Negotiating Space for Queer-Identifying Young People in a Refugee Organisation: Viability, complexities and tensions

There is relative invisibility and silence around the presence, management and support of queer people in mainstream refugee organisations in the United Kingdom. Institutional silencing exists, particularly where visibility or acknowledgment has the potential to disrupt existing structures. At the same time, queer refugees face the risk of exclusion, and may also undertake self-censoring. Drawing on empirical data from an innovative, cross-disciplinary, community based participatory research project between a UK based refugee organisation and two universities, this article explores the viability, complexities and tensions inherent in making queer identities visible. While highlighting the potential of arts-based methods to explore inclusive approaches to sexuality, we discuss the limits of this work and the resistance it created. This article is co-authored by members of RX, a collective of young people with refugee backgrounds; two community researchers; an humanities researcher; and a peace studies researcher.

Key words: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer (LGBTQ); Refugees; Young People; Arts-Based Methods; Participatory Action Research; Community Based Research

Introduction

In the United Kingdom (UK) there are a range of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) focused organizations which provide support for LGBTQ identifying refugees including Stonewall,[i] The Kaleidoscope Trust,[ii] and the UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group.[iii] However, support for LGBTQ issues is seldom visible in mainstream refugee organisations where there is often a culture of silence around sexuality and the presence of LGBTQ identifying people. In addition, there is an absence of support or programming for their (often specific) needs. In a recent initiative set up to support LGBT refugees and asylum-seekers, London Friend's Monty Moncrieff commented that 'We know that LGBT asylum seekers and refugees can feel isolated, and that many feel uncomfortable disclosing their identity in mainstream services, having come from countries where it can be unsafe to do so' (Pink News, 2017).

Estimates indicate that 150 LGB people seek asylum in the UK every month and there are 30,000-50,000 LGBTQI asylum seekers, refugees and newly arrived migrants in London (Double Jeopardy, 2013). These figures are approximate as the United Kingdom Border Agency does not publish these statistics. Where sexual orientation formed the main part of a

claim for asylum in the UK, 98% of applicants were rejected (Miles, 2010). However, there is a lacunae in research on refugees who explore non-heteronormative identities later in their lives and journeys where their sexuality has explicitly not been the trigger for an asylum application.

This article considers the viabilities, complexities and tensions in creating explicitly queer-inclusive spaces in a major UK-based refugee organisation. The broader context we are working in challenges the discourses of 'risk' (coming from a 'homophobic' culture) and 'safety' (being in a 'gay-friendly' cosmopolitan city) that inform the operational framework and assumptions of some organisations who work with migrants, especially migrants of colour, in the UK. Haritworn argues in their analysis of migrants of colour in Berlin, 'Women's rights […] and appreciation of racial mixing have each become features of a cosmopolitan, diversity-loving community whose Others are profiled by their patriarchal, homophobic, irrational, monocultural, backward, or criminal dispositions' (Haritaworn, 2015, p9). We begin by providing a contextual overview of the literature which underpinned our research, specifically literature spanning studies of race and sexuality. We then move on to discuss the methodological framework of the study which drew on Participatory Action Research (PAR), arts-based methodologies and methods. In the final section we provide a critical discussion of the complexities and tensions that are inherent in creating space for queer refugees and discuss whether it is viable for queer identities to be made visible in mainstream refugee organisations.

Our discussion is based on a project collaboration between academics and activists focussing on a case-study within a single organisation (RX) aimed at supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. The organisation is run as a collective without a formal organisational hierarchy, with an underpinning ethos of radical inclusivity and non-judgemental approaches to individuals who want to join (for example, a policy of not asking people to disclose any information on their background and status). RX has a specific focus on challenging racism, especially through the naming and recognition of structural forms of racial inequality; challenging racism has been a key route to solidarity across the diverse membership which spans over 40 countries. The trigger for the project originated from a long-term volunteer within RX who had identified a lack of space, resources and room for the discussion of queer identities and experiences. The organisation's own practices of radical activism and equalities-driven policies meant that members had a theoretical and experiential

knowledge of PAR, decolonizing methodologies and arts-based approaches to research and policy building. However, despite these skills, there was an assessment within the organisation that a collaboration with external academic researchers could help queer members negotiate a sexuality-based PAR project, thereby expanding the expertise and knowledge within the collective. This was seen as the necessary first step to assessing how queer inclusive the organisation could be in the future, in terms of policy and practice.

