

Countering Media Hegemony, Negative Representations, the 'Bad Citizen': Asylum seekers' battle for the hearts and minds of Scotland

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Introduction: The motivation for countering the media's asylum representation

We are a group of asylum seekers, and we go to schools and speak with the children about asylum [...] and the children ask us how did we flee and many other questions. And we answered them. So one day the teacher asked the children to write their opinion about asylum seekers. [...] and one boy wrote: 'I saw an article in the newspaper and it is totally different from what we've been told by the group of asylum seekers. So I realised that they [the media] don't give us the right information. (T in Glasgow)

The past decade has been characterised by increased numbers of people seeking asylum in the UK, and asylum and immigration becoming the most contentious public issue debate in the UK (Tyler 2006). As the asylum debate was played out in media and political spaces, the negative representations of asylum seekers as unabating, chaotic and a threat to the national citizenship order became more predominant (Gifford 2004, p.148; Bruter 2004; Bloch 2000; Roche 1987). The coverage might have contributed to the construction of a 'moral panic' and mistrust among the public leading to poor community relations in host communities of refugee dispersal (ICAR 2004; Erjavec 2003; Speers 2001; Hall 1997; Cohen 1980). Defined as a state of impending crisis emanating from a perceived problem

that is claimed to be out of control, 'moral panic' is a process whose end product has a media social agenda: to create 'folk devils' that are personified as 'bad citizens', an embodiment of 'evil' and bereft of responsible citizenship (Rothe & Muzzati 2004; Erjavec 2003; Hall 1997; Cohen 1980).

My analysis of the British Press coverage of the asylum issue gives credence to the ubiquitous anti-asylum coverage. The coverage was dominated by pejorative and sensationalist language to describe asylum seekers. They included terms like 'illegals', 'bogus asylum seekers', 'asylum cheat', 'asylum rapist' and 'spongers'. Also, evident were misleading statistical extrapolations and referencing aimed at showing an unabating 'influx' of asylum seekers. In addition, there was extensive framing of asylum seekers as scapegoats for society's malaise; especially as a strain on welfare services and taxpayers' money. These were also blamed for the government's chaotic asylum policies (Smart et al 2007; Buchanan & Grillo 2003; Wilson 2004). This is not to say that there were no positive asylum stories. However, the general trend was that the media coverage, particularly in the UK press, was biased, unbalanced and stereotypical in representing asylum seekers (Smart et al 2007). It was therefore not surprising that members of the asylum-seeking community and policy actors in the voluntary and statutory sectors perceived the mediated construction of a 'moral panic' and its creation among the public as largely responsible for generating public hostility towards asylum seekers and refugees, particularly in communities of dispersal (Speers 2001; Buchanan & Grillo 2003, p.9; Rothe & Muzzatti 2004).

It has also been blamed for subverting the asylum seekers' agency and participation in the life and activities of their

communities (ICAR 2004; Buchanan & Grillo 2003; Speers 2001). ‘Agency’ refers here to the capacity and determination of asylum seekers to undertake actions and decisions to effect changes in their lives and their communities of residence based on their values and beliefs (Mackenzie et al 2007). Brannan et al (2006) argue that participation in this respect means enabling asylum seekers and refugees to generate knowledge, to show a willingness to contribute to social action and political debate and to have the capacity to do things for themselves. The end product is social change, social cohesion and good community relations (Cheong et al 2007; Brannan et al 2006; Forrest & Kearns 2001; Roche 1987).

In order to mitigate the media’s hindrance to a sense of agency among asylum seekers and refugees, the government and other civil institutions have therefore called for the media to be more responsible in its asylum reporting. A raft of interventions was proposed by government, including the participation of journalists in the Home Office Community Cohesion Unit. This aimed to facilitate the media’s role in promoting community cohesion, a sense of ‘belonging’ and ‘life opportunities’ for all individuals in the UK, including asylum seekers (Home Office 2001; Home Office Community Cohesion Unit 2003). In addition, the press watchdog, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) produced guidelines designed to promote better reporting of asylum seekers among journalists. Side by side with these institutional interventions, the asylum-seeking community have formulated and delivered interventionist programmes aimed at countering the negative media coverage of asylum and mitigating the harmful impact on community tensions and hostility against asylum seekers and refugees.

