Practices of welcome with refugee and asylum seeking migrants in rural Wales: 'literacies of doing' and the (re)writing of place.

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Abstract

This thesis examines practices of welcome with refugee and asylum seeker migrants in rural Monmouthshire, Wales. Centred on two case studies, it explores how people with very different experiences and histories of migration, and very different senses of familiarity with being in rural Wales, encounter each other through activities such as walking, cooking, dance, celebrations and outings, which take place in a variety of spaces from homes to community venues to hillsides. While there is valuable scholarship to be drawn on about welcome in the city, this study shifts the focus to a rural setting, one that is often considered unconnected to global issues such as migration and one which is often experienced as unwelcoming by racialised and minoritised groups.

The theoretical framework brings Sara Ahmed's work on modes of encounter together with conceptualisations of language as social participation. It draws on Doreen Massey's conceptualisation of space as the intersections of stories so far set in wider power geometries and also to the complex relation to place that Avtar Brah's notion of diasporic space offers. Moving away from ideas of integration the thesis advances the

idea of ‘literacies of doing’ as way of reconceptualising relations of hospitality and emphasising the ways in which space and place are re-written through the spoken and unspoken language practices that members of these groups engage in as they find ways of being together.

The approaches to research are grounded in a feminist praxis that seeks to account for, but not necessarily resolve, the issues of researching across inequalities. The methodology is considered as a form of creative bricolage, working with the resources available at the time (during the pandemic). This echoes the creative and improvisational ways of engaging with each other across difference that was evident in both case studies.

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: [redacted]

Date: 19th September 2023

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed: [redacted]

Date: 19th September 2023

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for electronic sharing for inter-library loan (subject to the law of copyright) and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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The university's ethical procedures have been followed where appropriate, and ethical approval has been granted.

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Acknowledgements

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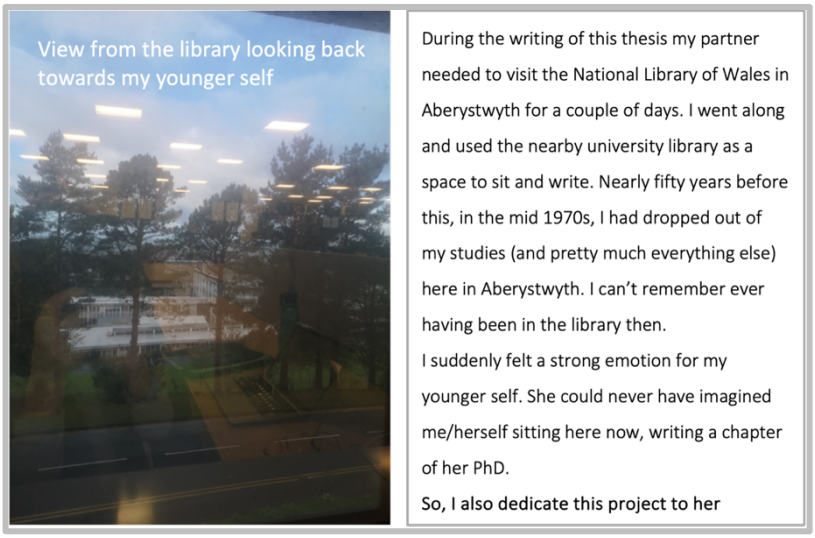
Talking of walking, I have to mention the good company of our dog Holly, because she is the reason for my daily walks where some of the best thinking happens. She has often witnessed me talk into my phone as I record fragments of research related ideas that I can't let escape.

My thesis is dedicated to my son Adam Mahmoud,
and to the memory of his father Abduselam Mahmoud.



Finally, a quote from writer and performer Kae Tempest in an acknowledgement of the other forces at play…

> Behind every exchange and encounter, every missed chance or lucky break, behind every event or non-event in a person's life, there are entire weather systems, pushing for or pushing against.
> Kae Tempest (2020) *On Connection* p34

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Terminology

There are different discourses around migration, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers according to context; popular, academic and activist discourses are all different. I have spent some time thinking about what is appropriate for the context of this thesis. It is not perfect but I think it is suitable for the job in hand. There is a need to find a way of acknowledging the differences and inequalities between the statuses and roles participants have without fixing them in binary identifications such as migrant/non-migrant or refugee/volunteer. I want to work against divisive state categorisations based on citizenship and immigration status and the negative discourse of the hostile environment but at the same time not deny the fact of their common usage in the time and place of this project. There is also, with the reader in mind, the practicality of finding a convenient shorthand to avoid using clumsy and longwinded descriptions every time to refer individuals and to how the case study groups are constituted. These are some of the terms used.

migrant

In the text this is a short, generic term which usually refers to refugee and asylum seeking migrants. Unless stated otherwise it always refers to transnational migrants.

refugee migrant

This is sometimes used as a shorthand for refugee *and* asylum seeker migrants unless the different status is relevant.

asylum seeker

Used where it is relevant to identify this particular status.

resettled families

This is a term that I have noticed is increasingly used by Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary (AToS) volunteers specifically for the AToS families who arrived under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) scheme.

Syrian families/women

I sometimes use this for the same group as above. It is useful but at the same time problematic in that it homogenises a group by nationality. AToS volunteers find it a more personalised reference than 'refugee families'

non-refugee

There is also the question of how to refer to those who are not transnational migrants (particularly in the Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary (AToS) group), and who are seen as more 'local' by virtue of the time they have been in the Wales, how far they have moved to be here, and their non-racialised appearance. I don't wish to perpetuate the idea of whiteness being the norm that doesn't need to be named. I am reluctant to describe this group only in binary terms based on what they are *not* (i.e. non-migrant) nor, conversely, on what they are perceived to *be* that migrants are not (i.e. 'local'). They are people with secure citizenship status, and generally with more economic and social security, but all this is hard to articulate in one phrase. This is the term I am least comfortable with but have needed to use it at times and at the time of writing have not found anything to replace it.

volunteer

This term is debated within the AToS group as there is a wish not to emphasise the distinction between volunteers and the refugee migrants. However, there is an undeniable delineation between non-migrants taking certain roles because of the particular local knowledges and social positioning that they have, that the refugee migrants (at least during their engagement with the group) do not.

members

In the case of Migrants Organise (MO) many of the migrant members are also volunteers. Migrants Organise tend to refer to anyone who is involved with the organisation, in whatever capacity, as 'members', and I have used the same terminology as far as possible.

mixed groups

I have purposefully chosen to research groups composed of a mix of refugee migrants, asylum seekers, other transnational migrants, people who have migrated within the UK, (often from urban to rural locations) and people who have always lived in the area. In the case of the Migrants Organise case study it is also a mix of temporary visitors and local residents. When I refer to mixed groups this can be any combination of the above

Abbreviations

MO

Migrants Organise – a London based organisation described in full in the relevant case study in Chapter 4.

AToS

Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary – a local group which is part of the nationwide Cities of Sanctuary network, described in full in the relevant case study in Chapter 4.

VPRS

Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme – a government scheme (now defunct) that resettled certain nationalities of refugees. They arrived with full refugee status and some funding and support workers to assist their settlement. All the Syrian families in the AToS case study arrived under this scheme.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Arriving in Wales

About three hours after leaving London, I am driving along a winding road in Southeast Wales. It's dark and it's teeming with rain. Resting on the passenger seat is a large, old-fashioned key with an oval head, a long stem and big teeth. The dog sleeps quietly in the back. I'm not sure how much further it is. Will I remember the place? I've been only twice before, very briefly. Finally, I recognise the house and turn in off the road. After a brief struggle with the big key in the front door I enter the house. It is empty. There is electricity but no furniture, no kitchen equipment, no heating, no phone signal, radio or internet. We just have a kettle and tea. The dog and I have nothing to do but sit on the floor waiting for my partner P to arrive a few hours later. That night we sleep on mats in the living room.

The next morning is fine weather. I look around at the landscape with some disbelief. I've holidayed in this kind of place many times, but this is where I live now. The familiar furniture arrives in a truck, and we start to settle in over the next few weeks. I visit the local community centre to find out what goes on there and by chance I meet people from the Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary group. I attend their meeting – I feel welcomed and at ease and sense the possibility of belonging. I liaise with a contact at Migrants Organise and a couple of months later drive to the station to meet one of their members arriving from London for a few days break from the city. He took a chance and so did we. The first of many. It feels like I'm going to be OK here.

What must it be like to have travelled across much longer geographical, cultural and emotional distances and arrive on a winter night somewhere you've never been before, with no key, with no one coming to join you, without the comfort of familiar things arriving? *Then* what is it like to connect with a local group such as Town of Sanctuary or to take up an invitation from Migrants Organise to stay in the countryside, with people unknown to you? And what happens next?

However you arrive, what is it like to find yourself expectedly or unexpectedly in rural Wales? What is it like to come to know, and be together with, those who you might expect or be surprised to find there?

In this introductory chapter I will outline the main topic of my research. I will briefly set the scene in terms of its geographical location, and also locate it in the specific time period in which it took place. I will then explain how I arrived at my interest in researching this particular topic. This is followed by setting out the overarching themes of the project and my research questions. I will indicate the main bodies of literature

and key scholars I have engaged with, which will be elaborated on in detail in Chapter 2, and which inform the thesis as a whole. I will also broadly outline my approach to research, in preparation for more detail in Chapter 3. I will then outline the nature of the case studies and the rationale for the organisation of the thesis. The themes of the subsequent chapters will then be introduced individually. Finally, I will outline what the project's contribution might be, to the fields of study within which it sits, and to the kind of activism on which it is based. Overall, the blurring of boundaries between research processes and activism has been central to the thesis and something I hope is reflected in it.

The research project looks at loosely organised, informal encounters of welcome, with and for refugee and asylum seeker migrants in a small market town and a nearby village in Monmouthshire, an area of Southeast Wales. It examines how people with very different experiences and histories of migration, and very different senses of familiarity with being in rural Wales, engage in a range of practices together. These include cooking, walking, writing, crafts, celebrations, outings, and short breaks, and they take place in a variety of spaces such as homes, community centres, cafés, hillsides and gardens. The study examines how these groups of people find ways of being together that make sense of social and cultural differences, and also the inequalities of economic (in)security and the (in)stability of citizenship status that exist between them. I am interested in how narratives around welcome, migration and rurality are created and mobilised through joining in these activities together in a rural context. The research investigates how these small-scale activities, in what might be considered 'out of the way' places, become sites of knowledge and narrative production and in what ways prevailing narratives around these themes of welcome, migration and rurality might be sustained or unsettled. The thesis also explores in what sense these intersecting trajectories of people, the practices they engage in, and the spaces they create, can be counted as political. As is evident in the research questions below, my research takes language as way in to examining these themes. The role of participatory local language practices, which include both spoken and unspoken repertoires of communicative resources, is key to my research into these encounters of welcome. I have formulated the interests and concerns outlined above into the following research questions:

- How do the groups of people in the case studies, encountering each other through expressions of welcome with and for refugees and asylum seeker migrants, make sense of the inequalities and differences between them in relation to their current social and economic position, their widely different experiences of mobility, their language histories, and their sense of familiarity with being in rural Wales?
- What relations of hospitality emerge through repeated encounters and developing relationships that sustain beyond the initial threshold of welcome?
- How do the activities that members of these groups engage in shape spaces, create knowledges and generate narratives about migration, welcome, and rurality?
- In what ways are narratives mobilised beyond these encounters?
- How do the processes at play in these encounters contribute to the writing of place?

There are some features of the context that have a significant bearing on the project. Firstly, the rural setting of the research is important. The countryside is often considered as a rather apolitical space, isolated from and unaffected by global issues such as migration, which is often seen as an urban rather than a rural concern. While for some rural spaces represent peace and respite, for racialised and minoritised groupings of people they can often be experienced as unwelcoming. The countryside is popularly conceptualised as the natural home of unchanging national values and traditions. It is associated with stasis rather that mobility. All these things have an impact on how welcome, and indeed 'unwelcome', for refugees and asylum seekers is organised both publicly and behind the scenes. Acts of welcome take on a particular form in a rural setting where numbers of migrants are small and where the everyday interactions more likely in the city cannot be taken for granted. This study considers how people create spaces and narratives of welcome in what might initially be considered unexpected ways and in unlikely places. It provides evidence that rural 'corners' of Wales are, in multiple ways, globally connected. This opens up possible routes into a sense of

belonging linked to the re/creating of rural spaces as open to new combinations people, relationships and practices.

As well as the rural setting, the Welsh context also situates the project in some specific ways. The devolved government in Wales published a plan in 2019 (Welsh Government 2019) to become the first ever Nation of Sanctuary. What this means in practice is a topic for debate (Bernhard 2022) as, although Wales might seek to differentiate itself from England and Westminster, the Welsh government does not have any control over immigration policy in terms of border control. It does however have scope to ameliorate some of the effects of hostile policies once asylum seekers are resident in Wales. It seeks to ensure that refugees have the access to housing, health, education etc. that they are entitled to, and has offered a period of free transport for refugee migrants for example. Even as a symbolic status (Wyn Edwards & Wisthaler 2023), the idea of building a culture of welcome does make the Welsh setting a particular one. Using the discourse of welcome at government level is in itself a differentiating factor in relation to England at least (Scotland and Northern Ireland are different again). In the region of Wales in which the study takes place there is little Welsh spoken in everyday public encounters, but the presence of Welsh/English bilingualism in the environment, the widespread learning of Welsh, in effect the presence of language practices not always so dominated by English, is something that also gives the Welsh context a particularity that is relevant to this project, not least because of its central concerns with language practices.

Finally in terms of context, are the continuing and increasingly harsh immigration policies designed to create what Theresa May in 2012 (as Home Secretary in the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government of the time) openly stated as a 'hostile environment' for asylum seekers. The idea of a 'refugee crisis' also emerged. State-led negative discourse around refugees and migrants, heavily bolstered by mainstream media, continues to have an influence that plays out in many ways that have serious material effects on migrants of all kinds in their daily lives. In contrast to this, many organisations both local and national, long established and more recent, continue to campaign and to offer welcome in different ways that push towards a more hospitable environment.

My research interest stems from my own move to rural Wales following a career in community-based ESOL teaching and coordinating in Northwest London, and related activism around migrant issues and anti-racism. Through this change of location and life stage, I came across new (to me) forms of activism locally, which were centred on ideas of welcome. I became involved in these and I also set up a mini project inviting refugee migrants from London to stay for short breaks in our home in a small village just outside Abergavenny.

Information from the 2021 census shows that in the London borough of Brent (my home and workplace for over 30 years), only 34.6% of the population identified as White, and less than half the population (43.9%), were born in UK. In contrast Monmouthshire (where I live now and where the projects are based) has a 96.9% white population and 94.5% were born in the UK. In Brent 20% of households did not have English or Welsh as the main language while in Monmouthshire the figure is 0.8%. After living and working in communities where encounters with difference in diasporic spaces is unremarkable and can be experienced across all the senses, an environment where those racialised and minoritised as 'other' are hyper-visible, yet also invisible in many ways, was a real contrast. I wondered how the violent policies of the hostile environment played out in these apparently cosy and peaceful, and overwhelmingly white, corners of rural Wales.

The research is based on the activities of two groups I had, at the time of the research project, been involved in for over 5 years. One is Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary (AToS), which mainly forms connections and organises activities with Syrian families resettled in the town. It also organises more public expressions of solidarity and protest, in the face of increasingly oppressive policies towards migrants, but this aspect of their activity is not within the scope of this study. The other is a London-based organisation, Migrants Organise (MO), whose members have come as visitors for short stays with us in my village through my collaboration with their community organising team. This organisation also does important public facing campaigning work nationally.

It was partly through local group Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary (AToS) and links with Migrants Organise (MO) that I developed my own sense of belonging and a sense of

purposeful activity after finishing paid work. At the same time, I found there were growing and persistent questions for me around how this kind of activism worked to shift or sometimes inadvertently reinforce dominant narratives about refugee migrants. These coalesced around concerns as to whether the welcome being offered could at times be complicit in highlighting the 'refugeeness' of particular migrants, reproducing the figure of the migrant as an imposed identity and holding it in place. Were the kinds of activity engaged in by those seen as the welcomers and the welcomed unintentionally preserving uneven power relations? These questions led me to contemplate connecting with scholarship in this field, not necessarily to resolve these concerns, but to clarify my thoughts about this kind of activism in a way that could feed back into it. The other important motivation for this study was to draw attention to what often goes unnoticed in these 'out of the way' places and spaces such as village halls, community centres, domestic spaces, and to the ways in which they can also be seen as political spaces through the encounters and practices that take place in them and from which new stories emerge.

It was not intentional to research with groups I was so involved with myself. The original plan was to research with sanctuary and refugee support groups in different areas of rural Wales, but everything was interrupted for an unknowable period by the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. It was difficult to make fresh contacts during the lockdown periods and time constraints meant that decisions had to be made and the most practical option was to work with groups I knew. For this reason, the thesis focusses on the two groups already mentioned, Migrants Organise and Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary. Though complicating things in many ways, I now feel this has enriched the research. It has been an opportunity for turning a more critical eye towards practices I am personally involved in and in this way scholarship and activism have been mutually beneficial. It is important to acknowledge that the research period with participants is a window of time that is preceded by relations already in place and which continue beyond it.

I will now introduce key areas of scholarship which are expanded on in Chapter 2. Through engaging with literature that examines concepts of mobilities, encounters and language, a suitable theoretical framework was built that helped make sense of what

emerged from the research. In order to understand how individuals with very different experiences of migration arrive at the encounters of welcome that are the subject of this research project, I have drawn on scholarship that focusses on inequalities in mobility, control over mobility, and the forces behind these inequalities (Adey, 2010; Massey, 2005; Sheller, 2018; Skeggs, 2003). Importantly we need to see these forces and inequalities as extending into the rural context of this project (Agyeman & Neal, 2006; Carby, 2021; Cloke, 2006, Woods, 2007; Ware 2022). While my research is concerned with interactions between people who are no longer on the move, I have paid particular attention to literature on the figure of the migrant. This is because the legacy of discourses around those who migrate, and the one-dimensional identity often imposed on them, particularly those racialised and minoritised as 'other', continues to affect transnational migrants well beyond their actual journey. In order to think about the spaces we create through being together once we arrive at these encounters, I have looked to Doreen Massey's (1995, 2005) conceptualisation of space as the intersection of stories so far set within wider power geometries, and also to the complex relation to place that Avtar Brah's (1996, 2020) notion of diasporic space offers.

Moving on to what happens in the encounters themselves, I found Sara Ahmed's work on modes of encounter (2000), worked in with further important theoretical discussions on welcome and hospitality by Dan Bulley (2017, 2023) and Cecile Vigouroux (2019), very convincing ways to look at the practices of welcome that are the subject of this research. This framework draws attention away from fixed identities, particularly those of migrant/non-migrant, guest and host, by its insistence that we do not arrive at encounters with pre-determined identities but we come into being through how we engage with others. It moves towards modes of engagement that take account of people's shifting and multiple relations, without losing sight of the wider power geometries that are always at play.

Interactions between people with very diverse language biographies and varied experiences of communication in English means finding or creating a shared language of participation that goes beyond working across spoken language differences. As these engagements are predominantly centred on 'doing' things together, I have chosen to link the idea of the mode of encounter with the conceptualisation of language as

theorised by scholars such as Suresh Canagarajah (2004), Melanie Cook (2018), Alistair Pennycook (2010), and James Simpson (2015, 2019): as a practice of social participation that includes both spoken and unspoken repertoires of communication. These repertoires are resources that can be assembled in different ways as and when needed or desired. In the context of this research, it is through this blend of spoken and unspoken language that participants encounter each other and I have chosen to call these practices 'literacies of doing'. I want to convey it as an active process where people are not only reading their world but actively inscribing something new onto it. Taking the premise that language and place are co-constituted, as Pennycook (2010) and others do, this approach moves away from looking for a sense of belonging to what is already there and instead opens up possibilities of a new writing of place, especially where more 'unexpected' formations of people and practices have come together in a rural space. This approach can lead to new ways to think about how people feel or show they belong and how they are seen by others as belonging (or not). Literature on citizenship and belonging, particularly Isin's (2008, 2012) writing on acts of citizenship, has been essential to thinking through how these encounters might help facilitate these alternative claims on belonging.

For me these encounters and practices are closely linked with informal learning, and my project has been informed by a long term interest in Paulo Freire's (1987, 1996) work in this area. The kind of intentional and unintentional learning that takes place through doing things together is, I will suggest, inseparable from grassroots knowledge production, which in turn is key to thinking about how narratives around welcome, migration and rurality are created and mobilised through these encounters.

To think about the particularity of the rural context described above, I have drawn on literature that challenges persistent notions of the rural as a homogeneous, apolitical space of permanence and tradition, naturalness and authenticity, untouched by and unconcerned with the wider world. I approach the rurality and the 'local' of the research context in terms of its relation to the global. I frame them not in scalar terms but as simultaneous and co-constituted spheres (Canagarajah, 2004; Johnson, 2016). As both Hazel Carby (2021) and Vron Ware (2021) clearly demonstrate, the rural has always been intimately connected to global histories of colonialism and to current

systems, movements and changes and is in this sense as political as anywhere else. Following Cloke (2006), Woods (2007) and others, I conceptualise the rural as a relational space, with a dynamic connectivity to the urban and global, but a place where diverse narratives are not equally heard, and heterogeneous presences are not equally seen or felt. This perspective matters for my study because it looks at how encounters of welcome might bring some of these presences and narratives into the open, and challenges ideas of who feels, or is considered by others, as in and out of place in the countryside

My thesis builds on valuable theorisations and research into practices of welcome for refugee and asylum seeking migrants in the UK by scholars such as Jennifer Bagelman, Jonathan Darling, Nick Gill and Vicki Squire. Their work, particularly as activist scholars, has resonated with my experience and interests, and has informed much of my approach. This project shifts the urban focus of their work to a rural setting. There is also scholarship that, though not part of the specific conceptual framework outlined above (and detailed in my literature review), is key to my own development as a scholar and grounds my thesis in feminist, anti-colonial, anti-racist theory and practice. In addition, there are those whose approach to scholarship has particularly attracted me and from whom I have learned, particularly in terms of how they write. These will also be acknowledged in the literature review.

Chapter 3 covers discussion of my approach to research practice. My position as researcher brought up the same questions for me as my experience of being active in these groups offering welcome, presenting a need to think about what is going on as we try to connect across inequalities of economic security, migration status, and social positioning. These concerns combined with an intensification of my already existing unease in relation to how practices of welcome might at times inadvertently reproduce these unequal power relations, as well as in some ways temporarily suspend or unsettle them.

The tension between efforts made to minimise the impact of these inequalities, yet a recognition that wider power geometries, rooted in the active legacies of oppression and current regimes of inequality, cannot simply be overcome, is for me a key feature of

what is at play in the encounters researched, as well as in the approach to methods I have chosen to take. I have been guided in this by feminist scholars Rachelle Chadwick (2021) and Claire Hemmings (2012) in how to work with the discomforts in order to develop a feminist research praxis that can open up different ways of knowing, which does not deny difference but foregrounds a search for solidarity based on a shared desire for transformation rather than fixed identities or shared positioning. My aim has been to engage in creative, participatory research which avoids extractive practices and creates space for the co-production of material and knowledges. I hope I have moved beyond simply acknowledging my positionality by making it my responsibility to develop a practice that continually takes it into account and addresses the issues that arise from it.

As I moved through the research process it became evident that the practices, methods and the social relations of my research practice were very close to, or perhaps continuous with, the interactions, activities and social relations at play within the case study groups that were the *object* of research. Also, in the case of the MO case study, the research practice fed directly into the development of further collaborations with MO, so research and activism were interconnected in this way too. Making clear distinctions between my research practice and what has been integral to my embedded position with these groups has not always been possible or, as I came to realise, even desirable. I think of both the research practices and welcome practices as different modes of encounter. My attention also shifted to the process as much as the material produced and this focus on the process as something in itself was something I learned a lot from. Perhaps because of my background in adult and community education I see all these activities, both activism and research, as encounters of informal learning and knowledge production.

Creative methods are central to my project. They are very much based on simple art and craft activities with nothing more than paper, scissors, glue and pens. Creative activities included a home-made postcard exchange, a subsequent exhibition of the cards, creative image making sessions on Zoom and in person, and threads of images, text and emojis on WhatsApp groups. My own amateur creative practice combining text and image to represent the processes at work, is also part of the mix. There were also

six interviews. Creative methods lend themselves to generating the alternative literacies I am interested in, and are more inclusive to speakers of English as an additional language. They combine well with activist aims as both the case study groups had some familiarity with doing creative activities together

I see my research approach as a kind of creative bricolage, of working with the resources available at the time, as a response to circumstances. In the case of this project, this was heavily influenced by Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, but also the mix of participants, our spoken and unspoken language repertoires, access to material resources, my own areas of expertise (or lack of expertise), the rural setting and of course the requirements of a PhD. The idea of bricolage also echoes the creative and improvisational ways of engaging with each other that people in both case studies were involved in. Resources and practices are worked on individually and collectively, by activists, refugee migrants, settled or unsettled residents and visitors, in order to find ways of being together in the rural spaces that I focus on. It is the case of course that people have different resources available to them for this process, some of which hold more power than others.