The aims of the research were fourfold: i) to identify the barriers to facilitating open queer communities and spaces in a mainstream refugee organisation; ii) to investigate ways of facilitating queer communities within an organisation through arts and humanities research; iii) to contribute to methodological innovation in researching queer lives; and iv) to contribute to policies for managing queer issues within refugee organisations. In this article we focus on the first three aims. The research was unique in that it did not focus on refugees whose applications for asylum was based on sexuality, rather we sought to work with people from refugee backgrounds who were already in the UK, and to consider the way that gender, race and faith can complicate the experience of queerness in the UK.

This article is based on outcomes of a cross-disciplinary, community-based research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of the 'Connected Communities' programme. The research was co-designed and collaboratively undertaken between RX, community and academic researchers, all of whom were named investigators on the grant application. Some identified as queer, others as allies. Our writing has been developed in an ongoing process between community and academic researchers over a period of four years (2015-2019). Due to sensitivity of the research and the potential implication for participants, members of RX requested that the collective remains anonymous in publications. The outcome of the project from the perspective of individuals and the collective was mixed. For some, it highlighted structural homophobia, while for others it represented the privileging of one identity marker over others. We attempt to outline some of these moments of tension and conflict in the process and draw from our collective writing and art-making during the project. Despite the relative 'failure' of the project to make a significant change to internal policies around recognising the needs of queer members, there was a collective desire amongst the project team to write about the research process. This have produced a variety of outputs, including a project report which had recommendations for RX, community researcher-led talks, collective reflective writing, digital stories, body

maps, collage, a mixed-media scrapbook documenting the project, conference papers and writing for academic audiences. As per our collectively negotiated code of ethics which drafted at the beginning of the project, we have remained committed to publishing as a project team to follow RX's philosophy: 'nothing about us without us'.

We have produced this work using a collective voice, however this does not mean our views are homogenous. As authors we come from divergent backgrounds but we have some key points in common. Everyone working on the project had a university degree or was a university student. Between us, we had training in a variety of disciplines including English Literature, Health, Politics, and Sport Sciences. This allowed us as a group to introduce one another to challenging critical material with the caveat that due to disciplinary differences and experience, some theoretical language was deemed unhelpful and deliberately difficult or 'too academic' at the cost of practice and making a real-word difference. Bar one of the academic researchers, everyone on the project had experience of facilitating PAR and arts-based practice. While in our writing we aim to create a collective voice, we have attempted to create a space which can recognise distinct positionalities which at times came to the fore as challenges to working practices. As a result, we have chosen to include extracts from a conference paper and final project report (produced for RX) which were authored only from the perspective of the community researchers. The conference paper was written after extensive discussion and ideas sharing between the project team, however, we collectively decided that it would be important for community researchers to speak directly to an academic audience without the 'gatekeeping' of academic researchers. The final project report was based on monthly project reports produced by community researchers (for RX), a collectively co-curated mixed-media project 'scrapbook' which charted the daily life of the project (including project data), and audio-recordings and minutes of meetings. Material extracted from these sources is indented in this paper when it is used to clearly mark that it belong to a larger work intended for a different audience and purpose. We are not treating this work as data for analysis, rather, it is part of the broader critical and discursive forms of writing that have taken place during the project.