In this paper, I consider some of the ways members of the asylum-seeking community are countering the media's hegemonic construction of them by raising awareness and promoting understanding of the refugee condition among local residents in urban communities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. I specifically consider how by deploying 'artistic and socio-cultural' events as well as 'communal talk and dialogue', asylum seekers communicate a critical pedagogy and alternative knowledge about the refugee condition to the British citizenry (Burton et al 2004; Kellner 2000). The aim is to illustrate that contrary to anti-asylum discourses in the British media that portrayed asylum seekers as 'bad citizens' or 'folk devils', asylum seekers are agentic forces of responsible citizenship, social engagement and empowerment.

The study

The media monitoring briefly referred to above was carried out over a period of six months: 20 September 2007 to 20 March 2008. It included Scottish and English editions of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers: *The Express*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Mirror*, *The Sun*, *The Daily Record*, *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Herald*, *The Scotsman*, *The Edinburgh Evening News* and *The Glasgow Evening Times*. I undertook content, thematic and discourse analysis of these newspapers during which I coded any item which included the words 'asylum', 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee'. Also, items were coded for: themes or focus of the story, labels used to refer to asylum seekers or refugees, statistics cited and the subject of any photographs. The coding targeted news reports, features, opinion pieces, editorials and letters. No television or other mass media forms were included in the monitoring.

The fieldwork data used here was gathered through in-depth, semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews with fourteen asylum seekers and refugees. The interview sessions were framed on an informal conversation at which interviewees talked freely about their experiences with minimal interruptions. The research cohort constituted eight males and six females, of Moslem and non-Moslem backgrounds, who resided in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Seven of these were awaiting a decision on their asylum claim, whilst the other seven had refugee status. Their age range was between twenty-six and sixty-five years, and all but one described themselves as educated to at least high school level. They all came to Scotland as a result of the dispersal programme. Except for the non-literate interviewee who only used the television, all said they read news, watched television and used the Internet.

Sampling was by 'snowballing', 'convenience' and was non-random. Asylum seekers were selected on the basis that they were easy to access and could communicate in English. Four of the interviewees were known to me through my participation in IKAZE, a theatre group run by asylum seekers and refugees in Edinburgh. Given my social relationship with the IKAZE interviewees, and being an asylum seeker, a fact known to interviewees, all attempts were made to ensure that this did not impinge on their responses. Measures included adopting an open mind to interviewees' responses, refraining from influencing such responses as much as I could (Kezar 2005) and ensuring that my biases, preconceptions and views did not affect my ability to 'objectively' analyse the data (Creswell 1998, Kezar 2005). In addition, I used 'respondent validation' to cross-check accuracy of views (Lewis 2003; Arthur & Nazroo 2003; Beresford & Evans

1999). Also, I did a lot of note-taking of contextual information that might inform my analysis (Small & Uttal 2005). I assured the interviewees of their confidentiality and anonymity to facilitate their participation (Powles 2004).

The data used here was drawn from fieldwork conducted in Scotland as part of my on-going research on the British media's contribution to asylum seekers and refugees' citizenship-forming. Parts of this fieldwork were selected on the basis that they were relevant to my exploration, in this article, of the issues of citizenship and its constitutive processes of agency, social engagement, social cohesion and empowerment.

Agency, social engagement and empowerment

Here I present two interventions, namely 'art and socio-cultural' events and 'communal talk and dialogue', that interviewees said they found to be instrumental in challenging anti-asylum constructions among the press and the public. 'Art and socio-cultural' events broadly refers to social and cultural events as well as artistic performances and displays. Common versions of these included drama or plays, storytelling, poetry, films, dance, singing and drumming. The activities are inclusive of each other because social and cultural events such as family days often incorporate artistic activities such as dance, singing, drumming and other related cultural expressions, and vice versa. 'Communal talk and dialogue' refers to workshops and talks that are held on an informal basis in the local community. Both 'art and socio-cultural' events and 'communal talk and dialogue' were usually designed as awareness-raising initiatives that provided social interaction and communicative exchanges between asylum seeker newcomers and their indigenous audiences

(see Khan 2000, p.8). Evidence of the use of art and socio-cultural events by asylum seekers as vehicles for facilitating social engagement, social change, empowerment and good community relations abounds in the fieldwork. I consider a selection of these to illustrate their potential for empowering both asylum seekers and indigenes to challenge the media's hegemonic communication of their view of asylum seekers and its attendant threat to good community relations.