My aim has been to combine a coherent argument with a desire to reflect the processes at work in a way that, to me, they are mostly experienced - that is as a kind of collage. As you will see in the visual elements of my thesis, I am drawn to creating composite images intersected with language to represent both the activities of welcome and the practices of the research context. It feels close to the form of knowledge production that takes place through the encounters of informal learning that are often unplanned and incidental. It also suits my effort to represent how small and sometimes fleeting moments of encounter take on new kinds of meaning when assembled together.

It is Chapter 3 in which I also mention the impact the different stages of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions in Wales had on the case study groups chosen and the methods of research used. During the research period the gatherings of people that are at the centre of the project ceased altogether, moved online or adapted in other ways in response to changing conditions, and the research practices had to adapt accordingly. The more remote aspects of the research such as the postcard exchange took place in

the spring of 2021. The interviews took place in the autumn of 2021 and the exhibition in May 2022. As the chapter highlights, there were clearly constraints, but there were also unexpected insights and positive effects resulting from the necessity of turning to the idea of bricolage and the 'art of making do' with what was available.

Chapter 4 introduces the two case study groups, Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary (AToS) and Migrants Organise (MO), that my research is based on. It gives some background information on each one and describes my own connection with them. The studies are distinct in many ways, the most obvious difference being that AToS is about connections between people resident in the area while the MO study is focussed on visitors. These differences, plus the variations in timing in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, meant that different methods were chosen to suit each one. A detailed account is given of how the methods and processes of the research played out in each case. This also had an impact on the organisation of the thesis. While the same conceptual framework runs through the whole project, and there are important common threads in both case studies that are consistent with the main arguments of the thesis, there are also differences in emphasis. Some themes emerged more strongly in one than the other, and some were quite specific to each. For this reason, I have organised the thesis chapters so that Chapters 5 and 6 focus on AToS while Chapters 7 and 8 are concerned with MO.

Chapter 5 introduces what I have chosen to call 'literacies of doing', based on conceptualising language as a participatory social practice and closely linked with intentional and incidental informal learning, including English language learning. It examines relations of hospitality as they develop over time, with a particular focus on food. These themes are taken forward into Chapter 6 but framed by the idea of home as a global portal – a key site for narrative production, as experiences from other times and places are drawn in and new narratives are created and mobilised. In this chapter we begin to explore how narratives are shared.

Chapter 7 shifts to focus on the MO study, and the Picture Postcard Conversations project. This was an exchange of postcards during the pandemic lockdown, in which London-based participants' shared their memories of staying in households in

Llanvapley. It is through this project that research and activism became most enmeshed. It is also where the *processes* of both research and activism, as much as any material produced, became equally important to the discussion. The idea of domestic spaces being inextricably connected to other times and places continues to be important, but what comes to the fore is the different ways in which being in, and between, places are expressed and how ideas of distance and proximity are unsettled. The other main section in this chapter covers ideas of rurality, nature, respite, and belonging in the countryside. Perhaps because the participants are visitors from London, this theme is generally more evident in the MO study.

Finally, Chapter 8 is devoted to how the intervention of the Picture Postcard Conversations was taken a step further. A new encounter was initiated in the form of an exhibition in the village of Llanvapley of the postcards, and the return of some of the participants. The chapter follows how the narratives that started in the home space, then moved into the in-between space of the postcard exchange, were now shifted intentionally into a new, more public event space. I look into how, through new formations of people, objects and activities, more complicated relations of welcome came into being, in terms of who were the guests and the hosts, the knowers, the learners and the knowledge producers. It examines how, for the brief time period of the event, the literacies of doing things together characteristic of this mode of encounter, work as a way of finding ways of being together that not only create a new space but generate new narratives. Finally, this chapter raises questions about how narratives moved beyond the event, what traces were left behind in the village and how this process can be counted as something political.

The contributions of my thesis to scholarship on welcome, migration and rurality, rests partly on the way I have combined them together. While there has been a valuable body of work on activism related to welcome for refugee migrants by civil society groups in the city, rural activism of a similar kind has, I suggest, been overlooked. My investigation into how these modes of encounter combine spoken and unspoken language practices, informal learning and narrative production also offers a fresh angle on practices of welcome. Finally, the composite methods and forms of representation I have used contribute to the already rich and varied repertoire of research methods in

geography. To conclude this introduction: the knowledges and meanings produced through the interactions researched for this thesis are, as has been stated, sometimes overlooked. I have attempted to gather some of them here into a form that can be 'seen', whether through including the images and text that were co-produced in the research, through collage I have assembled myself, creative writing as a response, and of course through academic writing. Perhaps these can be viewed as an assemblage of my own repertoires of written and visual language.

Chapter 2: Encounters With Literature

2.1 Introduction

The title of this chapter is chosen to indicate how my approach to reviewing the literature accords with the overall concept of 'encounters' that runs throughout the project. It is encounters with, and responses to, the literatures set out here which, assembled together, inform the arguments and contributions of the thesis. This broader, perhaps more lateral arrangement, rather than a more typical or conventional linear honing down to focus on a very specific body of scholarly material, is consistent with the concept of 'bricolage' that characterises the research practice and the thesis as a whole - that is, the collecting and collaging of multiple elements in order to create something new. This is not to say that every area of literature brought together here carries equal weight in terms of how central it is to the thesis. For each area, the reason for its inclusion, and what aspects of the research it is relevant to, will be made clear during discussion in this chapter, and also through reference to its application to the research material in subsequent chapters.

Undertaking and completing this research project has been a deep learning experience, not least through encounters with scholarly (and other) literature. I want to start my review of the literature by citing some scholars who have been key in developing my understanding of, and guiding my approaches to, important issues and theoretical topics. Some of their writing pertains to the production of theory itself. Others have written important work on feminisms, racialised regimes of domination, and practices of anticolonialism which have had an impact on me in ways that apply to both the academic work and the activism that is central to this project. I refer particularly to Black feminist/activist scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Avtar Brah, bel hooks, Gail Lewis, Lola Olufemi, Hazel Carby, Ruth Wilson Gilmour, from whom I have learnt a great deal. They have expanded my horizons while at the same time drawing my focus in more clearly on issues pertaining to the upholding or undoing of the intertwined systems of white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism, and racism. These issues can and should be woven into whatever context we find ourselves in and whatever project we take on, but

are essential for a project such as this one that engages with issues of mobilities and migration. They have had a big influence on my growth and outlook – as an individual living in these times, and more particularly as a white PhD scholar grappling with my role as a researcher with groups that include racialised minorities. While not necessarily referred to directly in the main body of the thesis, this literature has provided a crucial underpinning to this research and writing in its entirety.

I would also like to note some scholars who I have learned much from in relation to how to situate my research within systems that privilege certain kinds of knowledge. Certain theoretical knowledges are presented as holding some authority in relation to the themes of my research and its participants. Given that this project engages with groups of people who are often outside of (or excluded from) institutions of knowledge and learning, and given that narratives about them are driven by powerful sources that they have little influence on, it is important to think about how certain knowledges come to be known and legitimatised while others go unrecognised. As Sue Jackson puts it, knowledges are deeply embedded in power relations and "what is known and who are the 'knowers' is highly politicised" (Jackson 2010 p245).

Very salient to my work looking to represent the experiences and knowledges of groups that include transnational migrants, Kaplan (1998) stresses the need to detect how colonial discourses are sustained by the way theories of mobility and displacement are explained, pointing out how:

> Immigrants, refugees, exiles, nomads and the homeless […] move in and out of these discourses as metaphors, tropes, and symbols but rarely as historically recognised producers of critical discourse themselves. (Kaplan 1998 p2)

In a similar vein, I share Beverley Skeggs' concern to question who is making the theory and 'to whom does it speak?' (Skeggs 2003 p46). What happens amongst people who have experienced both thinking and doing mobility in very different cultural and historical contexts? What different meanings might they attach to their own, others', and the wider phenomena of mobility? Western originated theories may not speak to,

or for, everyone. How do we account for participants' different relation to theoretical knowledges and how does it affect what knowledges are recognised and recorded? Within this study, white, long term UK residents are more likely to be able to express themselves in the dominant framework for knowledge production than more recently arrived participants. I do not think the questions I raise here invalidate the research but they need to be taken into account and, in small ways, through my reading of literature, my methods and my writing, I hope I have done more than simply acknowledge them. It is inevitable however that what follows is the product of a particular, institutionalised system of Western scholarly thought.

I am a white researcher and activist working amongst groups of people composed of a mix of those who are racialised and minoritised and people who, because of their whiteness, are not. I am aware of the limitations of what I can contribute to certain aspects of discussion that is not offered more legitimately and coherently elsewhere, by those with a lived perspective who have thought and fought painfully over these issues. In such a contested field I feel, as a white woman, a hesitancy in my contribution to certain debates. Thinking through Alison Phipps' (2020) work, writing as a white woman on the limitations of white feminism, has been invaluable for me in this respect.

We are all implicated in a world where racism exists so we have a responsibility to address it. I have found much to help with my thinking on this in Alana Lentin's (2020) formulations of race and racialisation as a technology of control whose ends are the maintenance of white supremacy "on both a local and planetary scale" (p5) and also her call to address a "profound lack of racial literacy in the public sphere" (p11). It is important to think of anti-racism and associated work on anticolonialism as a continuing practice - there is always more work to be done. Coupled with a wish not to evade responsibility there is, for me, an anxiety about inadvertently doing harm. But as (another, different) Alison Phipps (2019) proposes, you have to have a willingness, you just have to 'embark' – there is "no pure place to stand" (p4). She suggests that decolonising cannot *only* work on a large societal scale. One "can't work to a theory of change which suggests that it is only with change at a societal or political level that decolonising can occur" (p24). With a willingness to 'embark' comes the need to be alert to the pitfalls of carelessly doing harm along the way. I also mention Jenny Edkins

and Les Back as being influential in raising questions that have hovered in my mind throughout the research process - questions about what scholarly work does, how the academy does not stand outside the world looking in, looking at what can be done in an unjust world, and about themes of attentiveness and responsibility, of uncertainty but also of hope.

I will now move on to a number of interconnected themes, drawn from various bodies of literature, that have formed the theoretical framework for my project. The first section addresses theory on mobilities and space that help understand how individuals arrived at the encounters of welcome in rural Wales and how the practices they engage in both create and are shaped by the spaces they move between. I then discuss work on the figure of the migrant as, although the refugee participants in the case studies are no longer on the move, their continued categorisation as a particular kind of migrant continues to have implications in many aspects of their lives. Following this, I have turned to work on modes of encounter in relation to welcome and hospitality as a way of moving beyond fixed identities of guest/host, and thinking about how power relations play out beyond the initial threshold of acts of welcome. It has been useful to relate acts of welcome to the idea of acts of citizenship in order to bring in a political dimension to these small-scale encounters.

Language plays a key role in these interactions and the theorisation of language as a social, participatory practice has led to one of the central arguments of my thesis concerning 'literacies of doing' and knowledge production. Linked to this there is a brief but important section on encounters as instances of informal learning. Drawing on literature concerned with conceptualisations of rurality has been a way of locating the arguments of this study in terms of its setting, with particular attention to the unwelcoming aspect of the countryside to racialised members of these groupings. This is the environment within which those participating in these encounters are interacting, and when talking about the writing of place, it is the rural that is being re/written. Finally, I will refer to literature that has addressed some similar research areas to mine and which my research has been able to build on.

2.2 Mobilities and the co-creation of space

However 'tucked away' in rural environs these local engagements are, it is important to recognise that they cannot escape where they sit in histories of colonial power and systems of domination in the postcolonial world of which they are a part. This section considers literature that focuses on how global forces drive freedoms and restrictions on movement (Ong, 2005; Anderson Sharma and Wright, 2012; Nyers and Rygiel, 2012). The two case study groups are composed of refugee migrants, other transnational migrants, people who have lived in the same area most of their lives and people who have migrated within the UK. For this reason, a discussion on mobilities and migration helps us to understand how we all came to be here, how mobilities figure in our relationships with one another, and how new narratives of migration might emerge from encounters within these groups. I have followed Adey (2010), Anderson (2012), Cresswell (2006), Merriman (2012), Nail (2015), Sheller (2018) and others in their insistence that mobilities are 'central to being human' (Cresswell 2006 p1). Importantly however, they warn against generalising, essentialising and homogenising a mobile world and emphasise paying attention to the forces that govern the unevenness of how and where people are able to move. Human mobility has been, and still is, considered variously as progressive, liberating and aspirational or as threatening, deviant and transgressive. Similarly, stasis, usually set in opposition to this, is seen as stable, desirable and normative or as backward looking, left behind and a sign of failure. As Brah puts it, mobility can be treated with suspicion in a sedentarist world view, or it can be valorised, being "coded as freedom" (Brah 2022 p 31). It is entirely possible for these inconsistent meanings to exist concurrently, since the outlook adopted depends on who is control of, benefiting from, threatened by, or oppressed by the ability to move or stay still (Anderson 2012, Cresswell 2006, Massey 2005, Merriman 2012, Sheller 2018, Skeggs 2003). It is likely that multiple meanings exist even within the small groups of people researched here, with their widely different experiences and positions in relation to mobilities and migrations. There is an important correlation between stasis and perceptions of rurality which will be covered later.

Scholars have also argued that the way mobilities are unevenly experienced is socially differentiated and that the mobility of some is contingently related to the immobility of

others (Adey 2006, 2010; Cresswell 2006; Skeggs 2003; Sheller 2018). As Skeggs sums it up, “mobility and control over mobility both reflect and reinforce power” (Skeggs 2003 p49) preserving advantage for some, and reinforcing inequalities. Brah highlights how power dynamics continue beyond the migration journey.

> Issues of power are central to who travels, how, to where, and in terms of what socio-economic, political and cultural positionality the migrating person comes to occupy at the destination (Brah 2022 p25)

Skeggs contributes the idea of mobility as a resource, to which not everyone has equal access. This fits well with the approach I am taking in looking at how people getting together in practices of welcome navigate their uneven access to a range of other resources too, such as the material, social and linguistic ones. Mimi Sheller (2018) puts forward the idea of mobility injustice, and I support this direct calling out of ‘unevenness’ as injustice as well as her claim that the idea of mobility injustice puts a lot of other concerns – racial, colonial, classed, climate, gendered, queer injustices, “into conversation with each other” (p2).

I take the view that mobilities are inextricably tied up with the creation of space (Adey, 2006; Cresswell, 2006; Massey, 2005). I am drawn to Doreen Massey’s (2005) conceptualisation of space as the intersection of trajectories and the weaving together of ‘stories so far’. According to Massey, place is constituted through intersecting trajectories and collections of stories articulated within wider power geometries. People, practices and things come together in different moments as constellations (Massey 2005 pp129-131). This idea of place as an open, unfinished, heterogeneity of processes and practices is one that lends itself to the social spaces and practices that are central to this project.

Following Massey’s work on space and the notions of mobility discussed above does not I think preclude the relevance and importance to this thesis of Avtar Brah’s work on diaspora theory and diaspora space. Key writers on this such as Brah (1996) and Gilroy (1997) address questions of space, time, belonging and identity in relation to the experience of diasporic groups within wider populations. It recognises the particularities

of geographies and histories that brought diasporic groups to where they are; summed up by Gilroy's well-known phrase of "roots and routes" (Gilroy in Brah 1996 p192). As Brah (2020) explains, roots can refer to the putting down of roots in settlement as well as the uprooting of displacement. These diasporic genealogies provide the resources and constraints that are "worked on creatively or positively, reluctantly or bitterly in the present" (Gilroy 1997 p304). Diaspora theory challenges simple dualities by offering a view of space where looking back and looking forward, concepts of past and present, here and there, are not separated. It takes into account the complex notions of home and belonging that the diasporic experience brings. It is able to hold the ambivalences and contradictions of dislocation and relocation, being settled and unsettled in a space that is always open to movement, change and possibilities and where new cultural formations can come into being. It does not box people into fixed identities and critiques the idea of bounded communities which promote a static view of culturally homogeneous groups defined as being more or less distanced from the social and cultural 'norms' of the majority (or as Audre Lorde (2017) has said – the "mythical norms"). The essentialising of communities and their cultures is particularly associated with women (Massey 1992), representing them as embodiments of tradition and reproducers of authentic culture. This is particularly relevant to the AToS study which is overwhelming focussed on women. Also of relevance to this project which is focussed on small scale, often home-based activities, is Brah's insistence that these new cultural formations are "constituted in the crucible of everyday life" (Brah 1996 p183) including its unequal power relationships. Finally, but very importantly for this thesis centred on mixed groups of displaced and non-displaced individuals, Brah (1996) makes it clear that diaspora space is also occupied by those "represented as indigenous" – that is, those who are widely comprehended as being already there. It is these "entanglements of genealogies of dispersion with those of staying put" (Brah 1996 p181) that are crucial to this research.

2.3 The figure of the migrant: beyond being on the move.

It is useful to consider the 'figure of the migrant' (Anderson, 2012; Cresswell, 2006; Malkki, 1996; Nail, 2015) and the discourses that surround certain kinds of migrant in

relation to identity and belonging. While mobilities have been discussed, pulling the other way - the appeal of the sedentary is strong. Ideas of rootedness are embedded in discourses of home and belonging. But as Skeggs (2003) rightly states, locating people in fixed places can become a reactionary and racist discourse. The defining of transnational migrants in terms of 'origins', is encapsulated in the oft repeated question, *Where are you from?*. The corollary to this is the imagining of these origins as an authentic, static, unchanging culture. Notions of fixed, uniform cultural traditions, associated with distant, 'other' places, are often the mainstay of intercultural encounters, perhaps including some of the practices of welcome studied here. This focus on stereotyped cultural formations can impede or ignore the production of new ones. Being asked to identify oneself in this way and multiple other ways that one may not recognise (Skeggs 2003) is the daily experience of many migrants. How those participating in the groups being studied here recognise each other – in ways that reinforce or disrupt migrant/non-migrant narratives of origins, migrations and settlement - is one of the themes of this research. How ideas of fixed origins and authentic culture tie in closely with notions of the well-rooted, traditional rural, especially when set in binary opposition the mobile, unpredictable city, is covered in a later section.

Cresswell states that the mobility of migrants' renders them "illegible" (Cresswell 2006 p13) However, the openly hostile environment created by government policies and readily picked up in the popular media and by right wing groups seems to take things a step beyond an unbelonging or illegibility. Certain types of migrants are actively and deliberately written (made legible) and then (mis)read - as problematic. In Europe at least, all too often the migrant is represented as a "person whose movement, or whose presence, is considered a problem" (Anderson 2019 p2). However, notions of mobility alone do not account for this; it is also a deeply racialised process. Skeggs touches on this when she calls on us to pay attention to how mobilities intersect with identities that fix people in place.

> So when people argue that mobility is the new universalising condition replacing class do we need to think what concepts of self and

> personhood this involves? Is it voluntary? Is it gendered, sexed or raced? How is fixity figured? Who is being fixed in place so others can express their distance from them? Who is being forced to inhabit an identity in order to be known? (Skeggs 2003 p52).

Her mention of the fixed identities that some are forced to inhabit is particularly relevant to the way people migrating and settling are often ascribed the identity of 'the migrant' by others. De Lima (2008) also refers to the privileging of a *migrant* identity in her study of EU migrant labour in Scotland. Whilst majority populations can shift between identities, migrants are often not granted this flexibility.

Nail (2015) holds that the narrative of the transnational migrant told predominantly by the state de-historicises the figure of the migrant and the social forces that drive migration (Nail 2015 p6). He seeks to redress this balance by drawing attention to the resistances and alternative, migrant led, social organisations developed outside the state that are under-recognised in accounts of migrant life. Anderson et al (2012) on the other hand identify a wide range of other actors, including local government, academia, the media, NGOs, trade unions and the daily practices of individuals that work with and against each other to construct and identify who counts as a migrant, proposing that there "are multiple ways and scales by which the figure of 'the migrant' is imagined, defined and represented" (Anderson et al 2012 p75). Speaking about the refugee migrant in particular, often described in reductive terms as victim, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2020) asks us to move beyond the "fetishisation of this discursive figure" and that "our responses must be critical or risk reproducing paternalistic neo-colonial discourses and practices including the drive to 'help' and save them" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020 p17). This is particularly relevant to practices of welcome that are often based on helping, if not sometimes drifting into 'saving'.

We must also be keenly aware that the state led stories referred to are told by Western states and actors within them, and heard by those populations. Many refugees and asylum seekers come from the Global South, but perspectives on mobility and migration from these regions are not the dominant theoretical discourse. There are also very different perspectives on South-South migration for, as Phipps (2019) remarks, in the

Global South such movements are 'unremarkable' and migrations not seen as aberrant in the same sense that they are in South-North migration with its "crisis of reception" of migrants (Phipps 2019 p37). In this sense, the theorisations so far outlined cannot be considered universal. While neoliberalism, globalisation and capitalism are regularly cited, it is important also to explicitly acknowledge the racialised dimension to these systems, most obviously evident in histories of colonialism, that have shaped these narratives and shaped academic theorisations of mobility and migration too.

Anderson asks us not to "pathologise migration" but to consider it as unexceptional and something relevant to everyone (Anderson 2014 p2). Darling (2014) and De Lima (2004) extend this idea to settlement, suggesting that whether categorised as migrant or non-migrant all are actors in local settlement, but with different degrees of power. This is clearly relevant to the local interactions in rural Wales if we view them as collections of people who are all implicated and affected by the governance of (im)mobility and its conditions in some shape or form, whatever an individual's own experience of migration.

None of the group members in this study are currently on the move, but how different forms of migration and the figure of the migrant are framed in state and public discourses follows people far beyond their migration journeys and into their new environments. Histories of migration remain active in relation to people's un/settlement, or indeed the state of suspension many asylum seeker migrants experience when their lives are on hold during the long drawn out uncertainty of the asylum process. This all shapes the relationships central to this study, between those now trying to resettle beyond their transnational migrations and those seen as already belonging in a place.

Drawing on these literatures on mobility leads us to think in terms of what freedoms and restrictions have been granted, taken for granted or imposed. How have these been experienced and resisted and in what shades of intensity? What happens when people who have experienced more 'extreme' forms of migration interact with those who have not. Rather than looking for stories from 'migrant' or 'non-migrants' it is the

story of the encounter itself that is more important in this project and encounters is a key concept that will be discussed later in this chapter.

In light of the above theorisations and critiques of how the figure of the migrant is drawn in state led, academic and everyday discourses, my research seeks to examine how far informal groups such as those studied here, made up of those identified as migrants and those not (i.e. *not* definitively migrant led), might be considered as contributing to alternative narratives. It looks at how ongoing encounters of welcome might sometimes unstick an imposed ascription of migrant identity, allowing different aspects of personhood to be foregrounded and explored amongst people who, particularly in rural settings, might not meet outside these encounters and may know little about one another. It looks beyond migrant/non migrant categorisations while holding on the fact that doing this does not overcome the wider power relations inherent in the encounters.

A final note on this topic and how all are implicated in creating the figure of the migrant. Although of course it is those constrained by this identification that are most affected by it, sometimes in life threatening ways, all of us are affected by living in a society that frames asylum seeker migrants in a negative way. It occurs to me that even the space given to discussion of 'the migrant' within this review, compared with very little discussion of the identities of other members of the groups in this research, implicates the research itself in consolidating the figure of the migrant and accentuating the problems of its being an object of study.

2.4 Encounters of welcome

The offers of welcome researched here are directed towards recently arrived, racialised migrants in a small rural town with an overwhelmingly white population and who might be considered therefore as not belonging, as strangers. I have turned to Sara Ahmed's work (2000) examining encounters with 'strangers' and brought it together with Gill et al (2022), Dan Bulley (2017) and Vigouroux (2019) who all elaborate Ahmed's arguments in different ways. Ahmed argues that the stranger is not someone unknown, but a figure already recognised and therefore named as not belonging, as other. It is,

according to Ahmed, in our encountering this figure as she comes near to us, and our recognition of her difference, that we actually create the figure of the stranger. In the context of the case study groups there is a potential that, despite the will to welcome, we are actually creating the figure of the stranger (in this case the racialised migrant refugee stranger), through our recognition of her as a figure in need of welcoming from the outside to the inside in the first place. There is the possibility that we might highlight her refugeeness, otherness and outsiderness. Ahmed (2000) develops the idea of more ethical encounters with others, moving away from a focus on identity and notions of welcoming or expulsion of the "stranger neighbour", and towards an emphasis on "modes of encounter" (Ahmed, 2000 p.145). She suggests that there can be more "generous" ways of encountering others that are not based on bringing the stranger from 'there' to 'here', that do not hold this 'you' in place, or seek to "grasp" or ingest the other, or objectify it as a thing (Ahmed, 2000 pp139 & 152). I concur with scholars (Ahmed, 2000; Bulley, 2017; Gill et all, 2022; Edkins,2019; Vigouroux, 2019) who instead conceptualise encounter as a sociality with others through which ones being emerges, rather than a meeting of already constituted beings (Ahmed 2000). Vigouroux calls for us not to, "assume who the host is or consider the migrant as the epitome of the guest" (Vigouroux 2019 p36) and proposes that host and guest are "mutually constitutive of each other" (Vigouroux 2019 p35).

