Voice, autonomy and utopian desire in participatory film-making with young refugees

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Abstract

This article is a reflection on what reflexive documentary scholars call the 'moral dimension' (Nash, 2012: 318) of a participatory film-making project with refugee young people who wanted to make a film to support other new young arrivals in the process of making home in Scotland. In the first part, we highlight some of the challenges of collaborating with refugee young people, in light of the often dehumanizing representations of refugees in mainstream media and the danger of the triple conflation of authenticity–voice–pain in academic narratives about refugees. In the second part, we show how honouring young people's desire to convey the hopeful aspects of making home emerged as a key pedagogical strategy to affirm their expert position and encourage their participation in the project. Revisiting key moments of learning and interaction, we demonstrate how young people's process of 'finding a voice' in moment-by-moment film-making practice was not a linear, developmental process towards 'pure' individual empowerment and singular artistic expression. Their participation in shaping their visual (self-)representation in the final film was embedded in the dialogical process and pragmatic requirements of a collaborative film production, in which voice, autonomy and teacher authority were negotiated on a moment-by-moment basis. We conclude that it is vital for a reflexive practice and research not to gloss over the moral dilemmas in the name of progressive ideals, for example, when representations are co-created by project film-makers/educators, but to embrace these deliberations as part of the 'fascinating collaborative matrix' (Chambers, 2019: 29) of participatory film-making.

Keywords: situational ethics; participatory film-making; refugee narratives; voice; utopian desire

Project background

Scotland, Our New Home (SONH) was a Creative Scotland-funded participatory film-making project for young people, most of whom had arrived in Scotland as an 'unaccompanied minor' (Education Scotland, 2015). This legal term means that young people have often reached the UK (and, in this case, are now living in Glasgow), unaccompanied by adults, are under the care of the local city council, and are (or were) involved in the complicated and lengthy process of applying for refugee status in the UK. The young people were part of the New Young Peers Scotland (NYPS) group, founded by their ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher and social worker, with the aim of training young people to become peer mentors for other new young arrivals in Glasgow. We got to know the NYPS founders in 2014, when working for a three-year research project that explored the role of arts-based pedagogies in

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multilingual education contexts (Frimberger *et al*., 2018; Frimberger, 2016). The ESOL programme, which many of the peer mentors had attended (or still were attending), had been innovated by the college's ESOL teachers as a holistic educational response to the learning, social and psychological needs of newly arrived, unaccompanied, young people between 16 and 21 years old. Our film project arose out of a later, voluntary collaboration between film-maker Simon Bishopp and some of the young people from NYPS in 2017 for an animation project that gave our film project Scotland, Our New Home its name (you can watch the animation here: https://youtu.be/tD--1v607Hs). The peer mentors wanted to create a resource to communicate the hopes and challenges that life in Scotland entails for an unaccompanied young person and crafted a voice-over script, which Simon translated into hand-drawn, animated imagery (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Figure 1: An image from *Scotland, Our New Home: The animation* (Simon Bishopp and the New Young Peers Scotland, 2017)

The young people took the animation to the Glasgow Southside Film Festival, and it has since been shown – by the peer mentors themselves, their social workers, teachers and ourselves – at a number of youth, social work and education conferences in the UK, Sicily and Greece. Our funding application for the SONH film project was motivated by the young people's ambition to now make a film in their role as peer mentors, explicitly for other newly arrived young people, and with the aim of supporting them in the process of making a home in Scotland.

In this article, we will look at the situated social practices and 'moral deliberations' (Nash, 2012: 321) that made up the 'moral dimension' (Nash, 2012: 318) of our film project. Our overall reason for exploring this interplay between our project ideals and the particulars of our project context is, as Chambers (2019: 45) formulates it, 'to ask difficult questions about the fundamental goals and pedagogical philosophy' that underpinned SONH. A project's wider moral principles, explicitly stated or implicitly assumed, always rub against the complex social reality of a production process, taking shape in the minutiae of everyday social encounters, relationship building, and
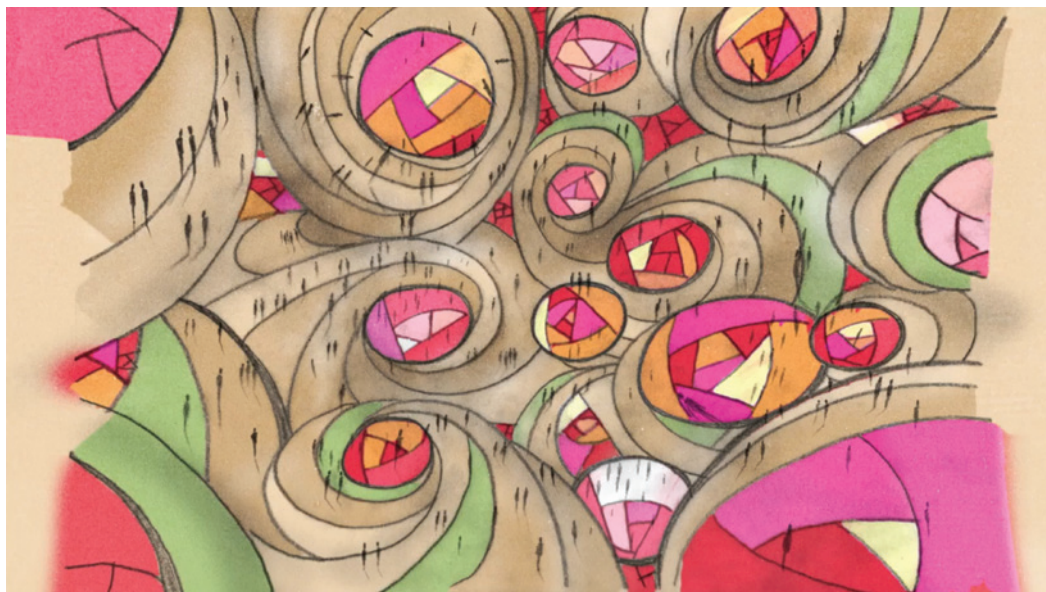
Figure 2: The final image from *Scotland, Our New Home: The animation* (Simon Bishopp and the New Young Peers Scotland, 2017)