Part of the review process of this paper rightly pointed out that the academic researchers in this article may, 'reproduce […] power relations in its authorship and career-enhancing potentials'. As a project team, we have openly discussed the conflicting pressures to 'report' and 'produce' outcomes from the project (whether it is the operation of the Research

Excellence Framework audit in the UK or reporting the outcome of a project to trustees). While the academic co-authors of this article recognise the importance of raising this issue, it limits the space for understanding the contribution and agency of community co-authors. As one of the project's community researchers powerfully articulated at an international conference about the participation of refugees and migrants in research:

> We become the refugee who is fleeing, not the human rights activist, not the manager in an organisation, not the youth worker, not the film maker […]

> One aspect that frustrates us as members of a community organisation is how often we get told by academics "you do the art and we will do the academic stuff" – by that they mean analysis and writing. They speak as if we do not understand it and cannot do it. We *have* to understand it and do it. (Anonymised Conference Paper).

Framing the research

As a team, our research began with a review of academic literature on queer migrants and refugees that could be relevant to the project, and a review of PAR processes and arts-based methods within RX that might be usefully adapted for the project. The following is a summary of research material discussed in the first year of the project. The publication of the United Nations Refugee Agency's guidelines on claims related to sexual orientation and gender identity in 2008 (UNHCR, 2008) has prompted scholarship on the specific legal processes used to measure sexuality and risk and the distinct experience of LGBT asylum seekers and refugees. An emerging body of research has focused on the specific forms of discrimination faced by LGBTQ refugees and asylum-seekers notably around the emphasis of evidencing risk and 'proving' sexualities (Giametta, 2017; Kahn and Alessi, 2018). Alongside developing discussions of LGBT asylum, queer migration studies has offered critiques of how racialized bodies are produced as sexual others (Gopinath, 2005; Puar, 2007; Manalansan, 2003; Cantu, 2009), challenging pre-existing tendencies in academic debates to assume the heteronormativity of refugees and migrants, especially when they come from outside the Global North (Luibheid, 2008). The limit of using 'LGBT', itself determined by a civil-rights movement predominantly based in the Global North, as a universal term for describing non-heteronormative sexualities is a well-discussed, and often returned to, subject (Gopinath, 2005; Dave, 2012; Weeks, 2007; Woods, 2016). The interrogation of modernity and the 'progress' of LGBT rights has become particularly important in challenging assumptions about the escape of people from sexually 'repressive' or homophobic regimes to more 'liberal' ones (Manalansan, 2003; Rahman, 2010; Horton, 2017). Queer bodies and LGBT activism have a long history of mobility from the 19th century, especially fostered by

transnational activism and migration which has paid particular attention to the diasporic, ethnic and religious politics (Wesling, 2008; Ayoub and Bauman, 2018). RX has been particularly sensitive to responding to Islamophobia and the intersectional issues of race, gender, ethnicity and faith experienced by Muslims refugees and migrants in the UK.

In a discussion theorizing gay Muslim identities, Rahman suggests that,

> understanding gay Muslims as intersectional identities demonstrates that cultures and identities and plural and overlap rather than being monolithic and mutually exclusive (Rahman, 2010, p. 948).

While intersectionality has been an important model for considering the 'overlap' of identity positions, Puar's work on queer assemblage (Puar, 2007; Puar, 2011) has challenged the application of intersectional theory through analysing its emergence from second-wave feminism's preoccupation with sexual difference which itself has been challenged by queer theory (Puar, 2011). Part of what these debates illustrated was the situatedness of knowledge production (Haraway, 1988). Puar's writing in wake of the War on Terror brought a strong focus on the securitization of brown bodies and the consequences of globalized Islamophobia (Puar, 2007).