Ahmed pays attention to "the conditions of possibility for us meeting here and now" (Ahmed 2000 p145). These are the conditions, always bound up with wider forces, not just in the present but in the past – in the up until now - that have made this encounter possible. This links well with the literature on uneven mobilities discussed earlier. Importantly for a geographical study, I think Massey's (2005) power geometries, influencing the intersecting of trajectories, can be considered here as these wider forces. Indeed, Vigouroux (2019) and Bulley (2017, 2023) argue for the spatial aspects of hospitality to be considered. Vigouroux problematises rigid principles of welcome which presuppose a bounded space to which the other is related and can be invited in, be it home, nation or community. The way Dan Bulley sets it out is in terms of how, once our trajectories bring us into contact with each other, variations in the conditionalities of hospitality, of openness and closure, generate a "contingent and

contested space" (Bulley 2017 p8) as people continually cross and uncross thresholds. I would add that that this can be in a multitude of ways – freely, coerced, invited, forced, welcomed, tolerated, clandestinely or against the odds. The central premise is that "space is a sphere of co-existence" (Bulley 2017 p8) in a world where there is only ever co-existence. Space, generated through ways of being together, is ever changing as movements in and out of it continue. I regard the gatherings of people in the encounters of welcome here as examples of these spaces of co-existence into which people come and go.

Once trajectories intersect, what are the possibilities of engagement and interaction? Ahmed talks about responsibility to the other in terms of one's response. This responsibility is both situated and ongoing.

> …to respond to the other, to speak to her, and to have an encounter in which something takes place. While responsibility is infinite – and cannot be satisfied in the present encounter – to respond is to be in the order of the finite and the particular. We need to recognise the infinite nature of responsibility but the finite and particular circumstances in which I am called on to respond to the others. (Ahmed 2000 p147)

I found Gill et al (2022) and Edkins (2019) also helpful in thinking about ethics and responsibilities in relation to these encounters with others, particularly when uneven relationships of power and a motivation to 'help' are combined. Both stress that while our responses "cannot be separated from political, economic and cultural circumstances" (Gill et al 2022 p124), how we address, ignore or respond in our encounters is not extrinsic to us, we are not intervening from a distance. Jenny Edkins makes a specific point in relation to how we approach helping those perceived as 'strangers'. She seeks to overturn the "assumption that 'we' and 'they' are already distinct before there is any relation between us" (Edkins 2019 p78), and makes the point that questions framed in terms of how 'we' help 'them' are based on state level narratives of domestic/foreign, inside/outside, us and them, here and there. She asks questions about our responsibilities to others and how we can intervene while avoiding

inadvertent harm. In a world where we should (above all else now) be considering our interconnectedness (both human and non-human) in our response to others' needs, she suggests finding solidarity not in the humanitarian conception of a basic humanity but in the face of inequitable governance (Edkins 2019 p84). These might seem very big questions to pose in relation to small local enactments of welcome, but similarly to Gill et al (2022), Edkins proposes that we are not intervening at a distance, there is no outside position. Whatever we do, or don't do, will have an impact.

Dan Bulley (2017), Nick Gill et al (2022) and Cecile Vigouroux (2019) all introduce an aspect of thinking through encounters of hospitality which resonated with my experience and certainly surfaced in my research, emphasising the need to situate the theory in everyday practices. They suggest that welcome is about a sensibility rather than a set of principles and that welcome is most often grounded in everyday experiences and mundane practices or, as Vigouroux (2019) puts it, "the fleeting moments of everyday encounters" (p31). While engaging with the theory (most prominently Derrida), they emphasise the importance of situating welcome in its context of present conjunctures, power geometries, historicity and its relations to spatial dynamics and mobilities. They further maintain that abstract, universalised principles do not necessarily shed light on particular instances of hospitality, with their attendant complications and tensions (Gill et al 2022). They rightly highlight that in abstracting welcome - both within academic study and within activism - there is a risk of "replaying and repeating the violence of colonialism" (p125). Through not reckoning with the systems that produce conflict and danger that cause flight for some, while others are apparently unaffected at a safe distance and thus able to "play host" (Gill et al 2022 p131), we avoid the reality that we are all implicated in and affected by the ongoing violence of continuing racialised colonial practices. These are not things that just happen 'over there'. I would suggest also that they are sometimes hidden in plain sight by being so close to home.

Gill et al (2022) insist on the grounding of this scholarship in the "unspectacular" places where things happen in distinctive ways (p127). In terms of a rural context, we might rename them as 'out of the way' or even 'overlooked' places. Yet rural spaces have always been interacting with historic and contemporary wider forces in the most

intricate ways (Carby 2021, Ware 2022). How do small scale encounters of welcome and solidarity, in out of the way places, interact with wider forces that might seem to obscure, minimise or overwhelm them? Gill et al (2022) make the important point that scholars have a responsibility not only to "detect [but to] actively push back against the hallmarks and effects of past violence in present everyday practices" (p132). Counting myself as a scholar/activist I would say this certainly applies – but I think it also applies to scholars who are not activists, and activists who are not scholars.

2.5 The language of welcome and the writing of place.

Before moving on to the section specifically concerned with language as a social and participatory practice which is a key concept in this thesis, I take a brief look at the role of language in theoretical discussion of hospitality. Ahmed (2000) includes the responsibility 'to speak' in response to encounters with an 'other'. Vigouroux (2019) refers to Derrida's placement of language at the centre of the host/guest relationship since the guest must request hospitality in a language they do not understand. Gill et al (2022) mirror this with a focus on the host's claims of sovereignty in the speech act of asking the stranger's name or declaring welcome. Either way, language is tied up with the expectations and conditions; the foreigner must in every sense 'speak' the host language. The guest must declare themselves, and the host can extend or withhold a statement of welcome. Once welcomed they are still expected to abide by the rules (Gill et al 2022).

Vigouroux brings to bear the realities of state and institutionally imposed conditions of hospitality that are language-based. These conditions can be directly implemented in terms of formal testing and, more indirectly, as narratives around willingness to learn the host language, and are activated in divisive ways. Who is un/deserving of welcome can be conditional on the 'debt of hospitality' to learn the host language, with the implication that not learning it is a refusal, and grounds for welcome being denied (Vigouroux 2019 p54). Language is utilised as a device in the sifting of the desirable and undesirable migrant. The co-opting of language into state policies of control feeds into public discourse on legitimate belonging expressed through the marginalisation of the linguistic 'other'. Linguistic minorities (particularly those speaking non-European

languages) are met with everyday linguistic discrimination or with open hostility (Lisiak, Back & Jackson 2019). Ways of sounding are an "inescapable state of strangerness" (Vigouroux 2019 p35) and, as Ahmed indicates, are a way of recognising someone as not being from here. Returning to the question *Where are you from?*, asked of many people (mis)recognised as migrants after hearing them speak, we can hear layers of meaning in it associated with claims on who belongs and who does not.

The literature referred to here concerns itself with the nation state or the city, but there is no reason for more rural locations to escape the implications of linguistic otherness and hierarchies of foreignness. In fact what they describe may be more striking and more intensely felt in rural spaces. It seems significant that Cooke et al (2018) found that ESOL students in the city, while they certainly did not see urban areas as free of tensions, felt that they were more likely to come across linguistic discrimination during rural excursions. In the context of Wales and Welsh speakers, it is likely that in some areas people are more accustomed to linguistic diversity. In Monmouthshire, where these case studies are situated, there is little Welsh spoken, but there is Welsh embedded in the bilingualism of the written environment (street signs, official notices etc). The discussion of language now moves on to the situated nature of the study in order to look at local language practices.

Language permeates many aspects of this research project made up of participants with different language backgrounds who are motivated to interact. Literature drawn from the field of sociolinguistics weaves in quite readily with geographical scholarship, the latter's key concerns with mobilities and space, and with local/global relations shedding an interesting light on these themes. Blommaert and Rampton (2011), along with Pennycook (2010), outline a theorisation of language where mobility and space are central theoretical concerns.

> [r]ather than working with homogeneity, stability and boundedness as the starting assumptions, mobility, mixing, political dynamics and historical embedding are now central concerns in the study of languages. (Blommaert & Rampton 2011 p24)

Pennycook (2010) goes as far as to say that "language as *spatial* practice" (my italics) is "a central organizing activity of social life that is acted out in specific places" (p2), in other words, "language operates as an integrated social and spatial activity" (p3). Scholars in the field of sociolinguistics have sought to shift theory beyond seeing languages as discrete, bounded entities, named and enumerated as complete systems in 'use' within a given, passive, pre-existing context (Pennycook, 2010; Martin-Jones et al, 2012; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). Instead, there is an orientation towards language as a participatory social practice (Simpson & Cooke 2017) engaging with "space, place, movement and interaction" (Pennycook 2010 p2). Language and place are conceptualised as interactive and co-constructed. Though coincidental, it is very apposite (in light of a postcard exchange being a key method in one of the case studies) that Pennycook uses an example of writing a postcard to elaborate on the idea of language practice as "a set of bundled activities" (Pennycook 2010 p3). Language and text are central to the writing of a postcard, but feelings, people, memories, images, connections between this place and other places are all brought into the process of meaning-making. Pennycook suggests that this also brings language into "multifaceted relations to place" (Pennycook 2010 p3). Simpson and Cook support this view that language practices are always integrated with other practices in the process of meaning making, highlighting:

> the salience of multimodal resources and embodied action in the meaning-making process. Communicative practice involves not just the deployment of linguistic repertoires. We also need to take into account the ways in which people use all available semiotic resources – linguistic and non-linguistic - as they negotiate meaning. (Simpson and Cooke 2017 p3)

Crucially for this study, the concept of 'knowing' a language is reconfigured by these scholars. They suggest it is "better understood as participation in social activities rather than capacity to use a system" (Pennycook 2010 p8), as a doing rather than a using, as a practice rather than a competence and "the product of social interaction rather than a tool" (Canagarajah 2004 p8). There is critique of terms of reference that fix language as

'first language' or 'mother tongue' or that hold up an ideal such as 'native speaker' as an ideal (Blommaert & Rampton 2011, Canagarajah 2004). Language as social practice is not isolated from other social activities of life and from personal histories (Pennycook 2010 p6). As Lisa Shepherd says in relation to her Welsh 'mamiaith' (mother tongue), "the relationship between language, family, heritage and belonging" is not matrilineal but "a complex network of identifications" (Sheppard 2018 p68). As Cooke et al (2018) describe, there are many different ways languages can be known, and transnational migrants are likely to have complex language biographies (Pennycook 2012).

Higham and Bermingham (2018) explore language in the Welsh and Catalonian context and find migrants expressing new ways of belonging based on the reality of plurilingualism. Learning a minority language, such as Welsh was "complementary" (Higham and Bermingham 2018 p15) to their integration rather than a signifier of it. It was not about claiming national belonging but about language as a resource which could open more opportunities for them. Rather than being tied to one language group or community they wished to be able to shift between them, "reflect[ing] in many ways their own plural repertoires and identities" (p15). Perhaps this links with Canagarajah's (2004) assertion that certain attitudes to language predominate in Western countries with little experience of linguistic pluralism, whereas elsewhere it is the norm for social life to be conducted multilingually. We see the notion of a linguistic or communicative *'repertoire'* coming into play, where speakers draw on a mix of languages available to them as a resource, deploying them in ways that fit constantly changing needs (Simpson and Cooke 2017, Cooke et al 2018, Martin-Jones 2012).

Looking at different ways people draw on a pool of linguistic resources, we can begin to see language practices and other creative social practices as a local response to the resources available. I am drawn to the idea that creativity can spring from working with what is available in innovative and improvised ways and that that this has the potential to be political. This is a process of bricolage, a notion of working with the resources available, that is elaborated on in the methodologies chapter, but also has a clear application to the practices of welcome that are the subject of the research as well.

Scholars theorising language as a local as well as a social practice (Pennycook 2010, Canagarajah 2004, Blommaert and Rampton 2011) bring in ideas of dominance, marginality and legitimacy which are helpful more broadly in thinking about all the small scale localised activities taking place in my own area of research. So, while discussed through the lens of language, the points that follow have a more general application to this thesis. The local is seen not as a "circumscribed domain" (Pennycook 2010 p2) but rather as a perspectival or relational understanding which avoids the local being set as 'micro' in scale, in opposition to the 'macro' of the global (Pennycook 2010). Mimi Sheller's image is helpful when she says these different scales are not "neatly nested but are simultaneous and entangled" (Sheller 2018 p176).

There is an emphasis on local practice as ground-up knowledge creation, thrown into the mix of other more or less powerful knowledges. Dominant groups who hold power associated with certain knowledges, are able to "orchestrate" (Canagarajah 2004 p8) other knowledges to their own interests, legitimising or delegitimising them (Canagarajah 2004). Despite this, or because of it, Canagarajah (2004) argues for a focus on local practices and their potential to bring into view the knowledges of the disempowered, and the particularity of local experience often dismissed as "unruly and insignificant" (Canagarajah 2004 p5).

Pennycook (2012) gives an interesting perspective on things, including language, turning up in unexpected places – in the local. He considers why things might be expected or unexpected, and warns against the exoticisation of these apparent juxtapositions when diversity should be considered more usual than exceptional. He proposes that unexpectedness needs to come under critical scrutiny as "particular modes of thought have constructed sets of expectations about language and place, about things being in their right place" (Pennycook 2012 p20).

In contrast to these notions of language as a creative social practice in a mobile world which does not fix an individual to a place of origin, there is a persistence in conceptualising languages as standardised discrete entities and the mapping of language to territory as a unifying feature of national identity. With reference to bilingualism in the devolved nations, as Simpson puts it, "[a]lthough Britain is very

obviously multilingual, its representation as a monolingual state, or one that at best tolerates a degree of regional bilingualism in Wales and Scotland, allies with the powerful ideology of 'one nation one language'" (Simpson 2015 p202). Politicians of every persuasion have explicitly, or through implication, made connections between language and good citizenship. Simpson (2015) and Cooke and Peutrell (2019) provide an interesting account of how ESOL provision has been appropriated to these ends in recent years and how ESOL teachers have become caught up in compliance with and resistance to policies that drive such provision.

As mentioned above, to speak English has in recent years been used as a signifier of integration in the UK and at times testing for a certain level of competence has been required for achieving secure status. For example, the current Life in the UK test, though not specifically a language test, combines specific knowledge beyond that of most citizens born and educated here, as well as literacy and IT skills (Cooke and Peutrell 2019). The inverse of this is that *not* speaking English is interpreted as an unwillingness to learn. Linguistic and cultural diversity are viewed as "problems to be managed" (Simpson 2015 p203) and learning English has been seen as a solution (Simpson and Whiteside 2015). However, as Simpson and Whiteside (2015) point out, speaking the same language does not remove tensions, it does not make people allies and this manipulation of its significance diverts attention away from more concrete, shared inequalities, such as housing, income or health (Simpson 2015). Language has been co-opted into migration policies both as a gate-keeping device and as a signifier of acceptable belonging as the "good immigrant" (Simpson and Whiteside, 2015; Shukla, 2016). What this all adds up to is language being deployed as an internal bordering practice.

Chick and Hannagan-Lewis (2019) comment on issues related to Wales-specific policies on language and integration formulated by the Welsh government. They highlight problems of access to ESOL classes in rural areas, while comparing integration policies favourably with UK wide measures associated with the 'hostile environment'. I am unsure how simply this comparison can be drawn or how easily the Welsh approach can be untangled from the UK-wide hostile environment policies. Their defining of integration as a two-way process and their enumeration of barriers to integration takes

us so far but I feel there is a need to further interrogate the concept of integration and focus on how compliance or resistance to it is accounted for. They acknowledge the significant part voluntary organisations (such as those considered in this project) play in plugging the gaps in language provision, often combining it with offering welcome.

> The considerable efforts of community activists in creating a culture of welcome and of providing vital integrative services should be recognised and applauded and can play a key role in ensuring the delivery of the Welsh Government's vision of a 'Nation of Sanctuary' for all. (Chick and Hannagan-Lewis 2019 p14)

I would argue that what groups, such as the case study groups in this project, are engaged in goes beyond shoring up the delivery of a state defined vision and a state guided policy of integration. Such groups have, instead, potential for offering alternative ways of belonging grounded in being actors in an ongoing writing of place.

While opportunities to practice English is a key aspect of welcome practices in the AToS case study that follows, these arrangements differ in important ways from more organised English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. Cooke and Peutrell (2023) provide up to date information on mainstream state funded ESOL provision, how fees and cuts in recent years have had a significant negative impact, and how emphasis has been increasingly on the utilitarian aspect of language, aiming for individual employability and an "economically productive workforce" (Simpson and Whiteside 2015 p5). Chick & Hannagan-Lewis (2019) and Simpson (2019) argue that the complex needs of asylum seekers and refugees are not met by simple structural approaches to learning. Simpson and Whiteside (2015) recognise however that policies can also be appropriated, subverted, interpreted and contested in a variety of ways through local practice. They argue:

> There is an unintended but beneficial consequence of governmental indifference towards – and abrogation of responsibility for – adult migrant language education: spaces open up for experimentation and

> the development of approaches to teaching more suited to the realities of migrants' lives … (Simpson and Whiteside 2015 p8)

Cooke et al (2018), Chick and Hannagan-Lewis (2019) and Simpson (2019) all look to participatory practice grounded in Freirean theory and acknowledge that it is often groups outside the strictures of state funded ESOL classes that have the freedom to experiment with these approaches through more informal learning encounters. In Freirean pedagogy, learning is a dialogue without predetermined ends, through which people are able to make and remake themselves, and in doing so reinterpret their world.

> Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other. (Freire 1996 p72)

It is an engagement that leads to new knowledge, to critical consciousness, and change (Purcell 2006). Crucially for this study, which moves away from notions of integration, "Freire's aim was never to make people function better withing any given system" (Finger and Asun 2001 p86). Rather a Freirean approach promotes a sense of citizens as agents who transform their contexts (Simpson and Whiteside 2015 p10). Applied to ESOL learning, the opportunities and tensions of life as a migrant in an increasingly unequal society are brought into the learning experience.

> [R]ather than shying away from complexities they are placed 'front and centre, considering them affordances for developing language, critical awareness and agency. (Simpson and Whiteside 2015 p8)

This thesis argues that ESOL provision is invaluable but also looks to encounters of informal learning where both spoken and unspoken language is key and where English is not, "over-interpreted as the language of equality and emancipation" (Simpson and Whiteside 2015 p9). Informal learning is often used to refer to community-based classes, or classes without a formal curriculum but still with specific intentions. In my

thesis I define informal learning as Jackson (2010) and others do, as always occurring, unplanned, unpremeditated, incidental and, though prevalent, often unrecognised. It is learning that takes place, not always consciously, often unintentionally, through all encounters with others (Inayatullah 2022). This supports my contention that people engaged in these encounters of welcome are also participating in learning.

2.6 Acts of welcome and expressions of citizenship

This section considers the ways in which literature on citizenship, primarily Engin Isin's (2008, 20012) notion of acts of citizenship, fits with the interactions that are the subject of this project. What this notion adds to the framework I am using is something more political. Ong's concept of 'flexible citizenship' shows how nation-states are willing to adapt and manipulate migration regulations and citizenship criteria to enable "elite actors" to be mobile while, at the other end of the scale, disenfranchised subjects such as refugees are "excluded from the environment of rights", and "stripped of citizenship once on the move" (Ong 2005 p698). This image of 'stripping' reminds us that refugees are rarely people who have never had rights, though they are often defined in terms of this deficit. Refugees and asylum seekers are repositioned socially and economically between country of origin and country of settlement. As Nail (2015) tells us, in the case of refugees, though their impetus to move may be based on decision making, they do not "get to decide the social conditions of their movement or the degree to which they may be expelled from certain social orders as a consequence" (Nail 2015 p2). Refugees and asylum seeker migrants within the groups studied here have had far less control over their migration and settlement, and the conditions that apply to it, than those members of the groups with secure status. The case is also made, however, that migrant/non-migrant does not necessarily correlate with citizen/non-citizen. Who counts as a migrant or citizen is drawn and redrawn by a multitude of actors and forces, and as a migrant there are ways of expressing citizenship and many ways of being excluded as a citizen.

Isin (2008, 2011) is a key source for those who have researched practices and acts of welcome with refugees and asylum seekers. Instead of concentrating on the customs and norms through which subjects are seen to become integrated citizens, more

significance is given to acts that "rupture" the given order of routines which govern through "calibrating, taming, and stultifying creativity" (Isin 2012 p148). Isin (2008) also proposes that it is through acts of citizenship that political subjects and activist citizens come into being. This connects with Ahmed's suggestion that we come into being through encounter, and that it is the mode of encounter that is most significant, moving away from fixing the identities of those who participate. Similarly, Pennycook suggests a view where "language and language user, are in a constitutive relation to each other" (Pennycook 2010 p13). So perhaps we can see here a link between encounters through local language practices and the mobilisation of alternative expressions of citizenship. Can these small groupings in more rural areas, with a shared intention to act through showing care and solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers, constitute a different way of being political? Would the actors in them see themselves as activist citizens and political beings? The combination and interactions of people and practices that are the subject of my research lead to a consideration of how, working with the resources available, unexpected expressions of being political and alternative expressions of citizenship, outside those instituted by the state, might be mobilised. This offers ways of thinking about agency, resistance and challenge to dominant narratives around migration and belonging, which may be happening through very local and everyday practices. Alison Phipps (2019) speaks about dis-integration rather than integration. I like the idea of practices that work to dis/integrate the expected norms in order to recreate new cultural and social formations.

Acts of citizenship set something in motion (Darling 2017, Isin 2008, 2012, Nyers and Rygiel 2012) but what follows can be unexpected and unpredictable. Isin's (2012) description of the creative quality of acts seems to endow them with a life of their own:

> I describe the basic quality of acts as creative (deliberate yet spontaneous, mischievous yet serious, courageous yet not heroic), inventive (surprising yet predictable, illegal yet acceptable, outrageous yet reasonable) and autonomous (individual yet collective, scripted yet experimental, unauthorised yet meaningful) (Isin 2012 p156).

I am attracted to the creativity and liveliness of this description and all it entails. I am interested in the idea that the results of activist citizenship may be unintended (Isin 2008), and consider in this project how any results might be incidental, tangential or even converse to intention. Equally, there is always an incompleteness, especially in the sense that we may or may not be part of what happens next or know where things go.

There is a substantial amount of discussion in the literature on how far everyday 'minor' political acts have the ability to disrupt cultures and power structures, both in terms of the immediate context in which they take place and beyond. There are various ways in which their scale and potential effect is described. Darling (2014) proposes that everyday acts of citizenship may seem insignificant individually but the incremental layering of many acts and encounters can grow into relevance as something political, and become activated at critical moments. He makes a case for adjusting expectations of these acts while not devaluing them. Though their effects may be partial or temporary they can cumulatively play a role in keeping people, issues, presences, visible and in "changing outlooks and dispositions towards those groups unaccounted for" (Darling 2014 p88) in current political orders.

The encounters, practices and stories active in practices of welcome can be understood in terms of mobile trajectories coinciding and creating social spaces which may be very temporary ephemeral or fragmentary (Adey 2010, Cresswell 2006). My research examines how repeated combinations and patterns of gatherings and practices, coalesce into more substantial and lasting narratives about welcome, migration and rurality.

In the same way that the lives of both migrant and 'non-migrant' are entwined through the same forces that shape migration, Jonathan Darling (2017) articulates the idea that the lives of citizens and non-citizens are deeply entwined. For him, it is the many top down and bottom up "processes of 'making citizens' through normative acts as well as disruptive ones that continue to shape everyday life for many citizens and non-citizens alike" (Darling 2017 p730). Individuals in the mixed groups discussed in this thesis are differently positioned but are all affected in some way by these top down and bottom up grassroots processes.

Isin (2012) distinguishes between active and activist citizens arguing that while active citizens work with scripts already provided by the hegemonic norms of the context they find themselves in, activist citizens write new scripts that can contest, diverge from or push against these norms. I am drawn to the metaphor of reading and/or writing scripts as it resonates with what I have called 'literacies of doing' in later chapters. Isin (2008) also suggests that acts of citizenship are dialogic. This brings to mind Paulo Freire's work again, his ideas on dialogic literacy as a force for change (Freire 1996). The idea of a dialogic and creative literacy as a means of gaining understanding, knowledge building and sharing, and the generation of new meanings, is something that fits well with this project. Freire insists on pedagogy that starts with 'where people are at' and taking that forward and, interestingly, Avtar Brah (2020) also speaks of "starting where people are at" in relation to solidarity building and activism, and moving on to "jointly develop new discourses and practices for the creation of new political horizons, a new common sense" (p42).