Art and socio-cultural events

Interviewees said they widely deployed art and socio-cultural activities at grassroots community level to raise awareness of asylum seekers' plight and to counter the perceived effects of negative media coverage of asylum. They used them to engage in raising awareness and educate the public about their plight, and to counter the media's anti-asylum representation. J, a male asylum seeker and member of *IKAZE*, said the impetus for the group's use of art was: '*[...] to eradicate their [the public's] ignorance of asylum seekers, which emanates from biased media coverage*'; and that through drama: '*I try to educate a lot of people [...] that's why we have the IKAZE drama group*'. By setting up *IKAZE*, J had not only identified a social problem that was a concern to him and his asylum-seeking colleagues, but also made attempts at solving it. Dramatic art therefore became a vehicle for this process: a process that they thought would address the media's negative construction of their plight (Khan 2000). Deploying their drama skills in this way to socially engage local people was an empowering social action. Also, it was an example of how marginalised people like asylum seekers could draw upon the social capital they had among them to actively participate in addressing a social issue they

perceived as problematic to their interest (Brannan et al 2006; Putnam 2000; Dibben & Bartlett 2001; Barnes 1999).

Asylum seekers also deployed artistic awareness-raising events including storytelling and film. *IKAZE*, for example, mainly employed drama, dance, storytelling and poetry, and performed in schools as well as in community events in Edinburgh and across Scotland. Interviewees said that the performances and film-shows were based on real life stories and experiences of the asylum-seeking *IKAZE* members of the cast. Their experiences included public hostility; especially verbal abuse that they said mimicked the media's anti-asylum language. They included being told: 'go back to your country, why are you here, bogus asylum seeker' (J in Edinburgh); and 'asylum seekers eat our donkey' (T in Glasgow). They said that grounding their artistic messages in their personal experiences would provide evocative insights into the debate around the controversial and topical asylum issue, a debate that they thought was dominated by the media. The down-to-earth communication of their own experiences to local people was an empowering way of social engagement and showed asylum seekers as agentic members of the community (Mackenzie et al 2007; Feinberg 1989). When asked why they try to address the media representations in this way, J said:

Because the media coverage is really negative. They failed to understand that asylum seekers are people, real people behind such labels and they look at us, and they think just because they [asylum seekers] are here they [the media] don't understand our plight – why they [asylum seekers] came here, why they [asylum seekers] live here, how they [asylum seekers] get here – so media portrayal is generally negative. (J in Edinburgh)

The down-to-earth artistic communicative engagement helped asylum seekers to represent their persecution not only as individual

traumatic experiences, but also as varied among the asylum-seeking community. Representing the diversity of experiences of persecution helped to counter the dominant media discourse that labelled and represented asylum seekers as a homogenous group of ‘scroungers’, ‘spongers’ and ‘folk devils’. This was also a way for asylum seekers to claim their individual identities (Husband 2005). Given that these diverse voices and perspectives were excluded from press coverage, the artistic enterprise became an avenue to represent themselves as real people with individual identities and experiences, just as their Scottish audience were (Tyler 2006). Consequently, J and his colleagues provided the public an opportunity to re-construct their perception of asylum seekers beyond the inflammatory and stereotypical media imagery of them as ‘bad citizens’. The direct social engagement, therefore, helped to provide a human dimension to their personal stories and restore their ‘sense of self-esteem’, a process that Burton et al (2004) consider as crucial to agency in community participation, social engagement and empowerment. J’s comments were illustrative of this process:

We use IKAZE to empower others, and going round schools. That was a way to challenge the negative media coverage. Like in schools, children will hear what their parents are saying and the parents will hear what the media is saying. So for us it was telling our own story in our own words without a go-between [the media]. (J in Edinburgh)

It is important to note that even though they projected an individual identity, their actions in pulling their social capital together showed that they were capable of socially organising as a collective to pursue a common agenda (Putnam 2000). I would argue, therefore, that interviewees showed a collective form of shared identity that manifested an allegiance to asylum seekers’

individuality as well as to their community or social group. Their willingness to provide a voice for their concerns and to call for the media and the public to respect them through their art was a form of identity politics that could potentially bring about social change (Husband 2005).