In his discussion of 'queer(y)ing research methods, Detamore highlights how the personal, professional and political entanglements of participatory research can use affectivity as a route to imagining more inclusive worlds: The tethering of the researcher to their researched (and equally vice versa) through the bonds of intimacy creates a political space – or ethical terrain – that binds one to the other' (Detamore, 2010, p.181). Our research became more urgent as we felt the increasingly pressure on daily life for people of colour, sexual minorities, young people, and others. This is a process of research which is unashamedly political insofar as it creates a shared space of social resistance which allows: 'the *intimate politics* of queer activism – the hidden and bold, relational and solitary, everyday enactments of interruption, care and solidarity' (Fine, Torre, Frost and Cabana, 2018, p. 623). In our routine work at RX we found routes to daily forms of care and solidarity from eating and spending time together, to turning to one another for advice about our personal experiences of sexism, racism and homophobia. While RX did not create a queer space or group in its organisation, our presence as a project, as people together in a collective space sharing stories, talking and working together, queered and interrupted the daily working space of RX.

Participatory Action Research

Within RX, PAR and creative arts methodology emphasizes collective inquiry and experimentation grounded in experience and social history within which 'communities of inquiry and action evolve and address questions and issues that are significant for those who participate as co-researchers' (Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p. 1). This drew on an emancipatory and decolonising framework where self-determination was fundamental (Smith, 2012), and where new categories of knowledge based on lived experience and local realities were valued (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006). This was done not merely to reduce objectification of people from refugee backgrounds, build capacity or produce more 'relevant' research, all of which was important. Rather, our approach also sought to de-privilege researcher expertise (Byrne, Canavan and Millar, 2009) and to produce 'alternative knowledge and more effective ways of understanding complex situations and relationships' (Moser and McIllwaine, 1999; Bagnoli and Clark, 2010 p. 103). Such a perspective does not mean that the knowledge produced should be reified or accepted as a singular 'Truth'. Good research still needs to interrogate these spaces by asking questions such as 'whose knowledge has been given dominance?', 'whose voice is absent and why?'; is this really the 'authentic' voice of the person speaking or are they echoing 'the voices of the powerful'? etc. This echoing can occur either as a result of internalizing the views of the powerful, or as a conscious act of self-alignment (Scott, 1986; Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006).

In community-based PAR, the varying levels of collaboration and extent of participation by community members varies according to the aims and collective agreement of each project. Suffice to say there are variations to the extent and forms of collaboration with participants being involved either in some, or in every aspect of the process 'including establishing research priorities, setting research questions, collecting and interpreting data' (Clark, Holland, Katz et al., 2009; Bagnoli and Clark, 2010;), and dissemination (Pratt in collaboration with the Philippine Women Centre, 1998; 1999). The approach adopted by RX both as an organisation, and for this project, emphasized collective agreement and not only participation but *action*, incorporating informal education and experiential learning rooted in the theory and practice of critical pedagogy, critical thinking, and the informed and committed action that is known as praxis (see for example Freire, 1970; Fals-Borda, 1979; Cahill and Torre, 2007; and Cammarota and Fine, 2008). This model enables RX to (co)produce knowledge, engage in action and reflection and choose how to be represented.

For RX this is fundamentally important as it allows them to challenge models of research and representations of refugees which can all too often lead to objectification (Krause, 2017).

Eversole argues that

> Many critiques now show how 'participation' can be used as a cloak of words to disguise business as usual: to hide power inequalities, gloss over differences, and enable elites to pursue their own agendas. (2010, p. 2).

In RX's experience this is a regular occurrence, even amongst researchers who engage with participatory methods. The following extract is from a conference paper presented by community researchers at an international conference where they were addressing the experience of inequalities in research:

> Sometimes researchers turn up, encourage our participation in telling, or showing our life stories, which they then (from our perspective) 'steal' for their own purposes and career prospects. At other times researchers or policy makers take a few young people away to represent us - to learn to be important, to act in the dominant adult discourse of committees, youth councils, 'youth-parliaments' and academic conferences. At RX we have a different model. We believe that as young people we are the culture-builders and discourse-makers. To this end we believe that it is important that as young people from refugee backgrounds we work together to explore and act upon the issues of disconnection, division and exclusion that affect us in our daily lives. (Anonymised Conference Paper).

These concerns about the extractive and appropriative nature of research and issues of (dis)trust are echoed by Krause (2017) and Pittaway, Bartolemei and Hugman (2010), among others.