moments of negotiating aesthetic, social and ethical decisions (Thomas, 2017; Nash, 2011, 2012; Ruby, 2005). Aiming for a reflexive research practice, we want to make transparent the epistemological assumptions and various discursive moments that underpinned and shaped our 'messy', practical project ethics.

The names used in this article are not participants' real names. Some shots from the project's (training) films have been turned into drawings by co-author Simon Bishopp to protect the identities of young people. The drawings are true to their original compositions.

Collaborating with refugees

As Scotland, Our New Home was a participatory film-making project with refugee young people, a reflexive approach seems particularly pertinent. The international participatory media project Children in Communication about Migration (Buckingham and De Block, 2007: 43) reminds us that visual representations of children's migratory experiences have to be carefully embedded in practice-based reflections on a project's power relations between film educators–researchers and participants. Critical questions about the ethics of representing and collaborating with refugees in film projects are also raised by Blomfield and Lenette (2019), who point towards the depersonalizing tropes and objectifying tendencies that haunt the tradition of representing 'the universal refugee story' in observational, ethnographic film-making. This depersonalizing tendency of visual representation is mirrored in the public communication spaces of news and social media (Bleiker *et al.*, 2013; Bleiker, 2018). The inability of media imagery to enable genuine relationships of caring and responsibility can hold the non-refugee viewer at a familiar distance to 'the refugee' as a complex individual (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017; Chouliaraki, 2013; Silverstone, 2002). Media's familiar visual archetypes of the refugee-as-victim and the refugee-as-threat both have the capacity to 'do the symbolic work of dehumanisation' (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017: 3). Both figures inscribe an easily consumable and symbolically familiar 'refugee

identity' as the ontologically given of this (still) other, in ways that can flow comfortably within the neat moral order of our everyday lives. In other words, even our own good intentions and charitable action (helping, donating, protesting) on behalf of the *other* might not necessarily guarantee a strengthening of their own individual political agency and citizenship action in return (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017). In their discussion of media's ethical responsibility, Chouliaraki and Stolic (ibid.: 5) argue that media's sole ethical focus on the (non-refugee) viewers' active citizenship can obscure a focus on refugees' rights to shape their own self-representations and 'articulate their own life histories, trajectories and aspirations as irreducibly human endeavours'. Donald (2019: 54–5) highlights that a right to self-representation also includes participants' refusal to partake in the sharing of personal narratives in film. Refusal can act as a way to assert political agency and resist educators' and/or researchers' own unquestioned desire and epistemological need for a 'tellable' (and often pain-based) refugee narrative about structural disadvantage in the name of social change.

The creation of a symbolically familiar 'subalternity as an identity' (Morris, 2010: 8) in academic research, stands in what Tuck and Yang (2014: 227) describe as a social science tradition of voyeuristic, 'damage-centred academic research'. They caution that 'pain-based inquiry projects' (ibid.), in the name of social change, can presuppose the conflation of an 'authentic voice' with refugees' narratives of pain. Such concepts of 'authenticity', hooks (1990, quoted in Tuck and Yang, 2014: 228) argues, can run the danger of relegating refugees' voices for ever to the margins 'as a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing', silencing voices of resistance and denying positive self-representation. Tuck and Yang (2014: 644; see also Tuck, 2009, 2010) urge researchers to consider instead a desire-based framework – one that acknowledges the complexity of human desire and striving, and includes not only 'the painful elements of social and psychic realities, but also the textured acumen and hope'.