The art events allowed question and answer sessions in which members of the audience could ask questions or raise issues relating to the media's coverage and their perception of asylum seekers. These functioned as avenues for direct social engagement and critical pedagogy during which their audiences participated in critiquing media representation of asylum seekers in a non-threatening way (Kellner 2000). Through this, both asylum seekers and Scottish audiences interacted and explored issues that some interviewees said would have been perceived by the public as taboo or embarrassing. For example, after their performance of *The Flat*, a community play based on the Pollok area of Glasgow, T, a Moslem female asylum seeker, said that the members of the audience wanted to know if they sought asylum to flee poverty and to benefit from the welfare system. This is a dominant trope in the media's representation of the asylum issue. She explained:

They think asylum seekers came here to take their money and live in their accommodation and they don't know the real reason why they [asylum seekers] are here. So after that they [audience] changed their mind. (T in Glasgow)

Through directly sharing their experiences by allowing audience members to raise issues, cast members conveyed an image of tolerance. It is indicative of asylum seekers as capable of listening to local residents, views that could be antithetical to theirs. It made them agentic social actors and educators, and presented asylum

seekers as having an inclination to directly engage in debating the asylum issue with residents (Roche 1987; Kellner 2000). T's observation that after their debate members of the audience '*changed their minds*' was insightful in understanding asylum seekers' agency to social change. The engagements were spaces for consensus-forming and learning, and therefore a driver of deliberative and active citizenship that others had argued could contribute to cultural understanding and social cohesion (Cheong et al 2007; Brannan et al 2006; Worley 2005).

In addition, these engagements were an empowering social process for both asylum-seeking and indigenous communities. Interviewees said they were empowering for them because they were avenues for resisting the stigmatisation and social ostracisation they suffered, and which they perceived as emanating from the endemic negative imaging of their community. As for J, it provided the impulse for their participation and social interaction in the art-based awareness-raising projects in their locality. T re-echoed this motivational dynamic for being a cast member of *The Flat*:

*You know the media make us sorry that we are here. We are fed up. Yes, they break us. They demoralise us. And when I am in the bus, and I read a bad article about us and see someone else, local people reading the same newspaper, I feel very shy. [...] they are seeing we are like animals, and that's why we did a drama. It was called *The Flat*. It was about us and local people [...].* (T, in Glasgow)

From the above narrative, T's perception that negative media coverage was responsible for the public's perception of them as 'animals' was the motivating factor for her participation in the play that had been touring local communities across Glasgow. She said that the play was '*a very good opportunity*' for asylum seekers like her

to directly share their experience with local people. The latter participated either as cast members or as members of the audience, and interviewees perceived this as critical to their efforts to counter the pejorative coverage such as T encountered in the newspaper on a Glasgow bus. Their direct engagement this way was also a representation of the resilience among asylum seekers to overcome the stigma that they attributed to the pejorative asylum coverage (Clarke 2005). Despite acknowledging that *'I felt very shy'* because asylum seekers were depicted *'like animals'*, T and her asylum-seeking colleagues continued to resist this type of stigma by performing. Their resilience was driven by the responsibility of citizenship: to engage and debate with members of the local community about a perceived social problem of stigma, isolation and hostility, as well as to foster a better understanding of the issue (Doheny 2007).

Interviewees' perceptions were that directly engaging with the Scottish public was also equally empowering for local residents. They argued that their engagement had exposed local residents to an alternative message or source of information about the refugee condition. Inherently, this had redeemed residents from being captive consumers of the media's negative asylum stories and allowed them to re-conceptualise asylum seekers in a friendly way. As T recounted: *'Even the local people who played with us [in the drama] said: I use to be like that'*. T viewed the evoking of a cathartic response and a frank admission of anti-asylum attitude from a Scottish cast member who is also a local resident as indicative of their gradual success in winning the hearts and minds of the community.