Creative arts methodologies and activism

Integral to the project was a creative arts methodology which provided a transformative framework (Mertens, 2010) and 'transdisciplinary ways of knowing and communicating' (McNiff, 2019, p. 24). This was chosen by members of RX as a means to democratize the research process (Leavy, 2015) through creating an inclusive medium. It also enabled members to build on skills gained in prior research which used drama, body movement and art. Through bringing together collaborative ethnographic praxis through art, we engaged in what O'Neill calls "ethno-mimesis" 'where inter-textuality of biography/narrative (ethnography) and art (mimesis) becomes a "potential space" for transformative possibilities' (2008, p. 3).

The choice of arts-based methodologies and methods created space to undertake 'radical' and 'innovative' research with the aim of 'addressing social inequities' (Finley, 2008, p. 71). For RX this was critical, as they also expressed in the conference paper:

> The issue of race and our racial status is always present albeit it is often unspoken or silenced. When we walk into a room we can feel it. We are often the only black people. We either become invisible, as if race and racial discourses do not shape us, or matter. That they are not present. That we are not present. Or we become the 'exotic other' and people ask us 'what's your experience?' 'What do you do?'. When people then find out we are refugees we become sexy – 'the strong Somali woman', 'the brave Columbian woman' and we get, somehow, put in a box that defines us as a refugee but nothing else.
>
> We become the refugee who is fleeing, not the human rights activist, not the manager in an organisation, not the youth worker, not the film maker. We are more than the label that researchers and the media often portrays us as and we want to challenge people to see us as more than the sum of this label. For people to recognise us as multidimensional human beings and ask us about other aspects of our lives, our qualifications, our experience. We do not wish to be asked to self-categorise or be categorised, or to disclose our status. As an organisation we have a policy of not asking. Of not categorising. Of refusing to. What does this mean in terms of our partnership work with researchers though?
>
> We unashamedly use creative methods – art, film making, Theatre of the Oppressed, photography as a means to learn and to communicate. When using creative methods the language barrier is no longer so much of an obstacle, people have a chance to laugh and to feel that they can be outside of the box that people keep trying to put us in. We have also found that it creates trust within the group, sensitivity and bonding.
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> We use arts-based methods to explore issues at a deeper level and to connect with people. In our experience it is very expressive and we believe that visually seeing or taking part in an experience is more powerful than someone presenting a written account of what happened. Sometimes reading a paper is powerful but for the communities that we work with they haven't had access to schools or universities, but every culture has art and uses images, and so it becomes easier to create conversations and change around art. When you give a paper you don't put your soul there. When you have to perform it you are in it. You are constantly processing the experience. Each time you take a photo, make a dance, it is a continual transformation of the issue. For us what is important isn't the value of the end product or its aesthetics or quality. For us the value is the process. If the process doesn't have value it won't work. You might not make the film, the play might not be good but the process is the most important, not the product. Of course this doesn't make for easy collaborations with researchers. The value for the researcher or the funder comes through data collected and analysed and academic outputs produced. If you have no end product how does a funder measure success?
>
> One aspect that frustrates us as members of a community organisation is how often we get told by academics 'you do the art and we will do the academic stuff' – by that they mean analysis and writing. They speak as if we do not understand it and cannot do it. We *have* to understand it and do it. Although it is very hard to understand

academic environments – you use such a different language and have such a different way of working. But we **have** to engage with this as it is academic research and writing and policy reports and media that shapes our world. We strongly believe that what happens in the academy has impact. For us not to engage with it has impact. If academics go away and write about us it is framed from their perspective, not ours. It represents **their** account of our world, not **our** account of our world. By taking part in research we too often become a number. A faceless statistic. It is important for each of us that this does not happen, and we have some guiding principles to ensure that it doesn't. (Anonymised Conference Paper).