Making home and utopian desire

Our project participants' striving to emphasize the social and psychic reality of hope over narratives of pain was certainly true for SONH. Based on their role as peer mentors for other new arrivals, and their own experience of making a home in the city, they wanted to make a film that gave advice to other newly arrived young people about how to navigate their new life. During our first brainstorming sessions, participants drew up a list of various practical things that new arrivals needed to know: the importance of knowing your legal rights as an asylum seeker and refugee; getting into education and finding the right organizations to join (a sports centre, a football club, a band) in order to make friends and build a community; learning how to cook and source food from your country; finding the right clothes to withstand the Glasgow weather; figuring out how to get around the city and how the public transport system works; learning how to budget money and organize your time. Our conversations soon went beyond these practical aspects towards the benefits of emotionally and psychologically sustaining activities, which had no seeming utilitarian purpose, but that simply 'make you happy: listening to music; sitting in the park: going for a walk; going to the river in the summer or using the swings in the park' (from participants' notes). The most important message that participants wanted to communicate to new arrivals was 'that they were not alone but that there are other young people like them in Scotland and that a new life was possible' (ibid.).

The young people's emphasis on the relational and affective nature of making a home has, of course, particular significance to the situation of unaccompanied

new arrivals, when at-home-ness and everyday normality have been lost. *Home*, as peace-building scholars Lederach and Lederach (2010: 63) write, serves here as a 'relational metaphor of feeling surrounded by love, a sense of well-being, shelter and unconditional acceptance. Violence destroys this feeling and the capacity to be oneself without mistrust or pretension; it destroys a sense of at-homeness.' Our project participants clearly did not want to speak, or make a film, from the margins, but rightly positioned themselves as 'experts by experience' (Donald, 2019: 54) in the art of making a home, right from the start of the project. They displayed what political theorists Goodwin and Taylor (1982: 26) describe as a practical utopian desire to give 'immediate hope for improvement and thereby discourage fatalism' in new arrivals. The challenge for the project was then how to honour young people's 'utopian desire' within the practicalities of our project process.

Reflexive documentarians (Blomfield and Lenette, 2019; Thomas, 2012, 2017; Hughes, 2019; Aufderheide *et al.*, 2009) rightly draw our attention to the importance of thinking and acting situationally. Practical aesthetic and ethical strategies have to be negotiated with participants that reduce the film-maker–researcher–participant power imbalances and can respond flexibly to young people's 'utopian desire'. As we will demonstrate in the next section, reviewing our aesthetic experimentations in the context of young people's expressed need to make a film that considered the hopeful elements of making a home in Glasgow emerged as a key pedagogical strategy in affirming their expert position and encouraging participation in their self-representation.

Making a film for new arrivals: Experiment, failure, hope

Towards the midpoint of the project, we experimented with the technique of speaking directly to camera (the direct audience address) as a way of aesthetically translating young people's aim to mentor new arrivals through their films. The Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art had kindly provided us with their learning studio for our session. We explored and appropriated the camera technique of the breaking of the fourth wall, as realized in films such as *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (John Hughes, 1986) and *Whatever Works* (Woody Allen, 2009). We deconstructed how characters establish contact and intimacy with their off-screen audience through the direct audience address, in order to comment on the story they are in, give an insight into their feelings and motivations, or to deconstruct, and even ridicule, the storytelling dynamic of the respective narrative situation. Participants decided to experiment with speaking directly to camera in order to establish immediate contact and create intimacy with their off-screen audience, not as a stand-alone aesthetic device of postmodern self-referentiality (Stegemann, 2015: 131). Trying out their ideas, we filmed participants' practical advice to other young people as everyday (recreated) scenarios: friends playing football together; the first, scary day of going to college; meeting new people at a regular social gathering at the Scottish Refugee Council; the process of establishing trust with a social worker or legal guardian. (An unaccompanied child or young person up to the age of 18 has the right, under the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015, to a legal guardian who 'acts as a point of contact and continuity as they process through the asylum and immigration system' (Scottish Parliament, 2015).) We first filmed the scenes in a wide and medium shot, and then focused on one young person speaking directly to camera. They commented on what they were doing (playing football, chatting

to people, making friends) and encouraged the off-screen audience (other new arrivals) to join the activities. Based on their own experience of arriving in Scotland, participants addressed concerns that might stop young people from reaching out in this way, assuring them with sentences such as 'you don't have to worry, people are really nice here' and 'everybody is learning English together' – spoken directly into the camera lens.