These awareness-raising interventions were complemented by socio-cultural events. In the Kinnieshead Community of Glasgow, asylum seekers and local residents continually organised events that

brought both communities together to engage in social and inter-ethnic dialogue and awareness-raising. R, an asylum seeker-organiser, explained his motivation for participating in the delivery of such events:

That is why we put the international family day event; for people to come and see what we [asylum seekers] can offer. To see the good things [...]. (R in Glasgow)

The event celebrated the ethnic and cultural diversity of family life in the locality and is now delivered on an annual basis. As with the artistic events, the socio-cultural ones were an avenue for representing asylum seekers as individuals of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, rather than the stereotypical image of sameness projected by media filters. The socio-cultural events also represented historical sites to safeguard asylum seekers' cultural heritage for themselves and their offspring. As R put it:

Well, we live in a diverse society, and that is globalise today, and we have to understand that, and why we respect the [British] culture, the law of the land [UK], we equally keep our own culture and that in itself will make our own children to understand where they come from. (R in Glasgow)

Socio-cultural events served another function: they became symbols of multiple citizenship identities. First, it is indicative of the ethnic and cultural diversity of British, or in this case Scottish, society and the multiculturalism of British citizenship. Second, it represented the transnational citizenship of asylum seekers, who still had a sense of cultural attachment and identity with their countries of origin. In this regard, the socio-cultural events were expressions of asylum seekers' cultural identities, which they thought would be good for their children to sustain. They, therefore, represented themselves as

repositories of cultural knowledge for both the local community and for posterity (Khan 2000). It was a responsibility that R took seriously:

Well, certainly that is why I am doing what I am doing. I think it is good [...] and I think I have the responsibility to contribute [...]. (R in Glasgow)

Asylum seekers' sense of agency in addressing issues of interest to them is part of being responsible, as social and cultural sites, for forging social action, social engagement and empowerment. Socio-cultural events provided them with a platform for political, social and cultural activism. This is because they provided the Scottish public with an alternative communication channel, other than the UK press, about the asylum issue. This facilitated a learning process that could potentially engender social change (Roche 1987). The artistic and socio-cultural agentic process complemented another commonly deployed instrument of social engagement and empowerment, communal talk and dialogue.

Communal talk and dialogue

Whilst artistic and socio-cultural events were usually aimed at general audiences, 'communal talk and dialogue' was targeted at a specific segment of community residents. Interviewees said that they comprised sections of the community that were prone to displaying anti-asylum behaviour, which interviewees perceived to emanate from consuming the media's negative asylum stories. I will refer to asylum seekers' awareness-raising work with young people of school-going age and drug addicts in Glasgow to illustrate the significance of this strategy.

According to R, his work with young people in schools in the Pollok community of Glasgow involved:

[...] different programmes and activities that have been running either through the schools or the local community. For example for the schools we have an awareness-raising project, where we go to all the primary schools in the local area and raise awareness of why we are here. (R in Glasgow)

T provided a similar insight into the significance of ‘communal talk and dialogue’ as a form of direct engagement with school children:

We go to schools and speak with children about asylum. And this is in primary seven. And the children ask us how we fled. And other many questions, and we answered them. (T in Glasgow)

As with the ‘art and socio-cultural’ events, interviewees said that the embedded ‘question and answer’ sessions facilitated a conversational dialogue that was crucial to countering their audience’s misconception of asylum seekers. In particular, they were an effective way of challenging and changing young people’s mediated negative construction of asylum seekers, as T explained:

So one day, the teacher ask the children to write about their opinion about asylum seekers.[...] and one boy wrote: “I saw an article in the newspaper and it was exactly different from what we’ve been told by the group of asylum seekers, so I realised that they don’t give us the right information”. (T in Glasgow)