There are an increasing number of intermediate, partial and insecure variations of formal status in current migration control regimes (Anderson et al 2012). Related to status are many barriers which deny access to labour, welfare, education, justice and produce new inequalities (Anderson et al 2012). Squire (2011) also acknowledges that political participation is risky for many asylum seekers and that, for many, life is taken up with everyday survival. When discussing other ways in which citizenship can be expressed, the material limitations, insecurities and risks associated with these barriers and precarious statuses should be taken into account. How new or emerging forms of citizenship intersect with governance through systems such as the asylum process is mentioned specifically by Darling (2017), Abraham et al (2012) reminding us of the importance of taking current material economic conditions into account; it is a vital grounding context, especially in the light of contemporary conditions of austerity.

2.7 The comforts and discomforts of rural space

Thinking about what makes this rural based project different from studies focussed on more urban settings invites a study of scholarship on rurality. In rural areas, travel distances are a barrier to 'plugging in' to social networks, and migrants often have

limited contact with others from the same national, cultural, religious or linguistic background. There is no “critical mass” (De Lima 2004 p52) of people to get together with, though of course contact with those from the same country is not guaranteed to be simple or positive (De Lima 2004). In urban localities there is more of a mix of migrant communities. Even when they do not share culture, language, histories, political affiliations or religion, what they do have is what Garland and Chakraborty (2004 p136) describe as “shared risk” – that of experiencing racism. I would add in the case of asylum seekers in particular there are also shared risks associated with precarious status, itself an outcome of state racism. This risk is not shared by the white populations with secure status who engage in the social interactions considered in this project. I would add that there is moreover a class dimension, in that refugees and asylum seekers share in working class concerns of economic deprivation. These are issues that, in my experience of these particular groups, most of the non-refugee participants do not have to contend with. Acts of solidarity have to account for these factors which inhibit an equally shared sense of what is at stake.

Cloke (2006) sets out the popularly imagined scene of the British countryside as a place characterised by small cohesive communities embedded in a “natural” environment (Cloke 2006 p380) This rural is pictured as a timeless space, of permanence and tradition, naturalness and authenticity. It is often positioned in opposition to the urban, which is negatively associated with change and difference, even a potential threat to the natural order and stability represented by the rural (Garland and Chakraborty 2004, Woods 2006). Massey (2005) and Woods (2007) question the primacy of the city, often viewed as the “command centre[s]” of a region or nation (Woods 2007 p491). According to Massey this has “tamed” our vision of the rural (Massey 2005 p160). McKrell & Pemberton (2018 p56) describe an “othering” of social problems to the urban. Migrants are frequently framed as one of these problems. Flynn and Kay (2017) however, assert that conversely the rural is often measured against an urban norm, the rural being defined in terms of not being the city and dismissed as an out of the way place that does not count for much. This study makes the case that it does matter.

Doreen Massey’s work shows how local rural spaces are not only shaped by but also have agency in mediating global forces and how, through this, the rural is ‘remade’.

Woods (2007) puts it another way, arguing that countryside is not a homogeneous space on which global forces act, or intrude, but a place where they become "entangled with existing local assemblages" (Woods 2007 p499), and not without accompanying tensions.

Hazel Carby (2021) and Vron Ware (2022) write convincingly and personally about how current and historical connections with colonialism and global capitalism are woven into even the most everyday aspects of rural life. Unfortunately the association of the rural with whiteness "founded on skewed histories and deliberate exclusions" (Cloke 2006 p382) persists, and slips into the rural becoming identified with and preserving "traditional British values" (Woods 2005 p4). This in turn can lead to claims of it belonging only to those who are continuing a so-called heritage of white national identity. This narrative can then travel in two directions in relation to the presence of racialised migrants – towards invisibility or hostility. It can be framed as denial or absence and, in its worst form, becomes a toxic narrative dangerously appropriated by the far right and organised racist groups.

Scholars seeking to reconceptualise it as a place that has *always* been dynamic and changing, but increasingly so with new forms of connectivity and mobility (Agyeman and Neal 2007, Cloke 2006, Woods 2005), suggest that there are diverse rural voices that are not equally heard, and presences that are not equally seen or felt. These co-existing rurals are sometimes competing in their claims and, according to Agyeman and Neal (2007 p101), make the countryside a "fiercely contested" space. However, despite the 'rural idyll' being extensively critiqued, it remains persistent in the popular imagination.

I have engaged with literature concerned with the presence, absence, and experience of racialised transnational migrants in rural places that are overwhelmingly white (Cloke 2006, Agyeman and Neal 2006). Clearly, migrants can also be white, but their experience is likely to be very different (McKrell & Pemberton 2018). There is a paradox in that people who are racialised through visible traits are, in rural areas, hyper visible yet invisible (Agyeman and Spooner 1997, Cloke 2006). Agyeman and Spooner note the countryside's "whiteness is blinding" (Agyeman and Spooner 1997 p197), in that the only associations with racialised others are those that either naturalise it as an absence

or any presence as an intrusion. This narrative of denial, invisibility, or absence is also an active form of racism though not always recognised as such.

Cloke (2006) frames the attitude to visually identifiable minorities as being defined in terms of who is in or out of place. The presence of racialised individuals is constructed as not just unusual in rural spaces but as a transgression, their presence more rightly belonging in cities. There are several examples, spread over many years, of overt racism demonstrated in protests against the opening of asylum seeker accommodation and detention centres in rural areas of the UK, such as recent cases involving a small village in north Wales (Heath 2023) and in Llanelli (ITV News 2023). Garner describes this construction of a group, seen as encroaching onto space where its members do not belong, as the "inscription of race onto space" (Garner 2023 p504).

Daniel Burdsey's (2011) discussion of the English seaside focusses on visitors rather than residents and adds some important elements to this discussion since the MO case study is also about visitors. According to Burdsey (2011), visibly racialised individuals, though they can be tolerated as visitors, are rarely portrayed as natural occupants of seaside spaces. While not necessarily experiencing overt racism the white gaze makes for a "discomforting" atmosphere (Burdsey 2011 p542). Importantly, drawing on Sara Ahmed and others, he emphasises how whiteness goes unnoticed as "the idea that predominantly white spaces are by implication racialised frequently goes unacknowledged" (Burdsey 2011 p537). Like the countryside, the seaside "embodies and sustains whiteness on behalf of the nation and exclusion from this particular landscape implies exclusion from the nation as a whole" (Burdsey 2011 p547). He argues that while the "increasing presence of racialised bodies offers a partial disruption of […] hegemonic whiteness, […] whiteness continues to be solidified through the recurrent Othering of minority groups" (Burdsey 2011 p549).

It is important to be clear that the discomfort of 'out of placeness' is a form of racism. Parker 's study (2018) found that everyday more 'banal' forms of racism are a regular experience for refugees and asylum seekers in his Wales-based research. He also noted a tendency amongst participants to play down instances of racism because they were reluctant to criticise the host nation. While this project is not about highlighting

experiences of racism per se, the above discussion sets an important context for activities instigated to counteract the conceptualisation of the rural as the preserve of whiteness and a place where those seen as other may experience hostility as a result. Organised practices of welcome may be considered more necessary within the context of the rural in this regard. Being in Wales, a 'minority nation' with a state sanctioned narrative of welcome as a Nation of Sanctuary, also gives an added dimension to how racism and counter-racism are expressed and responded to.

The idea of sanctuary and respite are key ideas for many groups setting up welcome. Rural environments are often seen in general as offering respite from hardships associated with the city. In the Migrant's Organise case study the visits are seen as offering a break from the difficulties of precarious city life as a refugee. They provide an opportunity for asylum seekers to break up long periods of anxiety and uncertainty waiting for status. Another aspect of rurality that the literature covers is the way the materiality of the so called 'natural' environment is seen to be imbued with 'intangible' qualities such as peacefulness (Cloke 2006 p380) and associated with meeting psychological and spiritual needs as well as physical health (Cloke, 2006; McKrell and Pemberton, 2018). It is seen as place of respite from the city, though not everyone is in a position to enjoy this as we have seen from discussions about who is welcome or not in rural spaces.

There are now a growing number of examples of informal organisations led by minoritised groups, making claims on the right to feel at home in the countryside. At the time of research, with the reinvigoration of the Black Lives Matter movement, there was a marked, and new, mobilisation of acts of solidarity in rural areas. And since then, there has also been a growing number of groups such as Black Birders, Black In Nature, Black Girls Hike and Muslim Hikers, some with a significant online presence, that seek to normalise the presence of people of colour following outdoor pursuits based in rural areas. These initiatives are led by minoritised groups, whereas in contrast, the welcome for refugees and asylum seekers in rural areas is often practised through what could be understood as a kind of 'escorting' of these visitors into and out of the white space by their white 'hosts'. Being in the company of white people neutralises 'out of placeness' to a degree and reduces what Agyeman and Spooner refer to as an "anticipation of

abuse" (Agyeman and Spooner1997 p206). The literature exposes contradictions concerning the idea of the rural as a space of comfort and respite for some and an uncomfortable environment for others.

Taking these theorisations of rurality into account, my research discusses how practices of rural welcome might offer counternarratives to who can make claims of belonging in rural spaces. I ask whether these encounters can amplify the presence of differentiated rural voices or whether they sometimes inadvertently exceptionalise the 'other'. I ask if welcome simply offers moments or spaces of comfort in an uncomfortable environment, or whether they contribute to the possibility of creating new rurals where the presence of racialised groups is normalised?

2.8 Building on welcome in the city - shifting to the rural

Several key scholars (Darling 2010,2011, Gill 2018, Darling & Squire 2012, Squire 2011, Squire & Bagelman 2012) have written specifically about practices of welcome, hospitality and sanctuary in more urban settings. Looking at these studies gives an opportunity to consider what might be similar or different in a rural setting. Three of them are about Sheffield as the original City of Sanctuary and all bring Isin's theorisation of everyday acts of citizenship into their analysis. They consider the practices that take place in various sites (such as a drop-in, and a café project) to be minor political acts that have the potential to disrupt hierarchies, to work themselves into breaks in normative relations, and to create new social formations – with a particular focus on how they might rebalance the unevenness of guest/host relations. They all hold that, though the small scale of these disruptive acts means that their effects are limited, partial or temporary, they nevertheless challenge the inevitability of embedded relations. Some of them ask questions about how these effects might be made more sustained and wide reaching (Squire 2011). As well as these commonalities of approach there are also different emphases in some of their work. All are essential in provoking thought about my own research.

Jonathan Darling (2011) uses experiences of volunteering in a drop-in centre for asylum seekers in Sheffield to examine the relations and ethics of care and the associated notions of generosity, gift giving and expectations of gratefulness. He observes the unequal relations this can emphasise. In their articles on sanctuary, Darling (2010, 2011) and Darling & Squire (2012) look at the implied gratefulness of those being 'offered' sanctuary feeding into the 'worthy' migrant/citizen narrative which renders the asylum seeker "politically passive and marginalised" (Darling 2011 p408). They consider what volunteers and asylum seekers are gaining and giving within these encounters. Even within the idea of reciprocity lie asymmetrical relations, since "service users can only offer that which they possess" (Darling 2011 p413). I share his view that it is often the "knowledge, experience and narratives" (p410) of refugees that are on offer in return for both attentiveness and material support. Though Darling does not explicitly mention it, this tendency by volunteers to use refugee narratives as 'gained experience' can I think become a form of appropriation of the struggles of the 'other' rather than building new shared knowledges that are more about being in common. Darling's point is not to deny good intentions; "my argument is not to dismiss those gifts which were offered there, as for many they were central to finding a way to 'go on' with their lives, but it is to assert that the power relations which saturate such generosity be acknowledged" (Darling 2011 p414).

Vicki Squire proposes an analysis that favours "solidarity, mobility and citizenship over cohesion, integration and community" (Squire 2011 p290) and works against the depoliticising concepts of community cohesion and integration (which, in my experience, are the bywords of public sector and policy discourse). I am very drawn to the suggestion of turning away from the idea of integration as an end point and from the idea of cohesion which avoids dealing with the tensions of inequality. Gail Lewis (2020) provides a useful phrase, "subordinated inclusion", which seems to better capture what actually happens in terms of redrawing the boundaries of community to include marginalised groups. She also advocates for a "responsibility to pay attention to each other without requiring people to assimilate or become normative subjects" (Lewis 2020 p68).

Squire (2011) uses City of Sanctuary activities taking place across the city to illustrate the idea of 'mobile solidarities' that shift towards ideas of citizenship based on the "ongoing creation and recreation of political subjectivities and social formations" (p290. Such encounters have the potential to cut across the hierarchies of the refugee/established resident distinction, opening up to the idea of working with the tensions and 'unfinishedness' of people coming together in contexts of inequality.

Vicki Squire and Jen Bagelman's article (2012) on Sheffield critiques the "pastoral logic" (p147) of the protector and protected dynamic and its depoliticising of sanctuary encounters. They suggest that the hubs of activity across the city can provide conditions for unexpected relations and creative forms of exchange including "solidaristic relations" (p150). Importantly they argue that, though offering something different from institutional agencies, those involved in volunteering are implicated in the governing of migrants too, particularly in the reproduction of unequal power relations. Encounters between participants differently positioned in society will inevitably have to hold the tensions of inequality within them, but perhaps it is in the struggle to deal with this that new relations and forms of agency emerge. Gill's article on welcome (Gill 2018) distinguishes between 'hospitality' with its sense of official duty, and 'welcome' from grassroots organisations with its warmer emotional connotations, "conveying to the newcomer the positive reception of their presence" (2018 p91) so that there is a sense of *feeling* welcome. He suggests that even small gestures within this more intimate context can be significant, and can "ground" global events (Gill 2018 p91).

Welcome is generally thought to be, or hoped to be, the first step towards a sense of belonging. Gail Lewis (2020) talks about both the psychic and social structures that generate or inhibit a sense of belonging, and which I suggest might work with or against whatever welcome one is offered by small groups of individuals, as in the case of this study. As Brah (2020) reminds us, "how you feel does not necessarily reflect how others see you" (Brah 2020 p45). Often the relatively 'private' forms of activism that are central to this study are seen as 'non-political' in comparison to larger scale public activism campaigns. Nevertheless, however small scale the activism is that we are concerned with, however based on local impulses of welcome, however grounded in the nitty gritty of here and now, it cannot be isolated from wider global forces and

contemporary domestic political regimes. Gill (2018) makes reference to a political climate that has the potential to suppress the welcome that voluntary groups try to nurture. He mentions Brexit, the rise of the far right, both real and perceived terrorism threats, and the "hidden violence of neo-colonialism, discrimination and exploitation" (Gill 2018 p91). I would add to this the long years and intensification of austerity, the purposeful creation of a hostile environment, and the permissions given by government and mainstream media through their modelling and normalising of racist behaviours.

I would like to note here that much of the theory in this section focusses on individual responses to encounters and does not suggest how these might coalesce into something more collective. I am interested in how this shift might take place. Gail Lewis (2020) and Lola Olufemi (2020) have much of interest to say about the individual and collective and about wider solidarities across difference – but their concern is more about collective organising (which the campaigning arm of MO is very strong on). In the case of these encounters of welcome, creating a local participatory language practice, interwoven with informal learning and knowledge production, may be one way of thinking about a more collective aspect to the encounters. The coming together of narrative fragments and their shifting between different social spaces, that is a feature of the case studies, may be another.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has followed a path through various literatures that have informed my theoretical approach and provided ways of thinking about my research questions and the material that was produced through my research practice. I started with outlining some of the reading that has been most influential on me as someone returning to learning in the academic sphere. I went on to set out theoretical approaches to mobility and space that are pivotal to understanding the processes at work in the subject of this research. The section on modes of encounter helped locate the active co-creation of space, taking place through approaches and responses to encounters with others, particularly here in the context of hospitality to those recognised as strangers. Through looking at literature that interrogates notions of hospitality it was possible to see how subjectivities as well as space shape, and are shaped by, these encounters to create

local, fleeting or more lasting social worlds. This discussion was extended to think about what might happen beyond the initial threshold of welcome, something that is key to tracing developments over time in this project. Literature from the field of sociolinguistics provides a basis for exploring different aspects of language: the language of hospitality, language as a social practice and language as a bordering mechanism. All three of these aspects are relevant to this study which is held together by language and literacies of doing. The above ideas were then linked to ideas of informal learning and grassroots knowledge production that are key to questions of narrative and meaning-making in relation to welcome, migration and rurality. Notions of rurality were then explored in order to think about the context of the study as a place of dis/comfort for those participating in these groups. This also sets the scene for considering how shifting narratives of the rural might move towards expecting the unexpected, seeing the global and local as intertwined, and offering opportunities to question what is in or out of place. Looking at acts of citizenship as a concept was a way of putting the politics back into these encounters and into rural, small scale, out of the way places.

Finally, I outlined the work of other scholars who have worked on welcome for refugee migrants, work which I have built on by shifting the context to the rural and by bringing together three main spheres of theory that speak to the mobilities of our arrival, our modes of encounter and how we speak to each other in our responses. It is to this area of literature, concerned with welcome and sanctuary, that the primary contribution of this thesis is directed. It advances insights from the often overlooked *rural* context of refugee migration and settlement. Its focus on language practices, 'literacies of doing', informal learning and the 'writing' of place, serves as a way of examining, and a means of emphasising, that there is a lively and significant world of rural practices of welcome related to sanctuary for resettled refugees and asylum seekers. The thesis argues that these practices matter, and are worth taking account of, within broader discussions of welcome and sanctuary.

Many links between these literatures will be brought together through discussion of the research material in later chapters. I finish by noting that organising the literature into what belonged in this chapter and what should go into the next one, about approaches to research and methodology, was not an easy task, and reflects the significant overlap between the practices of research and the encounters of welcome that are the subject of research. While confined to different chapters, the interactions of theoretical literature and approaches to research are key to the thesis.

Chapter 3: More than Methodologies

3.1 Introduction

In order to proceed with my research, it was of course necessary to follow an institutional ethics procedure which ensured that my approaches, methods and representation of material did not cause harm to participants and that they fully understood what their engagement with the project entailed. This was particularly important for refugee participants who are considered a vulnerable group. Special attention needed to be paid to invitations, information sheets and consent forms in order to make sure those speaking English as an additional language were able to give informed consent. My experience as an ESOL practitioner was invaluable in this regard.

This chapter commences by outlining the approaches I have taken to research and academic practice in general which are grounded in feminist approaches to academic endeavour. I then devote some space to the specifics of researching migration as, although the research is very purposefully about mixed groups (refugees and non-refugees) it is set within the wider context of migration. This is followed by some thoughts about my embedded position as a researcher in relation to multiple other roles within the case study groups and my social positioning more generally in relation to wider power networks. I then write about the discomforts and responsibilities in relation to researching across difference in groups marked by significant inequalities. This leads on to a discussion of modes of knowledge production in research and how this has informed my attempts at avoiding extractive methods and working towards some elements of co-production. I explain my reasons for turning to the creative methods that are central to my project and finally look at issues of how knowledges produced through this research are represented here in this thesis. I include a table to refer to, outlining the methods chosen, and there are fuller descriptions of specific methods related to each case study and how the methods played out in each one in Chapter 4. But before all this I think it is best to deal with how the pandemic affected the research so that we can then let it, for the most part, lie.

3.2 Covid adjustments

As with all research happening at the time, this project was significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, but I am reluctant for the project to be defined by it. While an inevitable background presence in the work it does not overwhelm the process or content; the practices that had a life before, after, in spite of and beyond the pandemic. While I will draw attention to the adaptations that had to be made in relation to the constraints of the times, I don't plan to labour them and I am not defining the methods and research in those terms.

The pandemic did of course necessitate a shift in approach to take account of the fact that activities had been interrupted for an unknown period, and it was not possible to meet up with anyone as a researcher. The time constraints of academic work meant that strategic decisions had to be made as to whether to 'hang on' or not, to see if restrictions eased and activities started up again. In the end, finding ourselves in a time when no-one really knew, the only way was to adapt and find a way forward in the uncertainty.

Originally my research plan was to work with rural sanctuary or welcome groups in Wales that were new to me and join in their activities as a visiting researcher. However, building contacts and relationships with new groups was hard during the pandemic - for one thing many had halted their activities. It may also have limited the capacity of small voluntary groups to consider being involved in anything 'extra'. It was enough for people just to try and keep going with the basics. As a result, I worked with groups which I had myself been actively involved with for several years prior to my research - Migrants Organise (MO) and Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary (AToS). Of course, with these known groups too, activities ceased altogether, were partially revived, or adapted as we moved through the changing conditions. Connections were successfully sustained in some cases, less so in others. The encounters that are at the centre of this project are small scale and in one way could have been easily blown off course by the pandemic, and few outside the groups themselves might have even noticed them having been blown away. But the intricacy and intimacy of relations within them were perhaps a way for them to weather the storm.

The circumstances of participants ranged from those (such as myself), whose lives were shored up against the pandemic by factors such as rural location, economic security, good housing, good digital connections and not having to go to anywhere to work, right through to participants living in more densely populated urban areas, leading precarious lives in terms of employment, income, accommodation, and immigration status, and with difficulty accessing digital connections (Dorling 2020). This last factor is important as I was able to use Zoom and WhatsApp but only in a limited way, dependent on participants' access to and familiarity with digital resources. One of the great things MO did for their members was to use funding to ensure they were all digitally well connected. In part, the arrival at the idea of a more 'remote' approach to research - using postcards - was a way of taking some control at a time when things felt, paradoxically, stuck yet unpredictably shifting. It was also a welcome relief to devise a different form of contact, avoiding digital overload during a period when so much communication was online. Setting up the postcard exchange meant a more explicit intervention into the social world I was researching, with all that that entails. In an unexpected way the constraints and limitations have led to a more creative and participatory project, particularly with MO, as will hopefully become evident in later discussion.

3.3 Approaches to research practice

I have outlined in the introduction and literature review my responsibility to give attention to what might reinforce or resist the hegemony of particular knowledges within academic research and to keep working on anti-colonial and anti-racist practices. As an individual researcher there is no easy resolution to some of these big issues but they require more than an acknowledgement. I hope that ways I have tried to actively commit to the stance I have taken is evident in all aspects of the researching and writing of this project, but it is here in the approach to methodologies that it can most obviously be put into practice. It is discussed here in relation to the means of knowledge production, the specific issues when researching with the inequalities that run through the social relations in both the practices of welcome *and* the research practice itself. As Squire puts it, this area of research '[d]emands that care is taken not to perpetuate patterns of knowledge production and ownership that extend the

colonial legacies of our postcolonial present' (Squire 2020 p301). Squire rightly points out this can be a fraught process and this tension should not be avoided.

The title of this chapter reflects my experience that, throughout my period of thinking about research methods, and in the carrying out of the research itself, it became increasingly evident that the research practices and the practices that were the object of research were deeply intertwined. Many of the concepts that structure this project are evident in both the methodology and the main body of the work. In this sense they are more than methodologies – they model and blend with the practices of welcome themselves in such a way that much of what is discussed in this chapter will thread through subsequent chapters in relation to discussion of the empirical work.

I tend to agree with Les Roberts who in his article about spatial bricolage (which I will come onto later) refers to an:

> awareness that siphoning off the constituent parts of a research project into a neatly contained section labelled 'methodology' can often work against the openness and eclecticism that are otherwise part and parcel of what that project actually entails in practice. (Roberts 2018 p3)

If we take research methods to be, as Law, Rupert and Savage propose (2011), social practices that involve engaging with and forming new social worlds, then the intertwining between research practices and the welcome practices that are the focus of this project does not seem so surprising. However, they also describe research practice as "theories that go in under the radar to form the social world by generating and reproducing collateral realities" (Law, Rupert and Savage 2011 p12). While agreeing that theories are put into practice through research, I am not sure how 'under the radar' they are here, in the sense that, as my research progressed, the echoes between methodology and the object of research became louder, and it became clearer that much of the theory I had examined applied to both. Also, I tend towards viewing the generation of new social worlds as more than 'collateral'. The intertwining of research and welcome practices has formed new social worlds that are enmeshed and have been

mutually generative.

3.4 Researching Migration

Bridget Anderson (2019) asks a necessary question: how can we study and research migration without reinforcing the ways it is seen as a problem in political and social discourse? How can we avoid reinforcing the "strongly imagined norm of national and stable communities disrupted by migrants" (Anderson 2019 p3)? My choice to focus on a mixed group of those who might be considered migrants and non-migrants (in the shorthand I am using as defined earlier) has been an intentional move, influenced by my position as a white, non-refugee myself. I was keen not to isolate migrants as a group to be researched alone. This figure of the migrant refugee does however continue to be prominent within this mix, as this thesis tends to be weighted towards literature and discussion on migrant 'issues'. The figure of the 'non-migrant' is not scrutinised in the same way. The whiteness of the rural context is discussed in some detail, and also my own position as a white, non-refugee researcher, but the whiteness of other members of the case study groups, while discussed in terms of group relations of inequality is not always given the same attention as the racialisation of migrant participants, and reinforces whiteness as the norm from which other groups diverge.