Reviewing the footage with the group, we realized that the technique of breaking the fourth wall did not work. Stopping the scenarios and speaking encouragements directly to camera was a clunky transition, pushing potential viewers (new arrivals) awkwardly from the observer to the participant mode. Project participants themselves discussed that they felt uncomfortable speaking their reflections and advice directly to camera out of an artificial mentoring situation from which they could not fully anticipate their audience's specific needs. Additionally, the direct audience address as an aesthetic translation of a mentoring situation felt patronizing. Claudia, one of the project participants, got to the heart of it. After watching the footage, she explained why the direct audience address as an aesthetic technique did not translate young people's desire to give hope to other new arrivals. She said that 'it was impossible to give the same advice to everybody. Every young person arriving in Scotland was different' (Claudia). Claudia reminded us that young people came with their own history and experiences, aspirations and individual needs that could not be fully anticipated before meeting them. Our experiment with the direct address felt awkward because it aesthetically presumed that newly arrived young people were not just a 'mixed category of people sharing a certain legal status' but an 'essentialized anthropological "tribe"' who all shared 'a common condition or nature' (Malkki, 1995: 511). Trying to communicate the 'possibilities for a good life' in this universalized way, beyond important practical advice on access to legal advice, housing, education and health services, was impossible. It assumed that all young people's 'social and psychic realities' (Tuck and Yang, 2014: 644) were the same because they happened to be asylum seekers and/or refugees. Claudia's review of our aesthetic experimentations in the context of young people's aim to give hope to new arrivals forced us to rethink the direction for the film project, on the basis of the fact that all new arrivals were uniquely different people with *various* hopes for their lives. We had to keep in mind that, although they are all legally refugees or asylum seekers, newly arrived young people differ enormously in almost every other aspect of their lives: their 'socioeconomic status, personal histories and psychological and spiritual situations' (Malkki, 1995: 496), as well as in their cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds, personal interests and, of course, personalities. The hopes they hold for their lives are subsequently richly varied and not static either. The direct audience address aesthetically presumed a universal refugee identity as the ontological given of our participants and potential viewers. The failure of our experiment with the direct audience address moved our project towards a more subtle aesthetic approach. Reflecting on Claudia's insight with the group, we decided to create short documentary vignettes about individuals who share everyday stories of how they personally made, and are still in the process of making, a home in Scotland. (You can watch the documentary vignettes here: https:// youtu.be/2_oHnoSULfE.) Taking the time to work through young people's ideas and our 'failed experiments' was an important aspect of acknowledging their right and agency to refuse some, as well as own other, aesthetic directions of the project. In the next section, we focus in more detail on how Sam, one of our project participants, participated in shaping his self-representation in the documentary vignette.

Sam – Finding a voice

Working in small production teams, and even meeting young people individually for the making of the final film, allowed us to flexibly schedule our meetings around their legal, social work appointments, college and university duties. Some young people had only recently arrived and were still in the process of finding their way around Glasgow. We always first met at a familiar point in the city, such as the Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA), or the Mitchell Library, where some of our training sessions had previously taken place. These central landmarks were easy to find and accessible for everybody by public transport, as participants lived in various housing arrangements all across the city. Sam volunteered to be filmed for one of the vignettes. He had only recently been to the cinema for the first time, had started to join the film nights at his children's care unit, and was newly enthused about movies. When we met him to plan his vignette, he unexpectedly arrived with a trombone that had been given to him by the youth street band he had recently joined. From early on in the project, Sam had emphasized the importance of music and community in his life. He enjoyed stopping and listening to buskers on the streets of Glasgow, and he was delighted when his fellow peer mentor Claudia invited him to join SambaYaBamba – a large-scale 'drumming bateria and brass section rooted in the musical traditions of the Brazilian carnival' (https://sambayabamba.com/about). At Sam's request, Simon filmed him proudly holding his trombone on the steps of the Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art in the heart of Glasgow.

Again unexpectedly, Sam invited Simon the same afternoon to film him during the band's street performance in the city. After lunch, they ventured out to find the band's agreed meeting point, which was initially difficult to locate, as Sam was unsure if he had remembered the street name correctly. When finally uniting with the elf- and angel-costumed samba band, the filming had to be improvised and hand-held, as Simon struggled to keep ahead of Sam playing his trombone, while parading up and down Glasgow's main city centre shopping streets with his fellow musicians (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: The SambaYaBamba youth street band, from *Scotland, Our New Home*: *The documentary* (Simon Bishopp and the New Young Peers Scotland, 2019)

We agreed to meet him again another day at the public library to plan his voice-over. After an hour of waiting, we received a phone call and picked Sam up across the city, where he had got lost looking for the library. The vastness of the city, getting lost and the slow gaining of confidence in navigating your way around Glasgow became another key theme for Sam's vignette. Whenever possible, we booked a study room at the public library to record the young people's individual voice-overs. It was crucial to have a quiet space, not only to ensure the best sound quality, but also to be able to listen carefully to what young people wanted to communicate to other new arrivals and, ultimately, also about themselves. With the aim of encouraging participants' agency in the film-making process, we framed our conversations within their expertise as peer mentors making a film to support other new arrivals, and did not position young people as 'documentary subjects' per se. The film was aimed at a very specific audience of unaccompanied young people, and participants, rather than us, were best equipped to anticipate the 'social and psychic realities' (Tuck and Yang, 2014: 644) of their audience. We often started by asking 'What do you think young people should know when they first arrive in Glasgow?', allowing the time and space for participants to formulate their thoughts on the subject. The question itself was, of course, not entirely new. It was a continuation of conversations we had had from early on in the project, which had led to the various aesthetic experiments (such as the direct audience address experiments discussed above) that, in turn, had brought us here, to the making of the documentary vignettes.