Embedded in this narrative was an example of the productivity of communicative exchanges between members of the asylum-seeking and host communities. The young audience member said he had gained a firsthand insight and understanding of the asylum issue, albeit scant, which contributed to his re-conceptualisation of the

asylum seeker. This process of politicisation and awareness-raising thrived on a critical pedagogical approach that is empowering for both interlocutors (Kellner 2000). Informal dialogical exchanges like this are socially engaging and fulfil a communitarian, deliberative and active citizenship agenda (Brannan et al 2006; Doheny 2007). They represent asylum seekers as taking responsibility to develop better understanding and knowledge of their condition. Doheny (2007) argues that this form of socially-framed dialogical engagement constitutes deliberative citizenship. It could potentially facilitate social change, social cohesion and empowerment. In addition, the ‘talk and dialogue’ sessions served an important communication strategy: to indirectly reach a wider audience, especially parents and other adult members of the community that interviewees found difficult to reach and engage with. R continued:

And from that we get feedback from the children and that has been very influential to the way those children have gone back and influence their own parents. And the impact of that is that we have better community relations. Now, with some of the parents, that was at first, eh, was problematic for us. (R in Glasgow)

T’s narrative of the domino effect of this intervention in facilitating ‘better community relations’ was poignant:

So after that [the talk in school] when they started to know they changed their minds. If you see now the Pollok in 2007 is not the same Pollock in 2001 or 2002. [...] Even one of our friends faced bad behaviour from a local family. But when she went to the school, and talk to children, the boy [...] maybe he went home and talked about what he has been told, the lady [the boy’s mum] changed her mind and started talking to my friend. My friend said: “when she sees me, she says hello and she told me about what I told her son [in school]”. So we got a good result from this project. (T in Glasgow)

T's experience illustrated that asylum seekers like her and her friends were capable of moving beyond their social networks to interact with local residents who T and other asylum seekers initially perceived as hostile. It represented a form of social bridging and social connectivity by interviewees to reach beyond their asylum seeking community and interact with local residents. Roche (1987) argued that this form of agency for social bridging and social change could only be realised through a learning process as the one narrated by T. Awareness-raising about the plight of asylum seekers through 'talk and dialogue' with school children, therefore, provided what I would describe as 'double-social bridging': first, a direct social connection with children, and second, an indirect one with other adults through the mediated agency of children. Interviewees hoped that these children-mediated agentic channels would educate parents and other adults that children encountered. R and T perceived adult local residents as being difficult not only to reach, but also to win over through changing their conceptions. Directly engaging with young people, therefore, was strategically important for transforming the perceived anti-asylum mindset and attitudes of the community:

Children play a good role in our [adults'] lives. May be when they go home they speak to their families, neighbours, friends and they give them what they heard from us [asylum seekers] and not from others [the media]. (T in Glasgow)

Prominence was accorded to targeting members of society that asylum seekers perceived as human sites for harbouring and perpetrating anti-asylum attitudes and actions in the community. This was evident in 'talk and dialogue' sessions delivered among drug addicts in the Sighthill area of Glasgow. P, an African female asylum seeker, narrated her experience in participating in these events:

[...]You know, when we talk to them that we realised that these people, it doesn't mean that they don't want us. They've never been told by the government that we were coming to live within their community. That's why they don't accept us. When we told them how we came here. How we are living. They started to tell us that they didn't know that we are not allowed to work. They didn't know that some asylum seekers are educated. Some [migrants] are just here for professional jobs, not even seeking asylum. They thought that everyone who is driving a car, has got a black skin is an asylum seeker sponging on their money to buy that car. We told them no. They are professionals...they applied for their jobs and just came to come and help. Because you need some educated persons from other countries. [...] we told that you need nurses [...] you need teachers [...]. They said government should have told us before they dispersed asylum seekers. Now they accept us. We work hand in hand with them. (P in Glasgow)