The two case studies that this project is based on are composed of a mix of people who have very different experiences of migration. They are made up of those who, as racialised minorities, are often ascribed essentialised identities, and others who, through their whiteness, tend to be accommodated with less reductive identities. This latter group are also those whose stories are more likely to be heard and are much more comfortable in the dominant language. For refugee and asylum seeker group members it is very likely that their social positioning has been radically altered through their migration experience. For these reasons there is perhaps sometimes a need to pay particular attention to refugee and asylum seeker participants in order to ensure that these essentialised identities and disadvantages of social positionings are not reproduced through research practices, and to clear space for their contributions to be heard. At the same time, it needs to be done without overemphasising the binary of migrant/non-migrant or defining refugees as passive subjects rather than 'protagonists'

"as creative subjects who play a role in their own right not just at the invitation of others" (Squire 2020 p300). Migrants are all too aware of their position within the spaces they move in and across, and are active and engaged in navigating them. For non-migrant participants this is taken for granted, so there can be a mismatch between how migrants are conceptualised by others in terms of their political agency and how they actually experience their condition (Brah 2022).

Finally on this subject of researching migration I think there is something to be said for the counterbalancing approach taken by Bisaillon et al (2019) especially in the context of the small-scale encounters that I am researching here. I like the way they choose to *model* an attitude to migration through their research practice that they would like to see in wider discourse – to treat it is as the essentially human thing that it is, "not as crisis or something out of the ordinary, but as a mundane and everyday occurrence". And by focussing on the mundane they "contemplated how individuals perform and create spaces of meaning, representation, and home for themselves" (Bisaillon et al 2019 p1028).

Both Squire (2020) and Johnson (2016) discuss approaches that attempt to challenge power asymmetries which render migrants as objects of research. As non-migrant researchers we need to treat migrant participants as "authors in their own right" (Johnson 2016) rather than as sources from which to extract knowledge (Squire 2020). We need to work out how we can speak as companions or even, as Lola Olufemi (2020) puts it, accomplices (p136), when we do not share the same struggles but recognise the interconnectedness of our lives in the context of how we are all governed. The tension of these relations is something that runs throughout the practices of welcome that are the subject of research so is of key importance to all involved and to the process of research.

3.5 Positioning the researcher: feminist approaches to inequalities and discomfort.

As a researcher who had already been active in the case study groups for some time, had organised or participated in many activities with them, and knew many of the participants well, this afforded many opportunities but also required attention to maintaining rigour and validity in research. Crang (2003) suggests that while theorisations on the transformative nature of research upon researcher and the co-construction of the 'field' by both researcher and researched is often acknowledged, attention to it is not always sustained. The embedded nature of my position in this research means that I have needed to be particularly attentive to this and it has been something I have needed to reflect on throughout. I would also prefer to frame it slightly differently by saying all of us in these encounters co-construct the 'field', which of course we do not recognise as a 'field' unless we are talking about academic study. The researcher role is just one particular way of doing this, of co-constructing the space. I intentionally use the term space here, rather than the more boundaried conceptualisation of field.

There are also cautions that go with engaging with people and events one has already been involved with over time. It means working on suspending one's assumptions, and looking beyond what has become taken for granted, familiar or routine because of one's position in relation to the research subject. As someone who had been involved in other roles with these groups prior to this research, there were expectations and assumptions about what kinds of things might happen and emerge from these encounters that needed to be set aside (Laurier 2016). Along with Bisaillon et al (2019), I am interested in "walk[ing] the line between research and life" in a way that troubles the "boundary between the field and our everyday lives" (p1059). I am particularly drawn to the way their project uses photo essays centred on objects to put their analyses into practice, as I too like to work with images of objects. Their reference to "nagging problems" (Bisaillon et al 2019 p1059) also resonates with the original impetus for this research which was my feelings of unsettlement with issues around the welcome activities I was involved with.

> Bringing our subject positions to bear in our photo essays, we blurred the boundaries between sites of inquiry 'out there' and those people, places, politics, as well as nagging problems, that are parts of who we are as people in our private and professional realm. (Bisaillon et al 2019 p1059)

Some of this unsettlement was based around the asymmetries of relations within these practices, and these spill over into research. Darling's (2011) discussion of the asymmetry of researcher, volunteer, participant, relationships in his study of a support drop-in for migrants gives useful insights here. It is in a comparable setting but it is based on his being a researcher in parallel to being a volunteer from the outset. Here in this project, the role of researcher was an addition to the mix of ways in which people already knew me, extending over a period of several years in some cases. Darling sets out how he gave time, attention and care, in his volunteer role but also held power and privileges as a researcher, to direct, question and make choices about stories that emerged and "draw the paths through which our relationship progressed" (Darling 2011 p412). What is different in my case is that the paths that relationships took were a development along lines already drawn (and carrying their own power imbalances). Darling mentions that although his role as a researcher was made very clear from the outset this sometimes "slipped from view" (Darling 2011 p409) as he blended in with other volunteers. Sometimes reinstating his position was awkward as it meant interrupting or even disrupting the emotional and care work he was involved in. I also found it was sometimes a struggle to keep my researcher role in view. It was easy to slip into the more familiar ways of relating and I was anxious in case the researcher role interrupted relations with people that were based on ongoing efforts towards mutuality and care.

The entanglements of my relations with participants, as researcher, activist, volunteer, host and friend, meant that boundaries were crossed and uncrossed all the time. Sometimes it was easy to drift across, sometimes it was unnoticeable. My 'closeness' to the research engendered some intense feelings on occasion - both enriching and discomforting. My approach to methodology is shaped by the need to navigate these multiple and often overlapping roles and shifting identities in relation to participants

and changing contexts, that I move between or indeed hold simultaneously. Though there may be a heightened awareness of this in the researcher role, the same could be said for all those involved in the interactions that are the focus of the research, particularly those agreeing to be participants in the research practice itself. This project is just one of a variety of ways in which our trajectories temporarily coincide and connect as we cross and uncross porous boundaries of multiple roles, shifting identities and different social spheres in our engagements with each other. The role of researcher has had to be woven into all this - hopefully with care.

These roles are clearly caught up with my own positioning in relation to the inequalities and power relations existing amongst group members. This has become more complex as my more particular role as researcher has been added to the mix. I am interacting as a white, middle-class researcher, secure in my citizenship status, amongst participants who are, in many cases, socially and economically positioned very differently as members of racialised, minoritised groupings still seeking social and economic security and the right to dwell in the UK.

Concerns about inequalities and power relations have not suddenly appeared in relation to my research. An unsettlement about the ways in which practices of welcome can preserve and reproduce unequal power relations, and in what small ways they may temporarily disrupt them, is a large part of what prompted this research interest in the first place. It could be said that some of the discomforts this produces in terms of research are a continuation and intensification of that already existing unease in relation to the practices of welcome I have been involved in. What matters in this discussion of methodologies is that the power associated with the researcher role are overlaid on these existing inequalities.

In a research project such as this there is an imperative to find ways of working with inequalities. As Watson and Till (2010) assert, it is not the function of methodology to overcome them, rather the search is for creative, ethical and productive ways of working with them. This echoes the suggestion in my thesis that the activities that are the *subject* of the research likewise do not overcome (whether they seek to or not) the inequalities within the group encounters themselves. They may unsettle them

temporarily but also have the potential to reinscribe them. This aspect of methodology echoes the emphasis on modes of encounter in the theoretical framework and the interest in the relations and practices that emerge from them. It is the processes at work in creating new narratives rather than any value judgement on the positive or negative outcomes in terms of the content of those narratives that is at the heart of this work. This will of course be fully developed in later chapters.

I found the work of Chadwick (2021) and Hemmings (2012) very helpful in thinking about my approach. Hemmings calls the sometimes uncomfortable feelings arising out of researching across difference and inequality "affective dissonance" (Hemmings 2012 p147). The "affective intensity" (Chadwick 2021 p1) that arises from working with inequalities across racialised and minoritised groups as a researcher from "privileged zones" can be a productive tool and "lively actant" (Chadwick 2021 p1) in research**.** Rather than exerting effort to overcome the tensions, we can see them as an "entry point for thinking about an affective politics of feminist research praxis" (Chadwick 2021 p2). Chadwick emphasises this as a feminist approach that takes into account important contributions of Black feminist writing and anti-colonial theory; for my own part I have cited those who have influenced my thoughts on this in Chapter 2.

According to Hemmings, closing down discomfort, staying in or returning to spaces of familiarity, is implicated in the reproduction of dominant forms of knowing. Foregrounding experience of these feelings makes for an openness to alternative ways of knowing (Hemmings 2012). Her emphasis on "modes of engagement" (p147) rather than identities, and on process rather than content, echoes Ahmed's (2000) work on modes of encounter. Part of this process, as these scholars and others (such as Edkins (2019)) suggest, is enacting "epistemic uncertainty" (Chadwick 2021 p4) as a way of refusing the "epistemic injustice" (Chadwick 2021 p8) of overlooking other ways of knowing and developing an ethical, accountable and potentially transformative praxis that can energise anti-colonial and anti-racist resistance. They argue that this approach to research can serve to develop both individual and collective feminist praxis that does not erase difference but foregrounds a search for "affective solidarity" (Hemmings 2012 p147) based not on identity but on modes of engagement, processes of knowledge production, accepting and enacting epistemic uncertainty, and sharing a desire for

transformation. Transformation and solidarity are by no means guaranteed but are a "good place to start" (Hemmings 2012 p158).

Alison Phipps (2019), in her work on language also affirms the links between the "dis-ease" of working across inequalities in both research *and* activism and I have found this to be an aspect of this project that has needed continuous attention.

> 'But structural inequalities cannot be overcome in a research project.[…] They endure and must be endured, as part of the disquieting and enduring dis-ease of all activism that is at the heart of all critical and decolonising work. (Phipps 2019 p11)

Some of the discomfort I have felt has been about turning people I care about into objects of research. This is especially in relation to refugee participants who are, as pointed out in the literature review, often included in discourses but not seen as producers of these discourses themselves (Kaplan, 1998; Malkki, 1998; Skeggs, 2003). My concern has also been about whether it is possible to do justice to the participants, who have entrusted their generous contributions to me. My aim has been to avoid appropriating stories solely for the benefit of researcher and the academy. If stories and contributions are absorbed into the world of academic practice alone, then they are potentially lost from spaces where they might make more of a difference and from kinds of writing in which participants would be more likely recognise themselves. It is the aim that material and stories that have emerged, and are at least temporarily in my care, can be represented and 'let go' both in the academic and wider world, in ways that align as far as possible with the intention to find a means of sharing and amplifying, but not claiming, what might be overlooked and undervalued knowledges. This means keeping in mind, and not undermining, the purpose of working within the academy towards social justice outside it. This is closely bound up with seeking a way to negotiate the role and responsibilities of a scholar-activist. The material here does not belong to this research project alone, the stories started before it and will continue beyond it. This is another (always unfinished) story that moves alongside my thesis, that is both a personal journey and one that has consequences for others. I conclude this section with a brief note on my position in relation to the academic world. My position as an older

woman student, retired from paid employment, whose experience is in community education rather than higher education, has also had a significant bearing on the shape of the project and the writing of it.

3.6 Knowledge production and co-production

Engaging with the politics of knowledge production, interrogating how and why certain knowledges are privileged or legitimised over others is important in any research, but especially when it involves those whose knowledges are side-lined, overlooked or ignored (McDowell 2010, Pink 2013, Watson and Till 2010). As Pink (2013) asserts, "how our ways of knowing are produced is an essential element of any research project; how else are we to understand the meaning of what we have come to know?" (Pink 2013 p264). What might come to be known in relation to this project is through a collage of knowledges, some more powerful than others. There are knowledges that have been available to me and that I encountered through academic scholarship in a Western higher education institution. There are knowledges of the world that appear so normalised through my being a white woman moving through white shaped spaces (Ahmed 2007) that they are taken for granted and require conscious questioning. There are knowledges I have come across through involvement with refugee migrant issues in my working life and as an activist over time. Then there is what we can 'come to know' through the focus and practices of the research project itself. Likewise, participants will have a range of knowledges, but how do we account for participants' different relation to the theoretical knowledges animated through research practices from an institutionally Western perspective? Returning to Skeggs and others, we can ask who is theory for and who gets to speak about it? How does it affect what knowledges are recognised and recorded in research? How best can we "involve people in the process of representing their lives" (Watson and Till 2010 p13)? Without underestimating the scope of their knowledges, the participants in this project are likely to have very different levels of confidence and familiarity expressing themselves within the particularities of dominant discourses of knowledge production, not least because of their language skills in English and the access they have (not) had to education, work and social worlds here. Heather Johnson's emphasis (Johnson 2016) is on giving space for those things which might not 'fit' with the concepts and categories we mobilise in

our research and leave many social actors and practices and knowledges unaccounted for, and I think this is something that has to be grappled with.

Assembling a collage of methods using multiple repertoires of communicative resources has, in part, been a response to circumstances but has also lent itself in both planned and incidental ways to at least some elements of co-production. These methods are not exemplary, they have been patchy, imperfect and partial in terms of co-production as an aim. It has been informally consultative, there are aspects of it that have been participant led, and there has certainly been dialogue, but it cannot be claimed that it has not mostly been directed by myself as researcher. The encounters of welcome require a flexible, changing, response to context and circumstances and perhaps the strategies we use to enquire about them require the same qualities in the research space. Overall, it has been the *doing* of it, the grappling with the process, that has illuminated some of the issues that are at play in the doing of welcome. It is perhaps a 'story so far'.

Heather Johnson's (2016) way of thinking about narrative in terms of dialogue is something that fits well into this research process, especially since she too is examining research methods with migrant participants in particular. As she contends, we understand our social worlds and actively constitute our social identities through the stories we tell to ourselves and to others, whether publicly or privately. She sets out below a kind of model approach to research concerned with narrative, especially where the local and global scales meet. She comments here on ideas of authorship and calls for a research practice:

> committed to an engaged, situated, and contextual understanding of research, led by participants themselves in a research practice strongly characterised by reflexivity. It recognises the role and impact of the researcher, situating her as part of the project and as the author, perhaps, of the connections and patterns that, to draw on Buroway (2001), "localize" the global. The narratives themselves, however, are authored by the participants. (Johnson 2016 p390)

Expanding on the topic of dialogue, as noted in Chapter 2, I am drawn again to bringing Freirean theories of dialogic pedagogy into the discussion. With my background in community adult education, I have found Freire's (1987, 1996) work on pedagogy a constant reference point in its intention to allow underrepresented voices to take some control over these processes, and its transformative potential. Here I use transformative in the sense of reshaping narratives and spaces, not necessarily on a grand scale, though Freire saw it as revolutionary practice. How the methods chosen fit with this dialogic approach will be expanded on in the case studies and the following chapters.

It matters that efforts are made to avoid extractive methods that isolate refugee stories as narratives of crisis that potentially add another layer to their representation as problematic. My focus is not on mining the backstories of migration trauma; I am not so interested in people being 'on the move', but in their encounters now we are all here and I was very clear to all participants that this was my interest. I asked the same questions to refugees and non-refugee participants, though for reasons of levels of understanding and ability to express themselves in English the questions were composed and prompted differently. With this in mind, I would like to include some thoughts from journalist Karyn McCLusky (2020) on the responsibility we have "with the enormous and fragile gift of someone's story" (para4). She talks about the awkwardness of saying no when an organisation or group who may have in some way supported you, request that you do an interview - the importance of being able to say no to questions. There may also be an issue for those from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds feeling a need to please in context of co-operating in the 'host' country (Parker 2018) (see more detail on this in Chapter 2). As McClusky says, there are many reasons to share your story but "it can't be because someone else wants you to". We have to bear in mind in whose best interests it is to share a story, particularly when we do not know where it will go and how it will be retold. This is of course even more relevant when people are speaking a language where their understanding or expression may be limited.

I have been interested to think about the how the stories told here, in a very local context, relate to global flows and forces. Heather Johnson (2016) is helpful here too, in her thinking about the local and global as simultaneous and co-constituted spheres. She

is particularly concerned with making room for the emergence of counternarratives, generating new manifestations of the global which are made possible through entanglements with the local, putting the "local and global in conversation" (p389). The local, she proposes, though specifically situated is not limited in relevance solely to its context but is productive of the global. To see it as solely relevant to the local context is to continue to reproduce the silencing of subaltern voices. She urges us to see people's narration of local and everyday experience as not just narration of "their world" but of "the world" (p387) and to recognise the generation of knowledge from daily material experience. This relates to this project on two counts: it is situated in rural spaces that are often perceived as the epitome of local; and the voices of refugee participants often go unheard. It therefore feels important to try and ensure that research practices and representation allow local counternarratives to emerge and take their place as constitutive of the global.

3.7 Creative methods – language, assemblage, bricolage

The above discussion of dialogue can, I suggest, be expanded to include a range of practices and actors, more than the two-way traffic suggested by the term. Moving from dialogue (but not leaving it behind) to the concept of bricolage I will explain the reasons I have been drawn to visual methods and also my approach to interviews that tries to bring them into the creative mix. It is perhaps timely to reiterate at this point that, as my research developed, any division between the blends of social and creative activities characteristic of practices of welcome for refugees and the creative practices of my research became increasingly indistinct, and many of the concepts that are important to this aspect of the methodology weave through the whole thesis. In this section I will discuss how a mix of creative research methods were used in order to try and bring some of the approaches above into play and will refer to specific instances where relevant Table 1 is a summary of methods used but the case studies in Chapter 4 give more detail.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PRACTICES/METHODS	
Picture Postcard Conversations Project	
Postcard Project	During lockdown MO members were invited to participate in a postcard exchange based on their memories of staying in rural Wales. More than 30 postcards were exchanged between myself and 10 participants. Initially they were 'ready-made' and then 'home-made'. All resources were posted out to participants including stamped addressed envelopes and craft materials
Exhibition and event	The postcards produced from the above project were collected into an exhibition with an accompanying event in the community hall in the village where the participants had stayed. Three participants returned to stay in village house and to help with the event. The event attracted over 50 people in an afternoon and morning session over a weekend. There were dance/movement sessions in the field led by one of the participants. Visitors were invited to make new postcards in response to the exhibition, and these were displayed on the veranda during the event. There were home-made refreshments.
Continued life of exhibition	The exhibition moved briefly to Swansea university during a conference event. It then moved to Migrants Organise offices where they plan to display it in the library space they are creating for their members.
In person and virtual creative sessions	
AToS Conversation Café; in person creative workshop	Taking place in a familiar community venue, two of the regular AToS Conversation Café sessions were given over to creative workshops. Participants were invited to come and make images of activities they have participated in together. 12 people came over the two sessions, some coming to both. Using paper, collage, drawing and text, images were made representing some of the activities engaged in with Conversation Café or more generally related to AToS. The incidental actions and conversations that accompanied the processes of making things together were at least as interesting as what was produced.
MO postcard project; creative Zoom session	During lockdown, participants in the postcard exchange were invited to a Zoom session where we made cards together, chatted about what we were doing, shared memories and future plans. Six people attended.
WhatsApp Groups	
AToS group; 'Welcome' story	During lockdown AToS members were invited to share pictures on the theme of welcome in a specially set up WhatsApp group.
MO Postcard Project; participant group chat	Running alongside the postcard exchange was a WhatsApp group which helped keep up the momentum of the project and where participants shared appreciation of the pictures of the cards they had sent and received.
Interviews	
AToS participants	Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 participants who attended AToS Conversation Café regularly – 3 were refugees and 3 were volunteers. Interviews took place either in participants' homes, my home or a café – all familiar spaces.

Table 1: Summary of research methods

I have also drawn on my observation through experience of being a participant in these encounters over several years. The use of these methods has been influenced by circumstance as well as choice but they can be seen to complement each other in a variety of ways. As McDowell (2010) states in relation to interviews, “other methods validate and contextualise” each other (p158). The mix of image, text, speech, film clip, and observation of sound and movement are the materials from which a collage representing what is happening can be assembled.

The concept of bricolage and the researcher as bricoleur is very appealing to me, and Les Roberts (2018) provided the route for me to think how it applied to this study. With its emphasis on what Roberts sees as roaming and gleaning - “picking up and repurposing matter that is already ‘out there’’’ (Roberts 2018 p5) in order to find and use what materials are available - it champions “the poetics of making do” (Roberts 2018 p23 quoting De Certeau 1984 p xv). This need not mean that it lacks rigour or is superficial, though of course one must guard against this. What is ‘fashioned’ is contingent on factors that are not always foreseen and it shows a “respect for the complexity of the lived world” (Roberts 2018 p4 quoting Kincheloe et al 2011 p168). I like the idea that something is ‘fashioned’ from what we have available; it is not a muddle of separate items. Its focus on process, the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what’ also matches how the methods of the research project unfolded.

Roberts also addresses the reflexivity entailed in this approach, one which aligns with how I have tried to approach my role as researcher.

> Reflexivity lies at the core of how and why the spatial bricoleur does what s/he does. Attention is thrown back on the researcher in the field, not just as an exercise in self-indulgence, but to recognise that the process of making do requires the researcher to step into any given space in ways that her presence - her creativity and performance, her intersubjectivity, her body, her spacing – becomes constitutive of that space. In this respect the spatial bricoleur is as autoethnographically invested in the space or spaces he immerses

> himself in as any other that are routinely encountered in everyday life. (Roberts 2018 p7/8)

Roberts also moves to the phase of representation, highlighting a dilemma that I have also had to negotiate: that however much we turn to the non-representational, and even if the writing of place (which is something this study is very much concerned with) is not just about the written word, "whether we like it or not we are stuck with the communicative and representational burden of writing up. We are stuck with words" (Roberts 2018 p5).

Harriet Hawkins (2019), writing on creative geographies, sets out how this term can mean a range of things, from people collaborating in the arts and cultural fields, to more vernacular crafts and amateur creative practices. My work certainly fits into the latter and my interest stems in part from a background in teaching ESOL and family learning (with ESOL learners) where very simple creative crafts were used for learning and as a way of talking while doing. It seemed to fit with the concept that is quite central to my thesis, that of language as a social and creative practice and 'literacies of doing' (expanded on in later chapters). But Hawkins (2019) also cautions how creativity is sometimes uncritically seen as 'inherently good', how it can falsely denote other methods as uncreative and yet if we say everything is creative it can lead to the idea becoming meaningless. I think there is also a tendency to think that just because something is creative it automatically smooths over inequalities and difference. While this is not the case, creative methods *can* allow fuller participation. I am drawn to visual methods particularly as a way of generating alternative language and literacies which can produce and communicate meanings and knowledges that might otherwise be overlooked. They open up access to meaning making to those that may speak English as an additional language, facilitating the inclusion of participants whose language skills in English exclude them from interviews for ethical reasons. It is also a mode of working that I feel comfortable with personally - as a non-expert. And I enjoy the way Crang (2003) expresses it as moving away from "very wordy worlds, visual methods produce forms of knowledge that are deeply textured in every sense" (p501). My lack of professional artistic expertise should not, I think, detract from using creative methods, and the images I have created myself that are used within the thesis are a legitimate

response to my research findings.

I also look to creative methods as they lend themselves to collective practice and can combine with activist aims. I gained a lot from reading Angeles and Pratt's (2017) work on creative practice, exploring the combination of academic and activist through promoting experimentation with new ways:

> to express things that cannot otherwise be said, to communicate to audiences that they could not otherwise reach, and to create the kinds of conversation they could not otherwise have. (Angeles and Pratt 2017 p275)

They promote critical-creative processes that disrupt hierarchies of knowledge production and "raise new questions and challenges for these practices and their practitioners" (p276).

Bagelman, Nunez Silva & Bagelman (2017), researching with migrant workers from Mexico employed in agricultural work in Canada, co-produced a small book as a form of collective research and activism. Illustrated recipes were interwoven with fragments of stories about their lives. This book was then disseminated in places where food is bought and consumed, promoting awareness outside the world of the migrant workers of the relation between food production, migration and poor working conditions. Their work approached migrants not as objects of research but rather political agents, using image and text to centre those most affected but whose voices "often remain peripheral or eclipsed" (p392). They view artistic practice as a relational activity, active in shaping subjects, worlds and knowledges. They argue that collaboration and the practices of creative engagement are at least as important as any creative outcome and are key to creating new relationships and solidarities between people and places. I particularly like their view that artistic activities can be both playful and also political. These scholars are also concerned with the production of accessible and *usable* knowledge which matches my own concerns.

I present their work in some detail because I think some comparisons can be drawn with the creative projects of the homemade postcard exchange and resulting exhibition

that are at the centre of the MO case study. The postcards were initially a practice borne from necessity during lockdown and worked simply as an exchange between participants and myself as researcher. However, through their move to a more public space, with some co-organising with MO participants, and the production of an accompanying booklet, the fragments of lives depicted through the text and image turned them into something closer to an activist event that was at once 'playful and political'. This event and subsequent ones will be discussed in detail later on. Though outside the timeframe of this research, I plan to use the images I have assembled around the AToS case study to create photo books for AToS that the group can use as they wish and which have a life beyond the research project.