Our project used RX's existing frameworks of collaboration and a co-negotiated code of ethics to ensure that no-one became the 'object' of inquiry, rather, that we were all participating in collaborative research together. To achieve this required moving through a process together rather than sub-dividing and allocating 'academic' and 'non-academic' tasks, including authoring several academic and non-academic pieces of writing. The following section describes this process and how it delivered the project to RX.

The Research Process

With critical discussions of structural racism being foundational to our research, the question of our own 'authentic' experience of racial difference became integral to building trust. The project had an important gendered dimension. Within the organisation there was an 'open door' policy for all groups except for one: the women's group. As we were exploring the potential for a queer identifying only group in RX, it was the women's group that offered vital expertise and solidarity when it came to explaining to the organisation the importance of safe-spaces. Indeed, most of the community researchers involved in the project were also members of the women's group. Their active debates on feminism and patriarchal power meant that they shared some of the critical perspectives of our project. For example, they had explored debated around anti-racist activism and feminism through reading the work of bell hooks. By discussing her experience as a lesbian of colour, the women's group had a route into understanding queer marginalisation that was based on their existing work.

The project commenced with two workshops on trust and ethics which led to us developing a code of ethics, principles and shared knowledge of PAR which underpinned our approach. We then undertook a workshop facilitated by a leading LGBT equalities NGO, identifying privilege and structural inequalities around sexuality in organisational structures and practices. This was specifically designed around the needs of the project. At the mid-point of the project we ran two creative workshops. The first foregrounded queer film and literature

through screening the iconic documentary *Paris is Burning* (Livingstone, 1990) on the queer ball scene in late 1980s New York. The resulting conversation resonated with participants especially around issues of class, marginality and the use of creativity to parody, challenge and reclaim forms of power. This discussion was followed by a reading of travel writing by queer writers who had crossed borders and experienced the challenge of describing sexuality across languages and cultural contexts. Small group reflections around these texts were designed to consider how we can view queer lives globally, especially in contexts where whiteness is challenged.

The exploration of how creative strategies can be used to represent the difference experienced by queer people of colour was followed by a digital story telling workshop drawing together issues of race, migration and sexuality. While the workshop on queer film and literature had been facilitated by one of the co-researchers, we decided to invite an external facilitator for this workshop, so that both academic and community researchers could adopt the role of participant to create a different collaborative environment with the wider participants. This workshop used the work of the queer South African visual artist Zanelle Muhole to demonstrate techniques for abstract representation that resist trying to capture 'real' or accurate portraits. Montage, still life, and collage were amongst a portfolio of techniques introduced, along with basic video editing. Through a series of prompts to create short narratives, and the use of video stills, at the end of the workshop we had a series of short photo-elicitation explorations of identity which were inspired by our discussions of queer art work by a woman of colour, but were produced in response to our own explorations of feeling queer and in and out of place. The project concluded with a final set of two workshops. These used multi-sensory experiences including sound, mindfulness and movement to disrupt stereotypes. Opening exercises in mindfulness were followed by short forum theatre exercises structured around narrative exploring the complexities of creating a queer-inclusive space.[iv]

Participants agreed that the creative process was important and aided them in their personal development and in terms of creating a group safe space. One participant commented about the creative workshops that:

> I really liked making stories about certain situations, waking up my mind, imagination, and having different experience through the creativity. I have to say that if I had to do all those activities on my own I couldn't be that creative, being with people, sharing different thoughts and experiences, feeling safe and connected,

discussing about what feels important to each of us, sharing what we know as best of life, that what really made differences.

Further, many participants pointed out that the mix of different activities were beneficial as it allowed different people to engage in different ways:

I also think it's very important to have lots of different processes as everyone engages with material differently and this gives more people the opportunity to take part in different ways.

I feel practical workshops allow those that are not confident to really come out of themselves and express what's going on for them mentally and physically and with young people it's important to encourage them to be creative and enable them to use their mind's eye/ imagination.