Speaking to Sam, it was impossible to miss what he considered a key point in the art of making a home. He 'lit up' and spoke passionately about his experience of making music as part of the youth street band. The joy of communal music-making and meeting people who were 'kind and friendly and made him feel safe' (from his voice-over) had been a significant aspect of his own journey of feeling at home in Glasgow over the last year. He wanted other young people to know the positive, relaxing effect that music could have on their lives. He wanted to convey the sense of connection that can come from making something together with other people in a group, especially

Figure 4: The bustling city crowd, from *Scotland, Our New Home: The documentary* (Simon Bishopp and the New Young Peers Scotland, 2019)

when you have left your country and are unsure about what the future will bring. As he had significantly benefited from the generous invitation of an older peer mentor who had taken him along to the band, Sam was determined to introduce other young people to the same positive experience. Additionally, he wanted to communicate that it was completely normal to feel disoriented in the big city, where all buildings at first look the same, the bus timetables are difficult to decipher, and you initially hope that maybe every bus just runs past your house (see Figure 4).

Sam enjoyed walking through the city to familiarize himself with his surroundings, even if he sometimes got lost. He wanted to encourage new arrivals that it was normal to feel shy about asking for help and direction because you think your English is not good enough. He wanted to get across that it is only a question of time and practice until you make friends who can show you around, until you can read the map app on your phone, and feel more confident about navigating public transport (see Figure 5) and even asking strangers for help. In Sam's case (and all others), it took an hour, and sometimes longer, until participants felt they had expressed what they wanted to say in a satisfactory way.

Figure 5: Navigating public transport, from *Scotland, Our New Home: The documentary* (Simon Bishopp and the New Young Peers Scotland, 2019)

As can be gathered from our descriptions, the process of 'finding their voice' in the voice-over session was a discursive, social process. It required attention not only to *what* participants were saying but also to *how* they were affectively communicating 'the textured acumen and hope' (Tuck and Yang, 2014: 644) of making a home in Glasgow. Sam's key message about the making of community through music is as much a response to the needs of the external audience of new arrivals, as it is, of course, an expression of his own selfhood and personality, rooted in his own unique 'social and psychic reality' (ibid.) of starting to feel at home in the city. Our pedagogical interactions had to be modulated according to this uniqueness of every young person's personality and 'voice', and, as we argue, had to necessarily undermine what Tuck and Yang (2014; see also Tuck, 2010) criticize as the often unfortunate triple conflation of

authenticity–voice–pain in research narratives about refugees. In the next section, we meet Laila, who took on the role of the camera operator in Sam's vignette (which you can watch here: https://youtu.be/ln-R8-4QBis). We will focus on how she developed more confidence in performing this technical role. Our aim is to further explore how our pedagogical interactions were shaped by (and shaped) young people's participation and articulations of selfhood in the production process.

Laila – Camera operator

We had known Laila since the early voluntary animation project, which was the precursor to our SONH film project. Laila had been one of the leading scriptwriters for the animation, and we met her as a bright and curious young woman, actively invested in her peer mentoring work. She was one of the young people who had presented the animation at the Glasgow South Side Film Festival, and she was keen to be involved in our follow-up project. Wanting to introduce and share something about ourselves, as well as gain participants' trust in our expertise as film educators in the first session, Simon and Katja created a short 'example film' (which you can watch here: https://youtu.be/AjKv2mIJ8eI). In the film, Katja (who is German) reflects on her experience of living in Glasgow, while sitting in the park and texting a friend (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Texting in the park, from *Scotland, Our New Home: Example film* (Simon Bishopp and Katja Frimberger, 2018)

In a sequence of flashbacks, we see her trying to figure out the Glasgow accent, eat Scottish food, confront the weather and find her way in the city (see Figure 7).

In making the example film, we did not mean to imply that Katja's experience of making home as an EU citizen, with privileged citizenship and workers' rights, and with a stable home place, was in any way comparable to young people's often traumatic experiences of forced migration. In the context of our film project, the example film served as a light-hearted icebreaker that allowed us to hopefully dispel any impression that we expected young people to re-tell traumatic life incidents, or that we conflated

Figure 7: Baffled by the battered sausage, from *Scotland, Our New Home: Example film* (Simon Bishopp and Katja Frimberger, 2018)

their authenticity of voice only with their painful narratives. Given that participants all had experienced the pressure, and potential trauma, of having to tell and re-tell their personal story of forced migration, over and over, in an institutional setting (such as the UK's Home Office) as part of their asylum procedure, careful reflection on how our acts of storytelling throughout the project framed young people as tellers and listeners of personal stories was imperative (Frimberger, 2017).