Practices of hospitality and welcome often involve social or creative activities of one sort or another, activities that lend themselves to generating spoken and unspoken language. Making and doing can create an atmosphere where people feel more at ease with conversation, and also with silences. Conversation can be about whatever creative process is taking place but can also flow away from and return to it. People can group and regroup around the activity. Spoken language can work alongside or weave in and out of the creative activity, while the creative process itself generates alternative forms of meaning making and communication. Embedding creative methods addresses some of the language issues raised previously and allows for the building of a collective practice. Organising creative activities for the research project gave similar opportunities to participants and mirrored the kind of activities that might well be happening in these groups outside of the research project. The creative sessions, the postcard exchange and the exhibition, for example, were not outside what might be familiar activities to both groups in the study. I am talking here mainly about creativity based around visual material, but the same principles of language and doing could apply to cooking, dancing, gardening or other activities. More detail on the creative session appears in the case studies and will also be referred to through the following chapters as an integral part of discussion.

I am also interested in the artefacts and images associated with welcome practices. I consider them another communicative resource, an alternative literacy, carrying meanings that aren't always expressed through spoken language, and I have used

images of objects throughout this thesis. In part this is necessitated by not including people in images without permissions. Also, following Bisaillon et al (2019) again, in their writing about their photo essays, they claim that focussing on objects is a way of bringing together people, places and practices. They saw this focus on objects and visual media as a grounding practice, focussing on the everyday, that would "tether our inquiries to the tangible practices that people do" (Bisaillon et al 2019 p1049). This they claim "spoke to contradictions and frictions arising from migrations, mobilities and circulations of various sorts" (p1049) rather than "spectacles and crises" which "ultimately meant we would all introduce themes that were personal, and even intimate" (p1029). Broadening the idea out beyond objects to multiple sensory experiences, Yasmin Gunaratnam (2013), with reference to Arundhati Roy, asks, "Can we not also think of the objects, events, sights, sounds, tastes and smells that we encounter in research (and in life) in this way? Research 'materials' as much as stories can animate and inhabit us" (p159). This particularly resonates with the multisensory experience of the postcard exhibition event which will be described and discussed later.

I carried out six interviews for the AToS case study, three with Syrian refugee migrant women and three with non-refugee volunteers. These will be looked at in detail in the case studies, but a general discussion of interviews as a method gives some background to my approach to them. The interviews might be viewed as the least creative of the methods used but I hope here to better integrate them into the assemblage of methods. In a thesis examining repertoires of language that make connections more accessible, interviews as a method provide the comparatively limited scope of spoken English, though of course the settings, the gestures, the pre-existing relationships, google translate, all played their part. The two creative, image-making sessions with AToS members provided a different kind of contribution, as much about process as content. The multifaceted language of these sessions, where the process and its incidental events are all part of the story, are perhaps better suited to studying the role of language as a participatory project. On the other hand, the value of the detail from the interviews is not to be denied and I think after the restrictions of Covid it was a welcome intimacy. By taking place in my home and participants' homes and in one case a café – all spaces we are familiar with - they also mirrored the encounters in domestic

and other intimate social spaces that are frequent AToS events.

Les Back's (2012), critical thinking through interviews, which are such a common and taken for granted method, revolves around the letting go of motivations for "capturing" or "giving" voice to participants (p248, p259) and also of looking for authenticity and truth. Rather he characterises the interview as a staged event within a stylised form – "a particular mode of narrating life" (p248). Linda Mc Dowell (2010) describes interviews as a "complex and contested social encounter riven with power relations" affecting the nature of the interaction (p161). Back also encourages us to refrain from simply listening to voices and "re-animate the idea of description' and attention (p253) to other important aspects of interaction.

As Yasmin Gunaratnam (2013) also says, if you are interviewing in someone's own environment e.g. their home, the "difference between what people are telling you and what you can take in from seeing them interact with others" (p158) is evident and there is "always more going on in interviews than what's being said" (p158). The short piece below (Figure 1) illustrates how paying attention to what happens in and around the spoken interview can be telling.

Taking forward these analyses I have tried to approach interviews as a dialogic 'making' activity, not necessarily completely unrelated to creative practices. And recalling Hawkins (2019) above, setting creative methods against what might be considered less creative is not always helpful. The points about interviews are finally brought together by both Back (2012) and McDowell (2010) in the argument that it becomes the responsibility of the researcher to take forward these manufactured exchanges and give them a shape that, while inevitably embedded in particular discourses and ways of knowing, somehow holds some validity and tells us something about a particular time, place, event, relation. This brings us on to the topic of representation.

Walking and waving

I pick M up from her house and we drive into town to find a cafe to sit in. As we walk out of from Morrison's car park, she stops to have a brief conversation with someone. As we pass the upmarket butcher's shop she slows, turns, and waves to one of the men serving inside, who acknowledges her greeting in return. She says 'hi' to a third person as we head towards the cafe. All this within a five-minute walk.

M knows more people in town than I do. Why would I think otherwise? We are both relatively recent arrivals here but she has lived here a year longer than me. She lives nearer the centre of town. Her children go to school here. She now has an extended family here. Her husband now works in town. From where I'm standing, she is better connected here than I am, and I realise I'm caught out by this and ask myself - why wouldn't she have a stronger sense of belonging than mine? As she says during our interview with a laugh, 'Now I say welcome to other people. I'm very old now'.

Café talk.

We arrive at the café and sit in the rather gloomy upstairs room, the same spot where, for a period of time we all met up for the AToS Conversation Café get togethers. I feel quite awkward in my role as researcher here. I feel uncomfortable trying to explain the research themes - this isn't the language of Conversation Café. Same café, different way of relating.

Somehow, we end up talking about recent local AToS protests against government plans to introduce even more draconian immigration controls. A form of public activism that at this point in time refugee participants were not involved in. This is something I've never talked about with N before, perhaps making assumptions about topics of interest. Our dialogue doesn't stick easily with the research questions but it has nevertheless opened up something new and, in terms of what has *happened* more than what has been *said*, it has been rich, at least for me, in terms of learning and knowledge production.

Figure 1: Interviewing Participant M

3.8 Questions of representation

Creating knowledges generated through co-production with participants is often then still represented as knowledge about them. In terms of representation in a thesis, what has been selected, curated, consciously or unconsciously, is mediated by the researcher and the context she is writing in/for. There is much to be discussed about the dynamics and interpretation of narratives where there is an understanding that "the narrative of another is never fully accessible. It is always received via translation" (Johnson 2016 p393). This cannot be covered here in detail but, drawing on Heather Johnson's work,

the task is not to look for narrative 'truth', the dilemma is, as Johnson puts it, "how to encompass this understanding of narrative translation such that it is not understood as a problem that undermines research but instead as a valuable practice of dialogue" (p393).

The question must also be asked, who benefits from the material produced? In this case, there have been benefits in that it has informed my engagement with activism going forward. The reconnection with MO participants was the stimulus for organising a further visit to rural Wales. An exhibition of postcards with an accompanying event and booklet brought stories to a wider audience (see Chapters 7 and 8). The postcards have now been taken to the MO offices in London for them to use as they wish – currently the plan is to display them as part of a library space they are organising.

In my project, both refugee migrants, non-migrants and myself as researcher collaborated in learning and knowledge production, and what appears here is a piecing together of collective as well as individual narratives. I have been interested in how stories, anecdotes or conversations emerge not only from interviews but also how fragments of language from other activities such as the postcards, pieces that may be just as significant, can be brought together and arranged into something. I am drawn to using fragments, mosaics, patchwork, intersected or layered with language. I think this reflects the processes at work in the practices of welcome themselves, where spoken and unspoken language practices blend in small scale, quite transient fragments of people's lives. It is a way to represent the contributions of those whose language skills in English mean they cannot speak at length or with detailed vocabulary and provides something closer to a collective participatory practice. For me, making the collages and other images has been a way of processing and thinking about what happens in these encounters of welcome.

A discussion of approaches, methods, and the theories of knowledge that they are embedded in, has clarified for me that ways of knowing, and ways of getting to know, cannot be conclusively decided upon and fixed in advance. Within the broad parameters of the choice of methods (and the constraints of Covid), the process has been iterative and non-linear (Watson and Till 2010 p17), emerging and developing. It

has required an approach that is responsive and open but without losing sight of its original aims in terms of research practice, and maintaining integrity. Creative methods and the process of bricolage can seem very informal, loosely connected and inconclusive. The challenge is to balance this with rigour and ensure the material makes a clearly identifiable and legitimate contribution to the thesis. My aim has been to build a project that meets a methodological intention to find ways to bridge the gap between academia and everyday life, and between activist and researcher. I have often used 'us' and 'we' in the writing up of this project. When referring to the case studies this acknowledges my embedded position within the groups. Sometimes it refers to myself as writer in relation to the reader as we encounter each other through the text (Ahmed 2000). Having outlined the approaches taken and the methods employed, the next chapter describes the two case studies in detail.

Chapter 4: The Case Studies

4.1 Introduction

In both the case studies in this project, people have set out, in an organised way, to set up encounters between people who would otherwise be unlikely to meet. In the context of a rural village and town, these go beyond the incidental, inter-cultural encounters that might occur more frequently in the city. However, the case studies are very different in other ways, in terms of the histories and purposes of the two groups, their make up in terms of members, their activities and my relationships to them. Their members were also differently located: AToS members lived locally to me and MO members were based in London. The research methods used were also significantly different, partly because of these differences but also due to the phase of the pandemic we were in when the research with each group of participants took place. In combination, these factors have meant that the emphasis of what emerged in relation to the research question themes has been weighted quite differently in each case study.

My study seeks to be attentive to the stories and experiences of people who have participated in these encounters in all capacities – volunteers, supporters, organisers, invitees. Overall, there is an effort to avoid categorisations and labelling (McFadyen 2016) attributed by others and used in discourse popularised during a period where immigration policies have created an increasingly 'hostile environment' for refugees and asylum seekers. While there are attempts to detach the different roles from fixed identities, especially binary oppositions such as guest/host, migrant/local, this has had to be balanced with the practical need to refer to different groupings within the context of the research, and terms will be defined in this regard (see the terminology and abbreviations section).

As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh states (2020), placing migrations in historical and political context is important, however this study does not seek out the back stories of the refugee experience or demand the 'violence of storytelling' (p7). While some contributors (both refugee and non-refugee participants) did choose to relate some personal background that they felt had a bearing on their participation, individual back stories have not been

investigated by me as researcher. It is recognised, however, that what people bring with them to the encounters, though we may not know the details, is inseparable from wider histories of uneven mobilities, colonial legacies and the current inequities of capitalist regimes. Hopefully the context as briefly outlined in the case studies below, and the very specific local context detailed throughout the thesis, is sufficient for the type of study this is.

The study looks for ways that people's experiences of these encounters, however they arrived and whatever the nature of their participation, can be presented together with some coherence. It is emphatically not about singling out the refugee experience but about how people involved in these groups find and develop ways of being together, how stories that emerge from this are told, and where they might go. As with the approaches to methodologies described in Chapter 3, I take the case studies to be more than a simple description of the methods but a way of gaining insights into the main threads of the thesis.

4.2 Case Study: Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary

4.2.1 The context

Abergavenny is a town in the borderlands of Wales, and is sometimes described as the Gateway to Wales. The nearest larger towns are Newport and Cardiff in Wales, and Bristol in England. It is just to the east of the post-industrial Welsh valleys area. It is surrounded by the Black Mountains to the West and the softer countryside of the country of Monmouthshire to the East.

Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary (AToS) is a small voluntary group composed of people who are all resident in and around the small market town of Abergavenny. The intention of the group is to welcome, offer support where needed, and show friendship to those who might be considered as strangers, with all that that entails in terms of their reception, attitudes towards them, and their own sense of un/belonging. In this case, in this specific setting, the recently arrived, racialised migrants are hyper-visible as 'strangers' in a small rural town with an overwhelmingly white population. The group is linked to the wider national network of City of Sanctuary groups, which started with

cities and has since expanded to include towns, villages, schools, and other institutions. The groups are set up to promote and create cultures of welcome primarily for refugee and asylum-seeking migrants. This takes many forms as will be evident in the material produced from the research but is characterised by being on a small scale, and often centred on activities such as cooking, walking, dancing, social events and outings. Separately from this network, but employing a similar kind of discourse, Wales has taken steps to become the first ever Nation of Sanctuary. What this means is quite a contested area (Bernhard 2022, Edwards & Wisthaler 2023), and in practical terms is yet to fully materialise, but the growing narrative of welcome that it has encouraged makes the activities of AToS part of a wider picture that is quite specific to Wales.

All the members (refugee and non-refugee) of AToS live in and around the same town but the histories of their mobility, their trajectories, what brought them to this location and the choices they had, or made, about coming are very different (Massey 2005, Sheller 2018, Skeggs 2003). The refugee members of the group came via the UK government's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) which, under the government's dispersal policy, sees refugees being resettled in smaller towns across the UK as well as the cities. Under this scheme they arrive with full refugee status which means they are not in the (even more) insecure position of asylum seekers. Often, as is the case of those in this study, they come as family groups (though restrictions on wider family reunion remains a big issue for the families here). Non-refugee members of the group have different biographies of migration internal to the UK, some having never left the area, some having left and returned, some being long term residents and some having moved here more recently. In my own case, I arrived here about a year later than most of the Syrian families. Although the stories of how we arrived are widely varied and those of us who are not refugees have had more control over those stories, it is worth remembering that the restricted or forced mobility of refugee migrants is specific to their refugee experience and not something that is attached to them as a fixed, identifying feature. In the same vein it is also worth noting that many are socially repositioned in their new context - often having led quite prosperous lives previously, something mentioned several times by participants in relation to what they have learned about refugees through these encounters.

As well as arrival in the town there are also questions about how and why we arrive to these particular encounters. AToS is a small, informal, entirely voluntary group. While it has no formal relation to any state agencies, informal contact with VPRS support workers plus the fact that some members are also ESOL tutors provides a 'way in' to meeting newly resettled refugee families. AToS has a minimal structure: a small committee (of which I was a member for a time), and a wider membership that participates to very varying degrees. Its stated aims are modelled on those of the wider City of Sanctuary movement. People join because of their own interests, beliefs, political commitment, needs and curiosities - and others because they have been invited to participate in what is on offer. There are no obligations or expectations (beyond a code of conduct), and the group's activities are shaped by the skills and interests of those who participate, the relations between us, and by the organising, guiding and safeguarding roles of the committee. Of course, everyone has relations outside the group; its significance in some people's lives is likely to be much greater for some than others, and this has changed over time. I had been an active participant in the group for over five years at the time of the study so my role as researcher was overlaid on roles of organiser, volunteer, friend and also overlapped with my role as an ESOL teacher in local classes which were attended by some of the refugee families. Though there were specific research activities set up, it is inevitable that my embedded position over a long period of time has given an autoethnographic thread to the research.

The AToS Conversation Café is the starting point for the study as it initially formed the central hub around which activities revolved and evolved. It was originally set up to offer the recently arrived Syrian families who were resettled in the town a weekly opportunity to practise English very informally, to provide some sociality and tentative connections with people seen as 'local' and who considered themselves to be in a position to offer any support needed. In terms of research, the Conversation Café itself and the activities associated with it provided the opportunity to examine how, having arrived in the same space, we found ways of being together that expressed welcome, hospitality and friendship, and to explore what role language as a shared social practice played in our encounters. It is also relevant to note that the encounters between white

volunteers and racialised refugee families initiated by AToS are unlikely to have taken place *in this particular way* in the course of people's daily lives. The setting of a small town does not offer the same opportunities as more urban spaces do with their mix of diasporic populations. At the same time, it is of course the case that outside the interactions of AToS the refugee families make many other connections over time; they have children at school, they have neighbours, a number of them work. Perhaps it should be noted that at the time of doing the field work the Conversation Cafe was not meeting regularly as the group adapted to changes after the interruption of the pandemic and as people's lives and ways of connecting had moved on. It has since revived with the arrival of newly resettled refugee families.

While later discussion resists the idea of the rural seen as disconnected from wider urban and global concerns, this can be differentiated from the idea of the study being situated. There are specific aspects of rurality that pertain to this study. One of these is the whiteness of the rural and the impact this has on resettling families and also the perceived need for welcome in the first place. Participant R talks about a 'nagging anxiety' about this that reflects my own. A long quote follows, but I think is it is important for a participant other than me to set the scene:

> I always felt this sense of oh my goodness I hope people are not going to be racially abused, I hope people are not going to be rejected I hope people are not going to be discriminated against because it is quite a sort of white bubble if you like and I think there is something about rural, I wouldn't say isolation perhaps that's too strong a word but…
>
> …that is not to say that if you were in the city you would be more protected from that but I suppose in a city you might have greater safety in numbers you might have a much bigger community not necessarily Syrian people but you'd have the community of being able to go to a mosque for Friday prayers, that sense of belonging to a bigger group of the sort of areas where people can go to shops that sell the food you want to buy, halal butchers. Maybe little cafes and

> restaurants and stuff. It doesn't mean to say you are suddenly going to be immune from that in the city but I just felt that [here] there was a greater chance people might be rejected or abused or whatever and unfortunately as we know instances of that very thing happening and probably more than I realise. It's only when you have that direct conversation with somebody that they start telling you about experiences they've had (Interview with Participant R)

4.2.2 The research practices.

The changing circumstances of the pandemic meant that methods needed to be adapted, and when I started, I had to rely on remote methods. For reasons of connectivity and language skills in English, Zoom was not appropriate for this group. I therefore experimented initially with a WhatsApp group thread. As face-to-face activities started up again, I was able to organise two creative sessions and then six in person interviews.

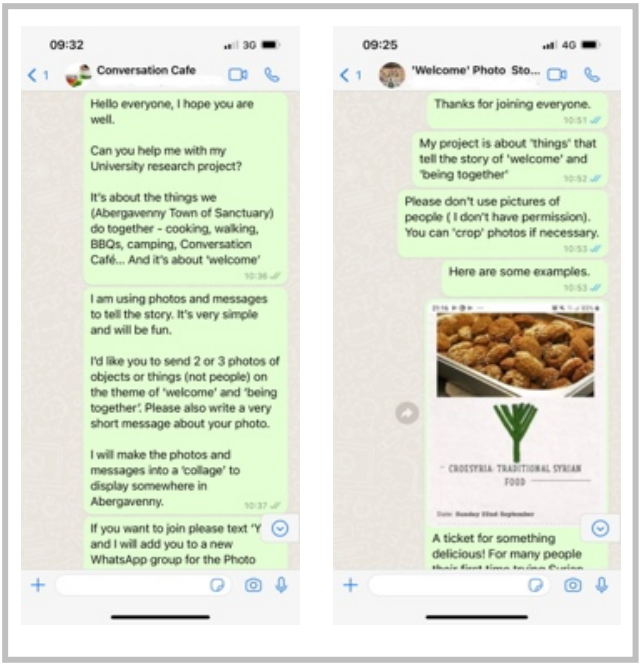


Figure 2: Instructions for AToS WhatsApp 'Images of Welcome' group

My first method for connecting with people was through a WhatsApp group. I invited people via an existing WhatsApp group linked to the AToS Conversation Café, so people were able to opt into the new group. I explained to people joining the group that they were invited to post pictures that represented the idea of welcome (see Figure 2). WhatsApp, with its mix of short comments, images and emojis was a mode of communication to which everyone could potentially contribute. It does not require a response in 'real' time, or in a linear way, or even a response at all. People can easily 'chip in' in different ways to the thread of current or recent posts.

I feel it had mixed results, or at least the results were not what I expected. There was a relatively small core of people who contributed, and it was volunteer members who mainly kept the flow of the thread going by responding to the pictures posted by the Syrian women. It was quite short lived. Nevertheless, when I looked back at it and put it together in the collage (see Figure 17: Creative session - images and conversations) I found it richer and more helpful than I originally thought in understanding the themes of welcome and hospitality, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Once we were able to meet as a group again, I arranged to use two of the Conversation Café meetings to hold creative sessions where people were invited to make images of events and activities they had participated in with AToS (see Figure 3, Appendix A: Participant Consent Form: AToS creative session; Appendix B: Plan for AToS creative session) I originally thought that these might be made into something more permanent for display but that is not the way things proceeded.

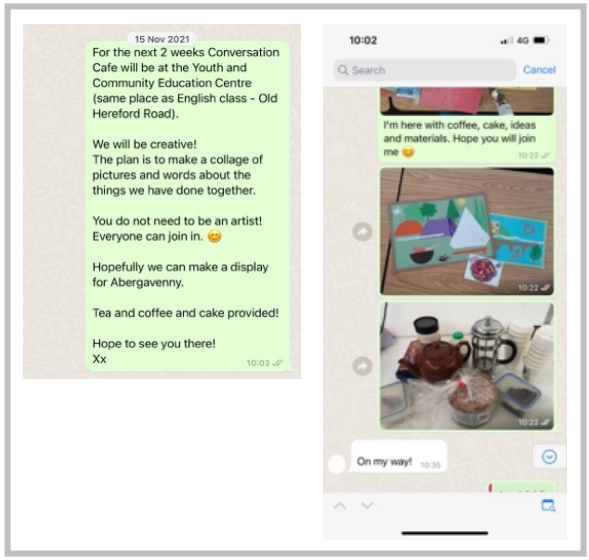


Figure 3: Invite to Creative Sessions

I was very aware in this session of the different ways I was known there - as a member of AToS who organises things (such as this session), as a friend, as an ESOL teacher, and now as a researcher. When setting up the session I could feel the teacher role coming through - something I wished to avoid. By appropriately adjusting my role the sessions became less controlled and a little more chaotic. In a positive sense more unexpected

things came out of it. I am very accustomed to events around this kind of activism not always going to plan. As a researcher I found myself wishing it was more controlled but I think by letting go, the sessions more closely echoed what happens in the interactions of AToS more generally, outside the research process. People present, not surprisingly, interacted in the familiar ways they did at Conversation Café. So some of the themes that came up through the process of using creative methods, around interactions being organised and spontaneous, controlled and improvised, came through in the sessions.

Overall, the two creative, image making sessions with AToS members provided a contribution which was as much about process as content. Initially I was, perhaps mistakenly, hooked on what would be produced, while actually, what was happening in the room while doing the making was what I needed to pay attention to. As Harriet Hawkins, who writes on creative geographies, puts it, “sitting with the process rather than the output” (Hawkins 2019 p974). The multifaceted language practices of these sessions and its incidental events are all part of the story, and well suited to studying the role of language as a participatory project. In Chapter 5 I will be discussing what came out of these sessions and my response through writing and collage.

For the interviews I approached three Syrian women whose ability to communicate in English I knew to be suitable and three regular and long-standing volunteers (See Appendix C: Participant Information and Consent form for AToS interviews and Appendix D: AToS interview questions). The interviews presented an opportunity to ask people more directly about some of the themes of the study, rather than more obliquely in the WhatsApp and creative sessions. On the other hand, in a project examining repertoires of language that make connections more accessible, interviews as a method provide the comparatively limited scope of spoken English. It is likely that conversing in English made it much harder for the Syrian women to put some of their ideas into words and it is possible that at times I was not successful in communicating fully what I was aiming to talk about. In these cases, I did not pursue questions that, even after rephrasing, I felt were not fully understood.

In some particular sections of the thesis, the limitation of using interviews did surface in terms of whose stories were heard in more detail and this has been mentioned where

relevant. Clearly it is something that needs to be addressed in a project trying to give space to the stories of everyone in this mixed group, especially those whose stories are often overlooked. However, I think it can be said that, while the nature and content of the contributions from the Syrian women was different in quality and emphasis from that of the volunteers, each in their way were rich in providing new insights to reflect on.

Moreover, the value of the detail provided by the interviews is not to be denied, and I think after the restrictions of Covid-19, face-to-face interactions provided a welcome intimacy. By taking place in my home and participants' homes and in one case a café – all spaces we are familiar with - they also mirrored the encounters in domestic and other local social spaces that are frequent AToS events. The settings, the gestures, the pre-existing relationships, google translate, all played their part.

Interviewees were asked to speak spontaneously on questions they were presented with in the moment, questions that, as researcher, I had spent a lot of time with. I would certainly include myself as someone who has, both in and outside this research role, sometimes found it hard to gather my thoughts without contradiction and without inadvertently expressing things in ways that might be subject to theoretical critiques of what we do in these practices and how we do it. I want to be clear that discussion in the following chapters based on interviews in no way reflects negatively on the best intentions that participants have. I would like to emphasise also, that I found the interviews a powerful learning process for myself as we talked through our experiences of encounters of welcome and hospitality. What interviewees said often refreshed my ideas or prompted me to re/think something and I found it a new opportunity to question my own attitudes, actions and language alongside those I was in conversation with.