However, some participants felt that there was some room for improvement, especially with regards to the focus of the discussion. In relation to the workshop about digital storytelling, one person saw the potential in using broader identity frameworks so that race was not an undergirding issue to all the work:

Photography was an interesting medium and I'm really pleased that we all got to try out new creative methods. I benefited a lot from the personal discovery, but there's a part of me that wishes we hadn't chosen the topic of race & ethnicity, as it wasn't obviously relevant to all participants.

The series of creative workshops and residentials attempted to vary their focus. While some focused closely on issues of race and sexuality, others took a broader and more inclusive approach to all identities. However, a participant challenged activities that appeared to stray too far from the stated purpose of the project:

Personally, I did not feel like I got a lot out of the movement workshop because it is not something I am used to, and I found it a bit difficult to engage or see the purpose of the different activities.

Discussion was the best part. People talking and exploring different ideas. I didn't enjoy the photo [digital storytelling] workshop I found it pointless and a waste of educational time. I still don't see how that explores LGBT and social changes.

However, what this also shows is that people engage differently with different workshops and that having a wide variety of mediums gives more people the chance to take part. It was also pointed out that sometimes it is good to push yourself: 'I also think that it is important to challenge yourself and push yourself out of your comfort zone occasionally.'

The positive and negative connotations of being pushed out of your 'comfort zone' became a recurring trope in the project. On the one hand, as the participant quote suggests, it was

viewed as a way of expressing a discomfort that was instructive and had the potential to produce new learning. In our case, this often stemmed from achieving a deeper appreciation of how important intersectional approaches to identity politics were, with a special focus on how sexuality and other markers of differences can be erased or elided. Being pushed out of your 'comfort zone' in the project, however, also referred to the ways in which there were competing discourses around what counted as valuable research, and what counted as a participatory and inclusive process. While participants in residentials and workshops did not flag or identify any difference between competing ideas around research and creative practice in their feedback, it was a recurring issue in the design of the sessions.

This unearthing of stories and exposing our own vulnerabilities (Carroll, 2013; Holmes, 2010; Sampson, Bloor and Fincham, 2008) illustrates the 'emotional labour' (Carroll, 2013) of undertaking this research. By the conclusion of the project, it became clear that none of the research team felt they had adequate support from their respective organisations to support their emotional wellbeing. The researchers within RX, signalled a lack of organisational understanding of homophobia. While their experience of racism could be well supported and addressed, other experiences of stigma were harder to raise without framing it as a complaint about the organisation (Ahmed, 2018). Collectively, we shared stories of organisational silencing or marginalisation, even when we were 'positively' recognised as different. As Taylor suggest in her discussion of being queer in higher education, 'Being 'diverse' for and in the institution can be an awkward premium and a personalised pain, an enduring sore point that harms, while diversity is hastened as promise, cure and capital' (Taylor, 2018, p. 65-66).

Although LGBT right-based activism has privileged visibility as a guarantee of liberation (Weeks, 2007), Horton (2017) uses the potential power of concealment and silence to determine more nuanced interactions where the queer body has some power to determine the terrain of interaction, postulating a difference between 'agonistic intimacy' and 'antagonistic intimacy' (Horton, 2017, p. 5). The execution of the project demonstrated this in practice. While the project began with an investigation of how to make queer lives more visible in RX, through the course of the project it became clear that selective disclosure and strategic concealment was a practical method of engaging with a broader collective on shared platforms of social justice, such as anti-racism. However, was this satisfactory or sustainable in the opinion of queer-identified researchers in the RX collective?

This project has exposed the latent and hidden prejudices and violence within RX itself. It has served as the vehicle to bring the elephant into the room. In this way, while we feel that progress within individual changes in attitude and skill is minimal, the impact of the project is definitely significant. It has created the possibility and pathway for more, for things not to go back to being hidden or avoided. This is vital for RX and for the young people that it works with, both now and in the future. In this way, this project has made RX realise that it needs foundations for more, and that in 2016 it is simply not acceptable to continue to avoid this work. It could be seen as a watershed that has a legacy that now needs to be built upon.