From this excerpt, interviewees' representation of asylum seekers was in stark contrast to the dominant media tropes that communicate asylum seekers as: exploiting the welfare and asylum systems; a facade for economic migration; and, a burden on the welfare state. Her explanation not only shattered the myth that asylum-seeking had been a facade for economic migrants, but also explained to the audience the reasons and benefits of economic migration. In addition, the interviewees represented asylum seekers as suffering exclusion from the labour market and an under-utilisation of their human and intellectual resources. They blamed their marginalisation and mistreatment on government policies that provided them with fewer social welfare rights, including the right to paid work (Tyler 2006, p.188). Contrary to media representation of asylum seekers as '*sponging on their [taxpayers'] money*', they represented asylum seekers as resourceful and productive, as well as willing to contribute to social welfare. I would argue that this form of informal and deliberative engagement by asylum seekers amounted to claims-

making. They were claiming rights from the state that would enable them to exercise certain responsibilities, even though these rights were denied them by the state as they were not considered as citizens (see Bosniak 1998; Brubaker 1992; Stewart 1995). The ‘talk and dialogue’, therefore, facilitated understanding of their predicament among the audience, and could win public support to campaign for social change in their favour (see Clarke 2005; Worley 2005; Forrest & Kearns 2001).

P said that through these interactions interviewees learned that the hostility by members of the community, such as drug addicts, emanated from a lack of information about why and how they came to be in Sighthill as asylum seekers. The audience attributed their ignorance to government failure to educate them about the asylum condition. Roche (1987) argued that communicative exchanges between newcomers and local residents that facilitated ‘interchangeability of standpoints’ of this nature, were crucial to social change. They facilitated a learning process where both asylum seeker newcomers and host communities understood and accepted each other’s perspective. Indeed, interviewees showed a pragmatic acceptance that public hostility was not only engendered by the press’s anti-asylum coverage, but by government failure to engage residents and educate them about their plight. A similar pragmatism was evident in the drug-addicts’ confession about their ignorance. The socially engaging ‘talk and dialogue’ with local residents, therefore, helped interviewees to understand the motivations behind local residents’ anti-asylum attitudes and actions. This sort of understanding of the dynamic of anti-asylum attitudes would empower interviewees and build their capacity to engage in the life of their community (Barnes 1999). Engaging directly with the school

children of Pollok and Kinnieshead, who T said *'have gone back and influence their own parents'*, as well as the drug addicts of Sighthill that P perceived to be *'more worried about asylum seekers coming here'*, were illustrative of this. It exemplified how one vulnerable community of asylum seekers could empower another – young people and drug addicts – and bring about positive change in the way both communities perceived each other and engaged with each other (Clarke 2005). The 'communal talk and dialogue' sessions were therefore considered by interviewees as imperative for challenging the perceived ignorance of the asylum condition among the Scottish public.

Conclusion

This discussion has explored ways in which asylum seekers are countering their negative representation in the British press by deploying their artistic, social and cultural capacities. The interventions were an example of a marginalised community challenging the media's hegemonic discourse with regard to the asylum issue. They also exemplified how asylum seekers were challenging the conflictual dichotomous boundary embedded in media communication that presents the indigenes as the 'responsible citizen' and asylum seekers as the 'folk devil' or 'bad citizen'. The latter is what media and political discourses blame for the breakdown of the former, the national citizenship order (Gifford 2004; Roche 1987; Crick 2000). By undertaking awareness-raising endeavours, members of the asylum-seeking community were contributing to a political and critical pedagogy that provided alternative knowledge about the refugee condition to British citizens. It constituted an

integral part of asylum seekers' contribution to social change and being part of 'responsible' citizenry.

Also, I have discussed how asylum seekers were agents of social engagement and empowerment. They did so by social bridging, communicative exchanges and pulling together their social capital. Through their social engagement with local residents, interviewees contributed to '*better community relations*' and social cohesion. Their interventions were an empowering process on two counts. First, in the context of asylum seekers as one of the most marginalised groups in the UK (Buchanan & Grillo 2003), interviewees were empowered to challenge the media's hegemony on knowledge and information that they perceived to influence public opinion. Second, I have shown that they empowered local residents, including young people and drug addicts, to also challenge and critique the media's pathology of asylum seekers as 'folk devils', and to re-conceptualise the asylum issue in a more positive light.

This form of participation and engagement was a negotiated collective interest between members of the asylum-seeking and host communities, and could be instrumental in building good community relations and a cohesive society. Deploying 'artistic and socio-cultural' as well as 'talk and dialogue' enterprises, asylum seekers and refugees have shown that they are capable of being agentic forces of social change, engagement and empowerment.

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