularly salient in the contexts of displaced communities around the world as agents that both challenge the existence of the nation state (Turton, 2003) yet are simultaneously economically and legally disempowered by it.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have analysed collaborative storytelling methods through the lens of co-creation. In doing so I have argued for an understanding of the ways in which people work together to create narratives that recognise all actors in the production process, from those with professional storytelling expertise to those formerly known as subjects now participating in production, and the online audiences that co-create through the liking, commenting and re-circulation of content.

*Captured* (2013) reveals the limits of photovoice methodology in facilitating high-quality audio-visual products that can reach wide audiences. It also invites questions around its suitability as a universal methodology applied around the world without adaptations to local access to technology or the communicative ecology as a whole. The project also questions the value of a product/process dichotomy and of locating an initiative on the ladder of participation from manipulation to citizen control (Arnstein, 1969). *Humans of al Rashidiya* (2014) demonstrates that a collaborative endeavour existing within an already familiar format can serve to frame individual stories and reach new audiences, and highlights the potential of networked narrative (Page et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2017) as the re-circulating and sharing of online content through a network. This adds a new layer to the vertical and horizontal communication developed through the Fogo Process (Snowden, 1983).

Production of the films *As Best They Can* (2015), *A Big Failure* (2015), and *Child Protection* (2018) was located within a methodology that privileged participants' editorial control while actively training and upskilling participants in filmmaking techniques. This editorial control and enhanced capacity facilitated vertical and horizontal communication, reaching those in authority and within the subject community (Snowden, 1983). All three projects offer alternatives to a single-author vision, and evolve from within communities in different ways, pointing to the importance of embedded, long-term, relationally focused collaboration.

The practice as research of this thesis has shown that when refugees have the opportunities to represent themselves, the resultant acts of storytelling are different from dominant modes of representation, affirming the work of recent media scholarship (Burgess, 2006; Gallo, 2016; Mannik, 2012).. Across all of the projects, the individual stories produced have covered a vast expanse of personal experience from recollections

of trauma to educational aspirations; from the monotony and struggle of enforced unemployment to the celebration of marriage. The creative outputs developed as a result of co-creation represent individual narratives, in the case of *Captured* (2013), or collective narratives in the case of *As Best They Can* (2015), *A Big Failure* (2015), and *Child Protection* (2018). The stories they tell are of moments of normality rather than crisis, the day-to-day process of survival while living apart from a homeland, and the small moments that comprise each day against a backdrop of legal and economic disempowerment. This act of voice can be understood as a narrative act of self-representation (Butler, 2005), remembrance (Arendt, 2013) and participation (Arnstein, 1969)

The research has also identified the ways in which young people in Rashidieh and al-Buss narrate their lives through social media and smartphones, building on research into the first decade of the internet in the camps (Aouragh, 2011). These new technologies offer new opportunities for a population that remains physically enclosed. Virtual territories are enabling new relationships, networks, and the creation of networked narratives, where individual acts of storytelling exist as part of a community of collaborators.

I argue that any act of co-creation must be located in an understanding of the community's use of technology and how its members are narrating their lives. Applying a prescriptive method of storytelling contradicts an understanding of co-creation as emerging within communities and with people, rather than being made for or about them.

Finally, in taking a holistic view of co-creation, I advocate for the critical examination of the commercially-driven and majority-led spaces offered by social media. This posture extends beyond self-evident biases to the very architecture of how these communications platforms are structured, and how they shape the ways in which content is viewed and engaged with through algorithms and moderation (Tufekci, 2017).

As collaborative means of storytelling develop through heightened social media use in contexts on the margins of society, and developments in technology such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, a co-creative approach enables us to both investigate the multiple relationships involved in media production and to simultaneously ensure that diverse voices can be met by listening.

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## APPENDIX A: PRESS AND EXHIBITIONS

### Press

Shaheen, K. 'Palestinian's Stories Brought to Light', *The Daily Star*, October 11<sup>th</sup> 2014  
<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Oct-11/273702-palestinians-stories-brought-to-light.ashx> [accessed 13.06.18]

Ayoub, J, 'Lebanon's Palestinian Refugees Step into the Limelight With 'Humans of Al Rashidiya'', October 8<sup>th</sup> 2014  
<https://globalvoices.org/2014/10/08/lebanons-palestinian-refugees-step-into-the-limelight-with-humans-of-al-rashidiya/> [accessed 13.06.18]

### Exhibitions

'Humans of Al Rashidiya' at *dis/placed*, Shoreditch Town Hall, London, June 2015  
(Counterpoints Arts)