There are practical changes, like networks, connections to other organisations and what they do. There are some developments in terms of what the issues and experiences are, and who else is out there to support them. There is a database, contact list and resource pack. However, RX's ability to engage with such individuals and issues has not changed greatly on a day to day level. While this is sad, it is very clear that it has created the doorway for the building of this work into RX foundations. (Final Report, RX).

The project was not able to produce a radical change within the day to day working of the organisation, but it did demonstrate the need to challenge why creating a space for queer groups and projects within the collective proved to be difficult.

Conclusion

Part of RX's work is to identify and work with the most vulnerable and isolated refugees and migrants. There is no doubt that people of different sexual orientations and gender identities are incredibly isolated, and vulnerable. Many of the people we work with come from countries where it is illegal to be gay or lesbian. Therefore they have not ever had the experience of being able to be open and accepted for who they are. Additionally, when arriving in the UK, the system marginalises and makes such individuals more vulnerable. On top of this, displaced individuals have to find their place seeking refuge in a new alien society where racism and prejudice against asylum seekers is significant. In the past, people with such experiences have come forward for support and RX has not had the capacity to respond. RX wanted to address this through training, knowledge, and building a group that could be an example for other young people. This project was also important because in the UK different sexual identities or sexual orientation is not illegal. Therefore we have the space and responsibility to lead the way in challenging homophobia. LGBT issues had been totally neglected in RX. It was a complete taboo. Some people were more ready to engage with it, but did not know how. Others were nowhere near ready. (Final Report for RX).

The difficulty in 'making room' for the project within the organisation, without external involvement and funding, demonstrated the way in which queer issues were rendered structurally invisible. This key finding in the final project report (prepared for RX) reflected on the latent discrimination experienced during the project. As funding ended, the

organisation held onto the documentation of creative practice, lists of contacts, and learning about process and best practice, but chose not to develop this project further. Our research has demonstrated the difficulty in introducing support for queer lives without triggering a debate about the viability or 'space' for queer *activism*. The politicisation of minority sexual lives and identities leading to a separate consideration of their 'right' to exist or be represented in the organisation was sidestepped through referrals to other LGBT-focussed organisations. These were deemed to be better equipped to deal with an issue that was potentially divisive or distracting from the primary focus of anti-racist activism in RX.

Without a mechanism for measuring how one kind of equality work (in this case around race) might obfuscate another kind of equality work (in this case around sexuality), there is a danger of unintentionally and intentionally silencing minorities (often gendered and sexual). We have demonstrated that creativity and the arts and humanities can be a tool for exploring expansive and inclusive approaches to sexuality which avoids policy or legal definitions of 'LGBTQ' which often focus on narratives of oppression and protection in the context of refugee and migrant lives. However, more work is required to build more complex portraits of how the legacy of colonialism has contributed to homophobia in former colonies and how challenging homophobia can be at the centre of mainstream anti-racist activism for refugee and migrant organisations.

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[i] Stonewall is an LGBTQ rights charity and lobbying group which works across the UK. Its current work focuses on implementing equality through the change of legislation, organisational equality, education and research for LGBTQ people. For further information see: https://www.stonewall.org.uk/. Note on terminology: where we cite literature, we use terminology used by the report authors (eg. LGBT, LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQI). Queer is used in the paper as an umbrella term for a range of non-heteronormative identities.

[ii] The Kaleidoscope Trust is a human rights organisation working across the UK and also internationally. They work to support equal rights where people are discriminated against due to their sexuality and/ or sexual identity. For further information see: https://kaleidoscopetrust.com/

[iii] The UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group supports LGBTQ people through the asylum and immigration process including supporting LGBTQ asylum seekers and LGBTQ people wishing to join their partners in the UK, undertaking research and policy making, and providing training to organisations. For further details see https://uklgig.org.uk/

[iv] Forum theatre was developed by Boal in the 1970s as part of his Theatre of the Oppressed technique. Through drama and performance participants are invited to explore solutions to oppression as a means to bring about social justice (see Boal, 2000).