Our example film was also meant to raise curiosity about the process of film-making itself. We had undertaken a short informal survey about participants' tastes in films prior to the start of the project. Young people's experience of watching films varied, but they were clearly influenced by, and sometimes keen to present, their knowledge of modern (mostly Western) popular film culture. Those who had resided in Glasgow for a longer period had named American superhero films such as the *Avengers* franchise and the *Fast & Furious* action movies, as well as Japanese anime, as their favourite films. One young man loved modern horror movies; another participant enjoyed romantic films such as *Titanic* and *The Notebook*, which they borrowed from their college library. Others had watched long-form films and documentaries (such as the Mr Bean films and *Planet Earth*) mostly as part of their ESOL class, or at film evenings at their children's care unit. Some of the young people, like Sam, had only recently been to the cinema for the first time to watch *Black Panther*. Only one young man, Rafiq, had been previously involved in the process of making a film. He had made short films, mainly in the role of editor, with his friends when still living in Syria, and he was actively involved in the editing during our training sessions (we return to this later).

Watching the example film, participants giggled at the strange, and sometimes funny, moments that they recognized from their own everyday experiences, for example, when Katja, dressed in shorts and covered in suncream, is surprised by a sudden cloudburst (see Figure 8).

After the screening, participants wanted to know how we had filmed the cloudburst (a watering can over Katja's head), how we had organized everything, and

Figure 8: A sudden cloudburst in Glasgow, from *Scotland, Our New Home: Example film* (Simon Bishopp and Katja Frimberger, 2018)

how we decided on the locations in the film and filmed scenes out of order. Laila was one of the most curious in trying to get her head around the means of translating ideas into the process of production. She was keen to participate in our follow-up task: breaking down the different activities and roles needed in a film-making team.

Laila was somewhat intimidated by the process of translating ideas into images, frequently affirming her fascination, but more often declaring her perceived inability to take on any of the technical roles required. In order to give young people a first glimpse into the process of creating a scene, we prepared a follow-up session on making a music video for Pharrell Williams's song 'Happy' (2013). We had decided on the song based on young people's displayed tastes in popular music. We had attended several of their peer mentoring meetings prior to the start of our project, in order to get to know participants and get an idea of their experience in film-making. Before the official start of the group, favourite songs were regularly exchanged (and sometimes danced to) using the room's projector/whiteboard, including American rap music (especially Big Sean and Cardi B) and Vietnamese and Syrian pop music. Pharrell Williams's song was one of the tunes played during these informal DJ'ing sessions. We decided that the song's catchy tune would lend itself perfectly to a relaxed, enjoyable session. We wanted young people to gain a first glimpse of the creation of a visual moment by devising their own dance choreographies, and taking on some responsibility for the filming itself. It was a truly chaotic but fun session. It was a great bonding activity that had us all laughing about the impossibility of coordinating our dance moves with rhythm and in time to the music. A group of young people, as well as their teacher and social worker, were out in the college grounds, trying to rehearse a 'human alphabet' for the beginning of the video; others were devising a 'rap sequence' under the tutelage of one of the participants, and Katja was trying to choreograph a line of people into synchronized head and hand movements for the final moment of the video.

Amid the chaos, Laila was curiously following Simon, who was overseeing the filming, giving her a running commentary on how to pan, tilt and zoom, film handheld and on a tripod. She had volunteered to act as the camera assistant, but she had vehemently refused to take on the full role and responsibility of the camera operator, worried that she would 'mess it all up' (her words). After some time in her apprenticeship

role, and with encouragement from Simon, she agreed to film some of the rap sequence in the video. She started to panic when she realized that she was not able to fit all the dancers into her shot, and she almost gave up, when Simon encouraged her to try something more counter-intuitive. He challenged her to set the camera as wide as it would go, to 14 mm, and to place it on the ground. Rather than framing the dancers in eyeline, Laila tilted it up at the people dancing, so that they seemed like giants making huge, exaggerated steps. She was fascinated by this unexpected visual result, and she ended up filming the whole sequence on her own (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: A shot from Laila's filmed rap sequence, illustrated as a drawing (Simon Bishopp, 2020)

Pleased with her newly gained insight, Laila had realized that filming is not so much the task of making a record of a moment, but a creation and interpretation of a moment, in which the camera, and herself as the operator, are active participants. Laila's curiosity about the film-making process never ceased, even if she never became entirely confident in leading the filming decisions on her own. Even towards the end of the production process, when acting as the cameraperson for Sam's vignette, and after many sessions where she had experimented with different angles and camera set-ups in our training sessions, Laila was always most comfortable in the role of apprentice and assistant. When filming Sam at the bus stop looking at the timetable, she performed a complicated tilting shot that included racking focus on the overhead bus route plan, with the aim of mirroring some of Sam's experience of public transport slowly 'coming into focus' for him.

Participation, refusal and co-creation

Although this participant production team of three (Laila, Sam and Tariq) had come up with the scene's images – in which Sam recreates a moment of feeling confused about how the public transport system works, and walks pensively among the bustling city crowd (see Figure 10) – Simon had suggested some of the camera angles: the close-up filmed through the glass back of the bus stop, the slow-motion long-lens shots of Sam walking in the crowd, and the tilting shot mentioned above.