I was conscious of the difficulties of navigating my position as friend as well as researcher in relation to all interviewees (as also discussed more generally in the methodologies chapter). In some ways it freed up how we were able to talk, as we were able to build on common knowledge about each other and AToS. There was certainly a tendency towards meandering diversions of conversation but I think our awareness of

the friendships at stake, between us and in the wider group, meant we might have been more cautious about what was said in any negative terms. The interviews were dialogic in the sense that, although there were prepared questions, our conversations took very different turns as what was important to each participant emerged. I made the choice not to include much of my own side of the dialogue in quotes from interviews, a decision that might make it seem less dialogic but on the other hand gives more space to participants.

All three methods used (the WhatsApp group, creative sessions and interviews) are ways of being together, remotely or in person, that were very familiar to everyone as they are how we might engage outside the research project too. They demonstrate the entanglements of our relations and make the line between research and the life of these welcome practices quite indistinct.

4.3 Case Study 2: Migrants Organise

4.3.1 The context

Migrants Organise is a London-based organisation that campaigns nationally on migrant issues and, more locally, advocates on legal and welfare matters for individuals, as well as organising a busy community programme. Key aspects of their approach connect well with some of the theoretical and practical aspects of this study. For example, welcome is mentioned as one element of what they do: “We advocate, advise, welcome and celebrate” (all quotes in this section are from Migrants Organise website http://www.migrantsorganise.org). Unlike many migrant support organisations, by not restricting their work to selected groups of migrants they refuse the categorisations that many scholars (Anderson Sharma and Wright 2012, McFadyen 2016, Skeggs 2003) agree can be so problematic. They call for the positive acceptance that “migration is a fact of life” as does much of the academic literature on mobilities. They seek to counter the hostile policy and media environment that directly (and negatively) affects the lives of migrants “by opening up spaces for a new narrative and lived experience” – and the creation of narratives is key to this study too. Their commitment is to “grow power” through an organic, bottom up, long term approach to social change “for the common good”, mobilising refugee migrants and others through building connections, seeking

common ground, working in solidarity on local and national scales. This fits with the small scale and organic nature of the encounters studied here and the discussion of the interconnectedness of scales. Movement building is important because "[w]e learned that it is not enough to have a voice if no one is listening". This particular point is thought provoking in relation to research and serves as a reminder to consider how, having asked participants to use their voices for us as researchers (in whatever way we do that – through speech, image, text), we arrange an audience of listeners rather than leaving voices in the limbo of the unheard.

The Community Programme is integral to the Migrants Organise model of organising, creating spaces where "each of its members can feel included and safe", and it is through this programme that the trips to Wales for their members were organised. The principles they work to indicate their commitment to the creation of inclusive spaces where people build connections, however small in scale, as part of the bottom-up approach to a larger movement building process.

Before my move to Wales, I established a link with Migrants Organise with a view to organising short breaks for their members in the domestic environment in our new rural location. The availability of a domestic space as a shared resource, and knowledge of the surrounding area, is something that we as hosts were able to offer. Over three years pre-pandemic there were repeated visits by two individuals and also three visits by small groups, two of which were writing retreats with a facilitator. The visitors had a variety of roles in relation to the organisation - members, volunteers and staff. There was no simple correlation between staff being non-migrants and 'members' being refugees. For each individual, roles and migration experiences intersected in different ways.

During the individual and the group visits we cooked and ate together, walked, danced, visited places and sat round a fire in the garden. When another family in the village joined in, we were able to accommodate more people. It is very informal. Some people have to share rooms, there are camp beds, living rooms are made into extra bedrooms, the most we have accommodated is 11 over 2 households. In the year immediately prior to this research project there could be no visitors because of the pandemic. This

project focusses on the material that was co-created with 10 of these people during and shortly after the pandemic. At the time, most participants were based in London, one was on the Kent coast, and I was in Wales.

By the time I devised the Postcard project, it was well over a year since anyone introduced via MO had visited and even longer than that since any organised groups had been. I was not sure what connection people would still feel or want to revive. I wanted to avoid any sense of obligation as a former host requesting something of former guests. The person who linked me up was encouraging in her view that for participants the experience had been something memorable, and some of them would want to reconnect. I have already explained in Chapter three, how the entanglements of my relations with participants, as researcher, activist, host, and friend, developing within the wider framework of forces that make our lives very different, has at times felt as though it forges deepening relationships and at other times unsettled them.

4.3.2 The 'Picture Postcard Conversations' project.

A remote method of research was needed during the time of the pandemic which coincided with my PhD research window. As we could not meet or plan more visits, I arrived at the idea of exchanging postcards. This served as a way of creating a research space and also for reconnecting during this time.

Sending postcards is not an 'authentic' practice in the sense that it is not how people communicate, locally and transnationally on an everyday basis. Postcards have always been an occasional rather than an everyday form of communication, and now, in the context of contemporary Britain, the occasional has probably shifted towards rare. The exchange of postcards in this project was therefore staged rather than authentic but taken as a creative opportunity, a response to the research themes was facilitated through this process. It was a chance to experiment with something different that people could opt into. Importantly, it also resulted in benefits beyond the research as people enjoyed reconnecting at a difficult time.

It is likely some participants were unfamiliar with the practice of sending and receiving postcards. The extent to which people felt able to, or wanted to participate, may have

been influenced by writing cultures and literacy practices dependent on education, age, family and broader cultural contexts, as well as previous experiences of creative projects. P6's comments on Zoom about sending cards before digital communication was widespread illustrates this.

> It was just so nice to receive something that is personal and from a friend in the post. I really miss that when I used to be younger, we didn't have internet back in my day (laughter) I used to write with a few friends who are in other parts of the country, and it was like the nicest feeling to just go and find a letter, so I would like to continue, maybe writing letters with you, Sarah, or whoever wants to receive my letters, I would really enjoy it. (Participant 6 in Zoom session)

Postcards were chosen as small, cheap, easily available, mobile objects that connect people and places by moving between them, carrying meaning through a combination of image and a short, limited chunk of text, enabling people with a wide range of language and literacy skills in English to participate more equally and create visual and written representations of their experiences of visiting this rural area. I was also struck by Pennycook (2010) using the example of writing a postcard to elaborate on the idea of language as a social practice, as "a set of bundled activities with multifaceted relations to place" (Pennycook 2010 p3*).* There is the obvious moment of writing the card - but they are also about images, feelings, knowledges, memories, anticipations, connections between people and 'multifaceted relations to place' (Pennycook 2010 p3*).* Postcard making and writing therefore seemed to be very fitting for some of the central themes of this project.

The Migrants Organise group is one that has connected with people through creative practice before (including writing workshops during their stays in the village) and I believe this helped in engaging its members in the project. There were other online projects organised by MO staff that were happening concurrently. As stated earlier in Chapter 2, in an unexpected way the limitations of the pandemic forced a more inventive and creative approach than that originally planned.

I am grateful to Kat Lewis who ran a writing project with MO, part of which took place at the house, and was therefore still in touch with MO members (and is also one of the participants in this project). She connected me with participants by setting up a WhatsApp group (see Figure 4) which really help start things off, providing a platform to explain further and encourage participation. This became a valuable spere of communication in itself and bubbled along as a different kind of conversation running alongside the postcard exchanges (more on this in section on multimedia below).

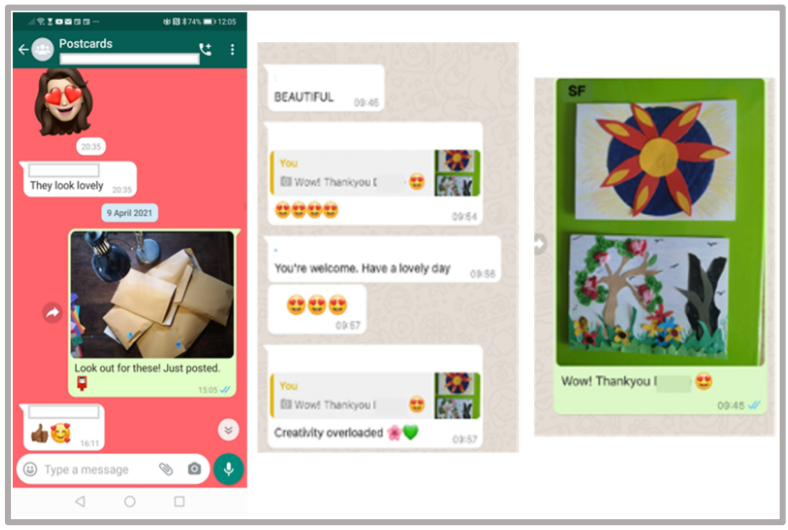


Figure 4: Keeping things going with WhatsApp conversations

Participants were invited to create and send postcards composed of image and text, in response to a simple prompt related to the research *themes* (Appendix E: MO Information and consent form.Appendix F: Instructions for MO Postcard Project). The suggested themes included both past present and future experiences (see Figure 5).

I'd love to hear about...

- your **memories** of visiting Wales
- your **feelings** about visiting the countryside
- what makes people feel **'welcome'** (or unwelcome)
- what you **look forward** to about visiting again
- ways we can keep **connected**
- or **anything else** you want to tell me or ask me!

Figure 5: Suggested themes for postcards

This prompt was accompanied by an individual postcard from me. In practice it is my postcard that has formed the main stimulus for replies. All resources were provided - blank postcards, stamped addressed envelopes, craft materials, everything necessary was posted out with the cards I sent to participants.

On Kat Lewis's advice we didn't jump straight in to making cards. As a starter to get things going, I sent ready-made cards from Wales and provided a London picture postcard to send back. I sent fifteen postcards of rural scenes around Llanvapley and Abergavenny (see Figure 6). The text on the cards had a fairly generic core, saying how I remembered their stay here and how the house felt empty without visitors. I knew some of the participants better than others and was therefore able to personalise some cards more than others. I sent a prompt and instructions with the cards (Figure 5) but I think my own cards really served as the main prompt.

Figure 6: Cards and materials sent to participants

I received about ten replies and responded individually to these with 'home-made' cards and included the pack of craft materials for participants to use for their replies. I tried to create images that responded in some way to what participants had written on their cards or what I remembered about them during their stay. I was attentive to the language skills of participants, and my background as an ESOL practitioner helped in ensuring my replies were in language that could be understood while trying not to lose detail, feeling and specificity. I had no issues in understanding their replies. This exchange led to conversations that diverged in terms of subject as we followed the path the cards took us on and led to dialogues stretched over time and space.

It was necessary to maintain the balance of keeping the project contained within the boundaries of the research questions without excluding the value of the unexpected or silencing knowledges that participants were keen to share. Participants took the original prompt in different directions and responding directly to the content of their cards was a way of sustaining the conversation beyond a single exchange. My aim was to make space for meaning and narrative to be created and communicated, and perhaps become a sort of hub through which stories could move. My responses inevitably shaped the dialogue too but I tried to tread carefully and lightly in an attempt to make, or let, things happen without exerting too much influence on what was produced. The sheer volume of my own production of cards compared with the few that each other individual has produced inevitably means my contribution dominates in terms of quantity. It was important that the chain of cards finished when participants were ready to stop and it was up to me to sense when to allow people to 'sign off' and not prompt further replies.

Other multimedia communicative modes grew around the postcards. A WhatsApp group and a creative card making Zoom session enriched the repertoire of resources available for a shared language of participation (see Figure 7). These activities also, to a certain degree, 'held' the postcard project in place and at the same time kept the momentum going. I posted pictures on WhatsApp of envelopes ready to post. People posted images of their postcards as they arrived and there were appreciative responses to people's creative work, using text and emojis. We decided on a collaborative Zoom

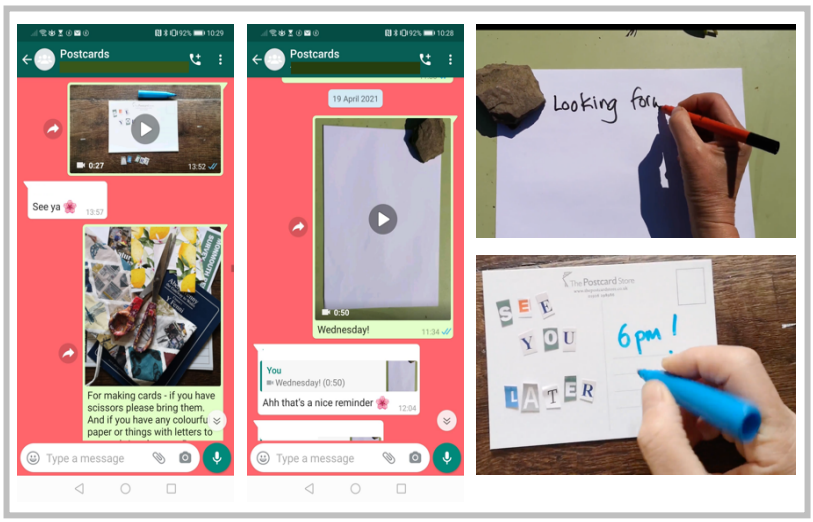


Figure 7: WhatsApp prompts

session, making cards together and I posted short home-made animations on WhatsApp as invitations and reminders (See https://youtu.be/vQr4CUWL5ko and https://youtu.be/vQr4CU WL5ko.)

The Zoom session worked on many levels, spoken language, photo images, drawn and collaged images, gesture and action, Zoom space and phone technology, all entering the mix. The session allowed for a rich repertoire of communicative resources, and boundaries of spoken, written and visual language, working with technology and with paper, being in physical and digital space, were broken down as people seemed to combine and switch frequently and easily between them - and produced cards as a result. During the session people scrolled through their phones and found photos of their visits. People held up their phones to their Zoom cameras to show these photos of the time we spent together all that time ago now. Some people used these re-discovered photos as inspiration and recreated them in the drawings and collages on their postcards. I showed examples of homemade cards, we made cards while we chatted or were at times quiet as we looked down and worked on their cards (though looking back I probably talked to much – filling the spaces unnecessarily). We talked about work in progress and finished cards were held up to cameras and were admired and talked about (see Figure 8). People reacted with facial expressions, gestures, sounds and words. We also spoke about future plans for visits to Wales and so research and projects outside it became intermingled.

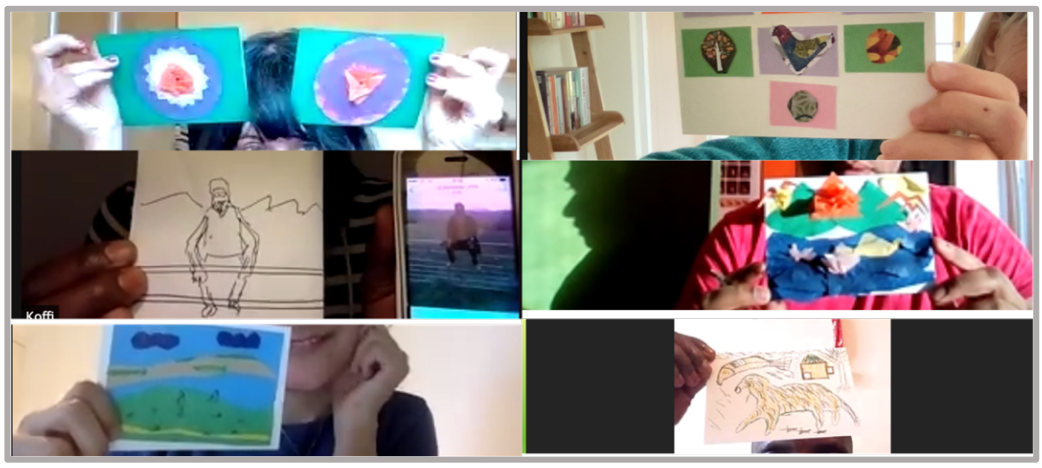


Figure 8: Being creative in the Zoom room

The nature of Zoom meant that small overlapping conversations and interjections were sometimes a little lost. I think the significance of the event was not so much about the clarity of the conversation (though there were important fragments) but that we were there doing an activity together re/creating a 'literacy of doing' through virtual means. I have used some of the transcript alongside the cards in main discussion chapters, thus combining image, written text and transcribed spoken language. The card I made was of the Zoom screen (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: SF card representing the Zoom session

During this session we also discussed a suggestion that people write to each other – not only me. I was keen on this as it would de-centre me and allow for people to express different kinds of relations but no one followed up on this.

While the WhatsApp and Zoom sessions played an important role in the research, at a time when so much was online, I found the sensory experience of making, writing, sending and receiving the cards a welcome relief and I wonder if others did too. There was something particularly affecting for me about the material aspect of the postcard exchange: the textures, the mark making, the packing and unpacking, the enclosing and the revealing, the passing from the sender's hand to the recipient's hand via the post. I imagined the participants, sitting in their home, thinking about what they would write, creating their card, packing it up and posting it – to my home. Seeing envelopes on the mat, the surprise element of opening them, looking at the images and reading the text was particularly welcome during the pandemic (see Figure 10).

The process also allowed thinking time. There were pauses while we waited for a reply, time to dwell on cards received and consider our response. We had a chance to say things that we did not say at the time of the encounters we shared. The process offered

interesting dimensions of time, space and reflection. As these objects moved between us, they narrated our experience in a different mode to the immediacy of spoken dialogue. In terms of enrichment, my affective response to receiving and writing the postcards has been something I am very grateful to have experienced. It has been a

Figure 10: Opening envelopes, revealing cards

deep learning experience through dialogue with others. I have been very touched by the fact that people who stayed here wanted to reconnect and take the time to communicate through the cards. It greatly influenced my attentiveness to the image making and writing in my replies to the postcards I have received.

Participants had time to take in the card they had received, and then in their own time create an image and consider what they wanted to write in response. This offers something different to what might be seen as the apparent immediacy of interviews, as discussed in Chapter 2. I very much enjoyed composing individual responses to the images and writing received. I did not necessarily expect a 'conversational' practice with participants responding specifically to what they received, though in some of the longer exchanges, this did happen (See Appendix G: Postcard Conversation with Participant 5) Importantly for this project, I found the image making for the cards to be a valuable reflective process where I thought not only about the person I was writing to, but also about the process and the research in general – thoughts and ideas came to me in the time and space of this activity.

In my experience as an ESOL practitioner, those that have a more limited linguistic repertoire in English use the language resources they have very creatively, often using new, surprising and evocative combinations of language. This is certainly the case in

some of the cards. The mix of image and text further expands the communicative repertoire. Some participants are likely to have been much more spontaneous in their writing and making than others. This may depend on their literacy in English, their enjoyment or confidence in image making, and the time constraints and opportunities of their living situation. The images and text of the cards can each stand alone, or they can be seen as individual dialogues between myself and each participant, and they can also make something new taken all together, as they were in the exhibition.

4.3.3 The Exhibition

The postcard exchange had the primary intention of being a research practice that allowed participants to reflect on their visits to the village. It was developed in a large part as a response to the pandemic restrictions of the times – the researcher as bricoleur, working with what was available at the time. However, an unintentional but equally important and welcome outcome of the process was how this method became a space of reconnection.

I had always wanted the research to be productive for participants and be useful to others outside the academic sphere, particularly activist circles. From the inception of the postcards idea, I hoped that what was produced would be seen more widely through displaying the material in some shape or form beyond the academic thesis. I particularly wanted one of the locations for this to be the village which was the starting point for it all.

Revitalising the links with MO members and staff opened up the possibility of combining the exhibition idea with a further visit by members, with the intention of them being involved in the exhibition event. I was fortunate to be able to access some funding (see acknowledgements) which offered the chance to realise a small exhibition of the cards and fund a visit for MO members to coincide with it. This seemed a welcome example of academic research and activism mutually sustaining/invigorating each other. The research project was instrumental in our reconnection and what came out of this connection enriched the research project. In the end it was a very extended process – the card exchange took place about a year after the visits by MO members and the exhibition took place about a year after that. This was not an ideal time lapse but is

what circumstances allowed. The exhibition and accompanying event took place on one afternoon and one morning over a weekend in May 2022.

I will now describe the exhibition but will limit it to the practical details as Chapter 8 is centred on how it played out in relation to the research questions. In discussion with Kate Mercer who advised on curating the exhibition and booklet design (see acknowledgements and MO case study) we decided it would be most effective if the cards were displayed as they might be in a domestic space, to reflect the origins of the project. They were therefore exhibited on freestanding household shelves alongside some of the domestic objects that were mentioned in the postcard texts. These included specific plants (daffodils and garlic mustard), tomato seeds, and a plate of Welsh cakes. The decision was made not to indicate whether each card was created by an asylum seeker, refugee or other transnational migrant, a volunteer, staff member, host, guest, or myself as researcher. This was in an effort to avoid categorising people in these terms, especially as many fitted more than one category.

Home-made tea and cake refreshments were provided, something in line with many other local rural events. Tables to sit at were covered in fabric tablecloths. There was a large space with craft materials on it and visitors were invited to make new cards as people responded to the cards and the event itself. In balance to this 'homely' set up, there was also a stack of illustrated brochures for visitors to take away, with some commentary on the cards that included the emerging themes of my PhD thesis. There was also a rolling slide presentation with pictures and additional text, in a quiet corner for people to sit and watch. The event was advertised with a banner on the gate to the village hall and via local email groups, Twitter and a card invitation which I delivered to each house in the village (see Appendix H: Invitations and brochure for exhibition). Three participants returned and helped set up the exhibition (more detail on this preparation in Chapter 8). One of them led two movement/dance sessions in the playing field. Visitors were invited to engage in the event in a variety of different ways Appendix H: Invitations and brochure for exhibition).

Chapter 5: ‘Literacies of doing’; finding ways of being together.

Figure 11: AToS Welcome banner - overlooking Abergavenny.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the activities of Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary (AToS), a local group which, at the time of the research project, I had been actively involved with for over five years. While there is a full description of the group in the previous chapter, I will briefly set out the specific context and the particular activities that are the subject of discussion in this chapter, together with outlining aspects of the theoretical framework that are most relevant here. As mentioned in the literature review, Nick Gill et al (2022) have been essential influences in highlighting the need to situate encounters of welcome and hospitality in everyday practices in order to understand them better, thus complicating universalising principles of hospitality. This situatedness is central to discussion, in this and subsequent chapters.

Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary members are all resident in and around this small market town and had been meeting together in a variety of different kinds of encounter over several years, so through the research process it has been possible to trace developments over time (despite being disrupted either completely or partially during the Covid pandemic). In the interviews that were conducted, participants spoke about different aspects of their involvement in the group over the period of their involvement.

The creative sessions that were organised specifically for this project, created a kind of visual record of some of the activities the group has engaged in. What is more, the process of interacting in creative tasks together provided key insights related to the research questions. My own experience has of course also been a resource to draw on.

The AToS Conversation Café was originally set up to offer the recently arrived Syrian families who were resettled in the town, a weekly opportunity to practise English very informally, to provide some sociality and tentative connections with people seen as 'local' and who considered themselves to be in a position to offer support. Focussing on those who had been regular attenders at the Conversation Café itself and the activities associated with it provided the opportunity to examine how, having arrived in the same space, people found ways of being together that express welcome, to explore what role language as a shared social practice plays in these encounters, and to follow developments beyond the threshold of the initial welcome.

It is relevant to the arguments of this thesis to note that the encounters between the all white volunteers and the racialised refugee families that make up the AToS group, are unlikely to have taken place *in this particular way* in the course of people's daily lives. The setting of a small town does not offer the same opportunities for everyday interactions between such individuals and groups as more urban spaces do with their mix of diasporic populations. The resettling families here did not have the benefit of plugging in to the networks of people who might share language, faith and culture or a shared positioning as racialised migrants. At the same time, it is of course the case that, outside the interactions of AToS, the refugee families have made many other connections over time; they have children at school, they have neighbours, some of them are working.

To gain a closer understanding of the processes at play in these activities, I will consider questions of mobility in relation to how we all arrived at these encounters, the characteristics of the encounters now we are here, and what kinds of practices of welcome and hospitality have emerged from them particularly in relation to language practices. To do this I undertake an exploration of how welcome is expressed through the embodied acts of cooking, walking, crafts, outings and social events, that are

characteristic of AToS activities. These are conceptualised as assemblages of spoken and unspoken communicative resources and, as such, as shared language practices that I have chosen to call 'literacies of doing'. I use the term 'literacies' because they can be seen as a participatory language practice deploying both spoken and unspoken communicative repertoires – including 'doing' things together - and because I see them as active in the writing of place. This writing of place is key to an understanding of these activities that is not about integrating people into a pre-existing space but creating something new which everyone involved has a part in. I take these practices to be a productive means of informal learning (intentional and unintentional) in the Freirean sense of taking people's social and economic positioning, and their needs and desires as a starting point for dialogic practice that has transformative potential (Freire 1996, Freire and Macedo 1987). These can then be connected to ideas of grassroots knowledge production (Canagarajah 2004) which in turn link back to the idea of writing place. The chapter develops into an examination of how encounters of welcome and relations of hospitality develop and change over time as repeated encounters move beyond the threshold of initial welcome and more sustained connections are formed (Bulley 2017, 2023).