Figure 10: Sam walking among the crowd, from *Scotland, Our New Home: A documentary* (Simon Bishopp and the New Young Peers Scotland, 2019)

All three participants were always curious to see how a shot turned out, and keen to watch the footage back and review its aesthetic quality to decide if we had to do another take. Tariq in particular had joined our film project and production team clearly to just 'hang out' and enjoy the social aspects of making something together, without being necessarily willing to take on any of the technical or organizational responsibilities for the production. Katja spent many moments with Tariq chatting about American rap music (which she knew little about) or playing chess in the Waterstones bookshop cafe (and debating Somali versus German chess rules), while Simon, Laila and Sam were running about deliberating over the bookshop's lighting set-up for, at this time, Laila's vignette, in which she wanted to work on her laptop, and take a book from a bookshelf, while narrating her advice to other young people. Laila was determined to use her vignette to encourage other new arrivals that, although learning English often seemed like an insurmountable task, even if you already spoke several languages, it could be accomplished. 'If I can do it, I believe everyone can do it. That's what I believe', as Laila puts it in her vignette (which you can watch here: https://youtu.be/LKT54BqjtJ0). Laila decided to tell other young people about her own experience of being so scared of going to college on her first day that she was shaking. Although initially she was not sure if she 'would be able to learn anything at all' (as she put it), because she had never been to school before and could not read or write, Laila completed four ESOL levels in one year and was now attending a mainstream accountancy course at her college, working to go to university soon. Early on in the project, Laila had identified going to college, and the support and encouragement she received there from her teachers and fellow students, as a key landmark in her process of making home in Glasgow. We had devised some of our training sessions around the making of a short film about a 'first day at college' that took Laila's insight as a starting point. One group had filmed and edited their short film on an iPhone in an impressive single long take in which the camera followed a new ESOL student, the main character, nervously navigating their way through the college's corridors, hesitantly entering their classroom, being invited in by the teacher, and looking at the other students who are in the middle of a task and do not pay much attention. The film shows the main character being passed a piece of paper by the person sitting next to them. Written on it is a simple 'welcome' and the scene ends with

a moment of eye contact between the two students that anticipates, but does not spell out, further social interaction between them.

Given young people's newly acquired interest in the aesthetic techniques used in telling a story, we devised some sessions that looked, for example, at Sergio Leone's drama-building camera technique in his famous three-way stand-off scene in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (Sergio Leone, 1966). Sergio Leone shows us worried poker faces with scheming eyes flinching, close-ups of hands, either suspiciously calm or nervously twitching towards bullet belts and revolvers – all with the aim of building up to the final climax. The shoot-out between the three cowboys is shown as a long shot at the end of a disorientating sequence of close-ups. We challenged the group to translate this technique into a more comedic scenario of a 'chocolate stand-off', in which two friends spot a bar of chocolate and each hopes to snatch it before the other (see Figure 11 and Figure 12). The group had fun planning and shooting these films in the college hallways and canteen, and raising the curiosity of other college students and staff.

Figure 11: A shot from participants' 'chocolate stand-off' film, illustrated as a drawing (Simon Bishopp, 2020)

Figure 12: A shot from participants' 'chocolate stand-off' film, illustrated as a drawing (Simon Bishopp, 2020)

Some of the 'chocolate stand-off' scenes were filmed and edited on participants' iPhones; others were shot by them on Simon's camera but (as demanded by the group) edited by him. One group, which included Rafiq as the editor, presented their scene in Leone tribute: close-ups of the chocolate, hungry mouths licking their lips, and eyes checking for the right moment to pounce, only for the camera to move to a long shot of a stranger grabbing the bar and walking off. The film ends with close-ups on the friends' baffled and commiserating faces.

As can be seen from these moments of learning about, and interaction in, film-making, our project process was an intensely social process, in which autonomy, collaboration and teacher authority were negotiated on a moment-by-moment basis. Laila and Tariq, for example, participated in some aspects of film-making, but, as mentioned, also refused to participate in other aspects of the process, as an important expression of their autonomy and agency (Donald, 2019). Simon, in particular, co-created young people's representations in our final documentary, and both of us were actively involved in organizing learning tasks and guiding the project process throughout. Chambers (2019: 29) reminds us that 'idealistic, emancipatory, quasi-auteurist' conceptions of participants' film work can falsely associate any senior influence on learners' aesthetic work with the embarrassment of an 'epistemic imposition' (Chambers, 2019: 28). We are aware that this 'embarrassment' can be potentially heightened when our film project with refugee young people is uncritically employed as an integration and social inclusion tool, that, as Hickey-Moody (2013: 147) puts it, serves as 'a technology of salvation … a method of saving, improving or occupying particular demographics of "at-risk" young people', rather than simply as a film-making education resource and, for some, first introduction to the joy (and power) of visual storytelling.

The film launch

Most of the participants were more interested in the social and production side of making the vignettes and did not want to participate in the final editing. As a result, we had to make sure that their voice-over and images were edited in a way that did not compromise the young people's key messages. We reviewed the edit with them for feedback and changes before the documentary was released. When watching the film, they were proud of the vignettes, approving of the visual style and narrative, and eager to share the film. There were only a few moments in their vignettes that they found too slow and wanted to speed up. They also chose a different piece of music for one section of the film. The group also decided to give their vignettes individual titles that reflected their messages: 'You can do it', 'Take every opportunity', 'Finding yourself in Glasgow' and 'Make your dream come true'. The launch was held at the Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art, whose curators had kindly offered the space and staff free of charge.

The young people invited their friends (some of them new arrivals), their social workers, guardians and teachers to the film launch. The peer mentoring group founders sent out invitations to a large number of children and refugee support organizations, with almost eighty people in total attending the event. With the help of the curators at the GOMA, the young people set up the gallery's learning studio as a cinema, organized a team at the door that welcomed people, checked the guest list, showed attendees to their seats and made sure that everybody received a DVD of their film. The young people had decided they also wanted to show off some of the work they had created during our training sessions, with the aim of giving the audience a sense of the project journey. They screened the 'Happy' music video and two of the

'chocolate stand-off' scenario videos as support films for the documentary vignettes, and they were proud when the audience rewarded their efforts with a big round of applause. Going through the feedback sheets we had asked the audience to fill out afterwards, they described the final film as 'beautiful', 'inspiring and lyrical', 'human' and 'wonderfully accomplished'.

Conclusion

As we have tried to demonstrate in this article, the emancipatory process of a young person 'finding their voice' and shaping their self-representations in our film project was not a straightforward, developmental process towards 'empowerment'. Chambers (2019: 29) rightly points out that 'as a craft, film-making can take years, or indeed a lifetime, to master merely one discipline, be it cinematography, editing, sound and (in the case of drama) script and acting'. It would be presumptuous for us to claim that one participatory film-making project, no matter how careful the planning and devising of educational resources, could 'empower' any young person into complete autonomy and singular artistic expression over a period of six months. We have to be careful to avoid a merely instrumental association of our participatory film-making practice with the important progressive ideals of 'holistic education, relief from marginalization, transformation of quality of life, empowerment and intercultural dialogue', as for example, stated in Scottish and EU youth arts and integration policies (Creative Scotland, 2019; European Agenda for Culture, 2017; Scottish Government, 2018). A functional desire for conceptual fulfilment of these ideals could potentially deny the 'situational ethics' (Aufderheide *et al.*, 2009: 6) of our project and falsely portray key pedagogical moments of collaboration and co-creation (involving participants *and* educators) as moments of 'epistemic imposition' (Chambers, 2019: 28).

The higher educational ideal, for example, of 'empowerment' of refugee young people, cannot be conceptually presupposed for our (or any) participatory film-making pedagogy. Young people's acts of finding a voice and asserting their autonomy by shaping the film's aesthetic direction, its narrative and their self-representation in the film, took form within the intensely social process and pragmatic (technical, aesthetic) requirements of a film production. It is vital for our reflexive practice and research that we do not gloss over these moral deliberations but honour the 'fascinating collaborative matrix' (Chambers, 2019: 29) of our participatory film-making pedagogy. In our project context, these deliberations arose from our (educators') pedagogical acts of guiding the film education and film-making process as a response to young people's desire to make a film for new arrivals. A disregard of our concrete pedagogical interactions, in favour of a universalizing idea of empowerment, could run the danger of erasing young people's unique differences and *context-specific acts* of asserting selfhood and autonomy during the film-making. Most alarmingly, however, a denial of our situational project ethics could potentially render meaningless young people's concrete 'utopian desire' to make a film that acknowledges new arrivals' richly varied and individually textured hopes when making home in Scotland.

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Simon Bishopp is a Glasgow-based community arts practitioner, film-maker and animator (www.showmanmedia.co.uk) who has led on a range of participatory film-making and digital animation projects. Most recently, Simon has collaborated with Katja Frimberger for the Creative Scotland-funded digital arts project Little Animation Studio, supporting children with differing needs to create their own, fully digitally animated short film, which will be exhibited throughout July and August 2020 at the Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art's new community arts exhibition space (email: info@showmanmedia.co.uk).

Filmography

Ferris Bueller's Day Off (US 1986, John Hughes)
Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo (*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, IT/ES/DE 1966, Sergio Leone)
Scotland, Our New Home: The animation: For schools and younger audiences (UK 2017, Simon Bishopp and the New Young Peers Scotland)
Scotland, Our New Home: The animation: For teenagers and adults (UK 2017, Simon Bishopp and the New Young Peers Scotland)
Scotland, Our New Home: The documentary (UK 2019, Simon Bishopp and the New Young Peers Scotland)
Whatever Works (US/FR 2009, Woody Allen)

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