I focus on two main themes that extend what matters about these activities into the wider context of rurality, and broader welcome and migration narratives. One is how they shift the emphasis away from competence in English as the predominantly accepted marker of belonging and how this relates to current policy and educational practice in relation to ideas of integration and citizenship. Secondly, how the informal learning and knowledge production that takes place contribute to a shared writing of place – in this case rural place. I link this to the potential it has for the unsettling of essentialising categorisations and identifications such as local/migrant, host/guest, English speaker and non-English speaker which persistently crop up in narratives of welcome and refugee migrant settlement. For the purposes of clarity of discussion, I see no other way than to refer to some members of AToS as 'volunteers' or non-refugees, and the refugee members as Syrian families/women or simply as refugees where necessary (as explained in the definitions section earlier). While not ideal terminology, it

cannot be denied that this demarcation exists in the context of the Conversation Café setting.

I will draw on the work of Sara Ahmed (200), Dan Bulley (2017) Nick Gill et al (2022), Cecile Vigouroux (2019) and others to explore these situated and ongoing encounters of welcome and on Canagarajah (2004) and Pennycook (2010, 2012) in relation to language as a social and participatory practice. I propose that the many practices that evolved through these encounters, that I describe as 'literacies of doing', or perhaps 'doing welcome', are integral to the writing of place as conceptualised by Doreen Massey (2005). I also take into account the importance and relevance of Avtar Brah's (1996, 2023) diaspora space as a way of thinking about how this mix of people relate to each other and to different spaces, places and times. I pay particular attention to how narratives of welcome shape, and are shaped by, rural space with reference to scholars of rurality such as Cloke (2004, 2006), and Woods (2005, 2007).

5.2 Mobilities, Encounters and the Language of Welcome

The reason for Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary's (AToS) existence is tied up with histories of im/mobility, caught up in inequitable power structures that exert control on who, how and where people can move or stay put (Brah 2022, Massey 2005, Sheller 2018, Skeggs 2003). However, A, in her interview, makes a remark that is striking in how it reframes mobility and welcome in a way that pushes back against preoccupations with where people are from, or why and how they arrived. Instead, it foregrounds current relations now that we are here and sits well with Ahmed's framing of welcome in terms of modes of encounter.

> Because I don't feel you person from anywhere. I feel you sister. When you love someone and when you talk to someone and you feel happy, you like about - you need to say welcome. (Interview with Participant A)

I do not think the wider forces at work are forgotten in the sense that they are the atmosphere within which members of the group relate to each other but, for this woman, Participant A, at least, naming or knowing a 'somewhere' that I am from is not as important as the familial relations that are developed and fulfilled for each other here. She expresses this in terms of finding new familial relations through new encounters and also in terms of her faith, which is perhaps something underdiscussed in relation to how people think about their circumstances.

> And we didn't have family here. The Town of Sanctuary, I thought you know the God make you to leave your family and you have another family…. Like if I talk to you, I feel like you my sister or my mum. If I talk to H, it's the same or if I talk to R it's the same, or J, everyone it's the same. (Interview with Participant A)

I wonder if this ease with naming the felt, close relations of sister, of mother, of love, is something that comes with a desire to build new familial bonds in the aftermath of displacement, and/or a pre-existing, culture-borne sense, that familial ties do not need to be exclusive to formally related individuals. Gill et all (2022 p130) mention this too, referring to "familiality" as an understanding of family that moves outside the Western conception of the nuclear unit (less and less relevant though still seen as the norm), with its fixed kinship relationships, to encompass intimate relations based on the 'family-like' feelings and meanings that they bring to people's lives. It is also possible that, speaking in English, participant A finds it easier to use simpler more straightforward language, which can be quite powerful in its directness. Although, as we shall see, many links are made between different times and places, they are for the most part not based on a preoccupation with where people are from. Mobilities therefore, are undeniably important in relation to how we come to meet but not in the linear sense that moves from there to here or then to now. To me it has more of a horizontal feel as other places and times are brought into dialogue with each other here and now. This seems more in tune with Avtar Brah's (1996) concept of diaspora space. I move on now to think about what kind of space Conversation Café was in relation these ideas and what emerged from it.

Participant A talks about feeling welcome at Conversation Café:

> …and when we go to Conversation Café in Community Centre, each week different teacher and that's make us welcome. (Interview with Participant A)

While this participant talks about teachers, presumably because at least in the early stages that was how it felt to her, Conversation Café could be considered first and foremost as offering a space rather than a programme. A space for encounters in the context of a small rural market town, where this form of sociality with refugee migrants may not occur in the course of daily life. A space where it was unknown what might emerge. As Participant R puts it, the idea of Conversation Café was to offer a space for "being in the room" where English is spoken. This contributor also talked at some length about the care taken in setting it up and also the trial and error. She described how it was set up with a rota of volunteers in the local community centre, and how there was concern not to "outnumber" the newly arrived Syrian attendees. She spoke about not wanting to take charge of the agenda but at the same time, "people don't always know what they want to talk about - at least initially". It was about creating a space for people to "bring their own stuff" in terms of topics and issues they might want to talk about, but "avoiding embarrassed silence".

In Sara Ahmed's work (2000), the mode of encounter includes a responsibility to respond to the other of the encounter, to speak. It is through this that something must or can take place. In the case we are looking at, there is an element of anticipation of this, an element of planned response in that there was some informal preparation about topics to talk about or things to do for each session as well as people bringing their own stuff. This might stem from volunteers' felt responsibility towards the others they are engaging with, the responsibility to provide a response. There is a wish to avoid the risk that, without a response, then nothing might happen or take place, it might be an empty encounter. There is a wish to avoid the emptiness of silence and fulfil the requirement, as Ahmed (2000) puts it, to (literally in this case) speak. At the same time there is an openness to what people might bring, and I suggest that what people bring is connected with the particularity of their arrival and, as such, forms an integral part of

how or why we all arrive at the encounter in the first place. Whatever is planned and whoever is there, *something happens* and there is a response to other/s, made through both spoken and unspoken language, and which can often turn out to be *not* what was expected.

The care given to setting things up fits Gill et al's (2022) regard for feelings of welcome. There was an acknowledgement in my interview with Participant H that there were going to be times when volunteers might "get it wrong" and a willingness to deal with that. This brings to mind Phipps (2013, 2019) writing about researching multilingually, about the willingness to not know and to accept the vulnerability of not knowing. Although this participant is not talking about a research encounter, it nevertheless seems applicable. Edkins' (2019) focus on the uncertainty around what we can know about doing the right thing, in response to the impetus to act in an unjust world, also comes to mind here. This not knowing or uncertainty must of course be distinct from wilful ignorance, lack of responsibility towards others, or an unwillingness to engage in a mode of encounter where one is no longer positioned as a 'knower' but as someone who is 'coming to know' from others.

For those purportedly coming to practice English there is of course the obvious not knowing of the new language they want to learn. But there is also the not knowing about, or perhaps better described as unfamiliarity with, the new location they find themselves living in, and the newness of relationships with people they are meeting and coming to know at Conversation Cafe. For the volunteers there is a different and perhaps less destabilising form of not knowing, which is an uncertainty about what will happen, who will come, a feeling of responsibility for whatever does or does not occur and a questioning of whether we are getting it right. The three interview participants who were volunteers, all spoke about the encounters being sites of learning – of moving from not knowing to knowing about things in relation to these interactions across differences.

As mentioned above, the Conversation Café was intended as a space for those invited to "bring their own stuff', and of course the volunteers do too. While the interviewees were not asked about their background, two spoke of the impact the group had made

on them specifically in light of their own upbringing. This was closely related to learning, or coming to know. An “austere” and “oppressive” religious upbringing had led to assumptions about Muslims having a similarly restrictive outlook. Getting to know the Muslim families had brought surprises about their relaxed attitudes towards certain things, the great enjoyment of fashion and glamour, and of music and dance for example. Another participant referred to growing up in a “very white Welsh valleys town” with “little exposure to Muslims or multiculture” and what an impact this contact through the group had had on her, describing it as, “rethinking what we know”. She cited the influence of images from the media which portrayed refugees as mainly “thin, drawn, and poor” and that prior to these encounters “I saw them in a different way - not as the people that we know they are”. The intimacy of the encounter is also key; “this is what you visibly see in their homes”. Visiting homes and the significance of the domestic setting as a space for informal learning and knowledge creation will be returned to in more detail in the next chapter.

In a climate of Islamophobia and in a rural context where people have few opportunities for everyday relations with Muslim women in particular, the informal organisation of the Conversation Café offered a way to initiate connections and develop group and individual relationships which were conducive to dissolving assumptions about aspects of Muslim cultures that are often negatively portrayed in the media and essentialised as homogeneous and fixed (Olufemi, 2020; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020). As interview participant C says, connections do not just happen, there need to be “catalysts” in the form of people organising to enable others to be there. Having something organised “enables somebody like me to go along and do things together”. I have argued that this is truer, or more necessary in a more rural context where there are fewer opportunities for incidental interactions with refugee families. However, as evidenced by the account of my meeting with M in connection with her interview (see Figure 1), there are also other factors at work here such as class and life stages. The lives of white, middle class, older volunteers are less likely to intersect with the lives of refugee families when they inhabit different (classed) neighbourhoods and workplaces, when routines do not coincide with those of young families, and when social habits generally do not bring them together.

These women volunteers have chosen, through AToS, to have closer encounters with refugee families and, in this sense, are entering into the interaction with a certain openness to difference and to being in a position of finding things out. Rather than viewing participants as entering into these encounters with fixed or one-dimensional identities, we can look on these interactions as dynamic sites of meaning making and knowledge production where, through what happens in them, our responses, how we speak and what we learn, we are re/created as subjects (Ahmed 2000, Bulley 2017). This does not in any way deny the asymmetry of our relations and does not provide a solution to broader inequalities at play within the encounters themselves. Perhaps though, there is scope in them for learning more about these asymmetries and becoming more attentive or attuned to them, allowing ourselves to rethink them and influencing actions beyond these particular encounters (Ahmed 2000). This is certainly not to say that the volunteers, or anyone else, can only know about refugees, Muslims, other cultures, through face-to-face encounters and can only resist racist, Islamophobic narratives through personal relations with these particular 'others'; this would be a dangerous route. In the context of this research however, I am specifically concerned with situated encounters of welcome that have been set in motion by purposefully setting up opportunities to meet, and how they might re/shape individual and collective narratives about migration.

5.3 Literacies of doing

Having considered the modes of encounter through which practices of welcome develop I now want to think more about how language as a participatory practice is integral to this. I propose that a local language of participation was developed through doing things together, initially centred on a more organised, one could say less spontaneous or 'everyday', welcome but continuing beyond this as people developed more sustained, familiar and familial ways of being together. These shared language practices move beyond the dominance of English as a common system for communication and the marginalisation of other languages, towards working creatively to develop a practice that draws on a range of resources. I want to suggest that the 'doing' of language, the assembling of a wide range of spoken and unspoken

communicative resources, both creates and reflects our ways of being together. These include the details, or perhaps micro practices, that make up activities such as cooking, walking, going on outings, or eating together. They include the embodied practices of dancing or of sitting quietly observing. They can be the passing of utensils when helping with cooking (see quote from Participant A p138), the tasting of food, taking photos, smiling and greeting in the street. The gestures of inviting, attending, lending and gift giving also make up this linguistic repertoire. All these were mentioned in conversations with participants. Sprinkled with spoken language in all degrees of confidence and assisted by Google translations, it is through these practices, put together and reassembled in all sorts of ways, that meaning and new knowledges are created within the group and potentially move beyond it.

The reality of situated encounters as opposed to abstract representations of migrants and refugees is highlighted by one participant (R) when she says that the arrival of the Syrian families meant that it was now "hands on" whereas before it was "in your head". The active nature, physicality and connection suggested by "hands on" seems to fit well with my emphasis on what people *do* together in these encounters. I have come to view the practices of welcome that AToS is engaged in as 'literacies of doing'. They blend spoken and unspoken language repertoires to create formations of actively being together. I am drawn to the idea of seeing them as literacies because we are not here just reading the world, we are inscribing something on it, etching something new, creating knowledges from this grassroots position. Language practices, as Pennycook (2010) suggests, also have "multifaceted relations to place" and these literacies of doing, as a language in practice, can be viewed as co-constitutive of place – both shaping it and being shaped by it.

The theorisation of language as social practice is useful in its emphasis on the significance of local practice and the recognition of ground up, grassroots knowledge creation (Pennycook 2010 Canagarajah 2004 and Blommaert and Rampton 2011). Practices of 'doing' language are considered in this thesis as 'local' but with a relational understanding of what that means, avoiding the local as micro and the global as macro (Pennycook 2010). They are a local response to the resources available and include acts

of ‘speaking’ through doing. More will be covered about relational aspects of the local/global in the next chapter particularly in relation to the space of the household.

In the extract below Participant A remembers her very first encounter with someone from AToS. It is evident in quite a moving way I think, how the unspoken language of gift giving, along with the practice of translation between both spoken languages by means of the written text in the gifted phrase book, and the beginnings of conversation in English, come together at the very start, to make a connection that signifies welcome and allays some apprehension as to the impossibility of ‘speaking’ in this situation.

> After one month we came to here the interpreter say someone coming to your house to see you. I say English or Arabic. He said English woman. I say how can I understand what she talking? No, no just talk with her whatever you want. I said what? He said yeah, talk to her whatever you want and after that she came and she have a little present, a gift for us and she have an English and Arabic book and when she talking she translate for me and when I’m talking I translate it to her. But I’m just remember the first time. She’s very lovely.
> *(Interview with Participant A)*

Moving on from the one to one encounter above, I now look at the potential of this mixed repertoire of communicative resources to work in the more collective dynamic of Conversation Café. I spoke with two participants who, as I did, volunteered in Conversation Café from the early days. They remembered how volunteers brought things in - cooking utensils, recipe books, postcards, photo albums, seed catalogues, plants, culinary herbs. People drew plans of their houses, shared photos on phones. Some sessions were family orientated - making biscuits, making junk models of castles after a trip to Raglan castle. These can be seen merely as props for learning English or as ways of relating that go beyond this. In my experience, it often seemed that the learning of English was forgotten about or became secondary to the process of relating to each other through participating in a shared process of language creation using whatever was to hand - objects, google translations, drawings and photos. It was through this

process and practice that we were also able to learn about each other and new shared knowledges were co-produced, knowledges with the potential to be shared beyond the encounter itself. It is important to note that the discussion above focuses on the volunteers' experiences and perceptions of how the Conversation Café sessions worked. I have less material to show how the Syrian participants understood it. Understandably, learning English clearly remained very important them amongst the other communicative practices. To this end the following section concentrates on comments about learning English that were made during the interview process.

5.4 Encounters of informal learning and ESOL

I am interested in how language practices mesh with ideas around informal learning as a feature of the encounters in my study. I now explore this specifically in relation to the informal learning of English that took place through interactions such as the Conversation Café and other ways of coming together. I examine how these learning practices contrast with more formal ESOL provision and state led narratives around the English language as the marker of a desirable integration and even as a condition of citizenship.

My analysis centres on the limitations of seeing English language learning opportunities as separate from other encounters of learning and knowledge production. To this end I wish to foreground the significance of shared language practices, conceived as literacies of doing, that shift away from the dominant view of competence in English language being equated with successful 'integration'. I focus on the English language learning that takes place, amongst a plethora of other kinds of learning, through the sociality of meeting and doing things together. I seek to direct attention to what this kind of language practice offers that is missing from more formal policy and from the conventional practices of English language learning. Such policy and practices have increasingly been bound together with the idea of language as a discrete system and the learning of English as a condition of the hospitality of the state and, more generally in the public sphere, the idea of English as a signifier of belonging - a narrative driven by the state and its media accomplices. In tandem with this, English is also increasingly

taught as a solely instrumental form of learning associated with employability (a strange focus in the light of asylum seekers not being allowed to work).

If it's possible, I would like to hold together two aspects of language that have come to my attention through my research experience with AToS that might at first seem inconsistent. One is the importance of the availability of state provided English classes. As a former adult education practitioner specialising in ESOL, I wish to strongly defend the need for sufficient, easily accessible, professionally delivered ESOL classes, particularly in the face of funding cuts over recent years. The second aspect is the significance of other communicative repertoires that, assembled together, displace English as the primary way of people relating to each other and to place. While not going into technical detail about ESOL provision, my experience has provided evidence of great strengths and great commitment by practitioners, but also shortfalls and shortcomings in the way English classes are provided. Some of these are practical issues such as limited availability, lack of childcare facilities, and fees in some cases. There is also limited scope for imaginative and transformative pedagogy when teaching and learning are attached to specific, externally decided outcomes, or to accreditation or testing on which status sometimes depend. People's desire to learn English is distorted by state policy that utilises competence in English as a measure of belonging and this is something to be resisted. Despite these issues, English classes are a vital service for people wanting to improve their skills in English and there are many teachers who resist as best they can within the provision available (Cook & Peutrell 2019).

Informal learning is a practice that allows language development in English to blend with other social and communicative practices. It can offer a different way for a sense of welcome and belonging to develop that is not dependent on, or measured by, the formal learning of English as the dominant language. As well as drawing on theories of language as social practice as has been done in previous sections, I think a Freirean approach to pedagogy (literacy in particular) has a bearing here, in its insistence on pedagogy as a dialogic practice that starts with where people are at and what they want to know (Freire, 1996).

In the context of this case study, ESOL classes are provided by the local authority and the Resettlement Scheme, and most refugee migrant members of AToS have attended classes at some point in time. The Resettlement Scheme includes provision where the teacher visits individual households to teach people in their homes. During my involvement with AToS, both these types of provision happen to have been taught by key members of AToS (one of them being myself) so there has been some overlap between formal paid work teaching English and volunteering with AToS. For the refugee families resettled in the town this means that their teachers are also people they interact with through AToS. This is very different from my experience of ESOL provision in a large city, where the lines between teacher/volunteer/friend were much more clearly drawn. While not advocating that teachers expand their role to include volunteer and friend (I am very ambivalent about the benefits of this), I propose that there are benefits to making a close connection between learning English and other kinds of informal learning taking place in a social environment. The detail and minutiae of everyday life come into play as people are able to ask about minor things as expressed by participant A below.

> You know when we came to here we doesn't have any English and when we talk to…all us, all of you, they help English even the small question.
> If you have just a small chance to talk English everyday that's it, it's perfect.
> (Interview with Participant A)

There is a sense that small questions are easier to ask and are accepted, and that having 'all of you' is a benefit over a single teacher. As has been argued above in relation to literacies of doing and informal learning, people learn about each other's lives through this process as well as the initial aim of speaking in English together.

I was struck by this participant's emphasis on the importance of being understood. It might sound obvious, but I think it is worth being reminded how not being understood is something that can affect one's sense of personhood. The effort put into

understanding based on someone only being able to say ‘a little bit’ is appreciated here and I think it is the social and home environment that facilitates this attention to detail.

> S: When you come to my house you help me with my English. I like it that you understand.
> (We agree that not being understood is not a good feeling, that it’s nice to be understood)
>
> S: Now I’m not really good English but you come in my house. I like this one because you help me, for I don’t know what to say for this one - you say this me. You want something for question. I say little bit but you understand.
>
> *SF: Yes, I do.*
>
> S: I like because you understand what I say, you know.
> (Interview with Participant S)

Conversation adapts to different balances between understanding and speaking. There is no pressure or expectation to speak in English, which might come as a relief sometimes.

> Like K, when she didn’t talk English but she understand everything. She’s understand everything but she doesn't have, she doesn’t know how to speak. She knows a lot of words but she’s worried always because she doesn’t talking too much. Even she talking with her children she talk one word or two word English and one word Arabic.
> (Interview with Participant A)

And it is similar when people in the group talk to people like K - they make an effort to understand, and use whatever is at their disposal, a blend of English, Arabic translation etc. In my experience, I found that leaving the teacher role behind and just helping people find the words needed to express themselves, without feeling the need to stop

and teach these words or correct their use, combined with paying attention to other forms of expression, allowed conversation and meaning to flow more readily.

These examples of how language is practised seems to undermine fixed roles of host and guest too, as here the responsibility is not solely on the guest to comply with the conditions of guesthood set by the host (Vigouroux 2019); the host must make an effort to speak to the guest on their own terms. Maybe we can even say there are no terms, just an effort to find a way of connecting which may or may not centre the dominant language of the host – English. I also raise questions about the teacher/student role in learning, because, if we see English as just one of the things that is being learned in these spaces, then the flow of knowledge and creation of new knowledges through new social and cultural formations is not a one way flow. However, I would also hesitate to say the flow is back and forth. I see it as a more complex and dynamic pattern, collage, or kaleidoscopic picture of interconnected fragments created through this kind of learning and knowledge production.

The quote below (see also an earlier quote from Participant S see p124) indicates that, for this person, the home environment is seen to be valued as a site for improving their skills in English.

> I like this. I'm happy because I'm not really good English because I stay here, we have Covid… but I'm good because you are coming, L coming you know. I'm good because this one not because I go to school.
> (Interview with Participant S)

In terms of language learning the Conversation Café and later the home environment allows for a Freirean approach, where the starting point for learning is where people are at and what they need and/or desire to know. This approach combines with a desire for change and transformation rather than a motivation to help people to fit in, or to make compliant citizens. For Freire it is connected to struggles for liberation, in the sense that it is learning in order to enact change and not learning in order to comply. In the context of this study, it is the encounters between people and the literacies of doing things together that facilitate learning. It is participatory in the Freirean sense that it is

dialogic and the starting point is what people want to know. In this study there is, unsurprisingly, evidence that people's starting points are not necessarily the same. Reference to learning is articulated by volunteer interviewees mostly in relation to cultural knowledge, but the refugee women bring it up mostly in relation to speaking English. What is common is some desire for transformation and change, and though the realisation of this change may not be on the very small and local scale of this study, I suggest it can work in a number of minor ways for these two starting points - the desire for cultural knowledge and the desire to speak English. In the context of 'literacies of doing', set in a social environment, language needs can be met alongside other practical and social needs and not isolated from other learning processes. Through these encounters, what people are learning is combined and assembled in multiple ways and for me this knowledge production has a clear link with the writing of place which I also view as a transformational process.

5.5 Developments over time

This study follows the research groups over a period of time that is enough to show evidence of developments and changes. Thinking through the temporal aspects of 'modes of encounter' it is possible to see how acts of un/welcome are always "mediated and shaped by other past and present relationships" (Vigouroux 2019 p35) but also, as Ahmed suggests, they can be about an opening up and looking forward. What might this encounter make possible, how might it affect "where we might yet be going?" (Ahmed 2000 p145). This lends itself to thinking about dynamics of welcome in this project as they move beyond the initial threshold of welcome, as relationships, identities and practices reconfigure over time. Notions of fixed identities are disrupted if it is understood that subjects are brought into being through the sociality of repeated encounters and our responses to the asymmetries of our relations. Acknowledging the unequal mobilities of our arrival and the economic and social inequalities of our relations within the encounter does not preclude how the 'mode of encounter' and our responses, might affect where we go and who we become.

Dan Bulley (2017), in his discussions of hospitality, takes us "beyond the threshold moment" (p9) to look at what happens next. As Bully (2017) asks, how do relations play

out once the 'outsider' is 'in', or as people cross in and out of the space of welcome and hospitality, from and into other social spaces. What are the ways that, through repeated encounters, host and guest roles become less defined? Bulley emphasises the affective dimensions, feelings of (not) belonging, being 'at home', (dis)comfort, (in)security, that are subject to change and modulation. In this section I will bring together the material produced by participants that pertains to these ongoing relations emerging through repeated encounters, and think about what happens through shared language practices over time.

The material shows these encounters to be sites of not knowing and of uncertainty and also of coming to know through informal learning, taking place through the modality of doing things together. I suggest that universalised theorisations of welcome can fall short of accounting for this possibility of getting things wrong, for being uncertain, and for learning through encounters. As such, they do not allow for an understanding of how relations develop beyond the initial crossing of the threshold of welcome, instead tending to fix relations of welcome and identities of host and guest in a particular time and place – that of the initial moment of encounter.

After some time, the Conversation Café moved to meeting in a local café, partly in a move to normalise the meeting of this group in a more public place as friends. It then moved to meeting in people's homes, mainly in the homes of the Syrian families. As described by participants, more individualised social bonds also developed and people began to visit each other's houses outside of the Conversation Café arrangement. There have also been numerous group events and outings – hill walks, picnics, garden barbecues, 'Syrian suppers' (as both invited and public events), outings (an owl sanctuary, a farm, St Fagan's Museum) and an annual camping trip are examples - some of which were depicted in the creative sessions (see, Figure 15 a) and b, and Figure 16 a) and b) later section of this chapter)

Building on the initial relationships of Conversation Café, new ways of connecting emerged. As participant R says:

> I suppose everybody felt they wanted to do something individually, but I suppose we all had to find our own individual way of doing it because you can't just sort of magic something up you have to have some kind of relationship with people in order to make it work. (Interview with Participant R)

Ways of making this transition often involved practical tasks. Two volunteers mentioned that visits to homes sometimes started through the offer to help with a particular job or to transport, lend or give something. These were often garden related – examples given were lending a hedge trimmer, giving plants and vegetables, helping transport a donated greenhouse. The giving and receiving of Christmas cards and gifts was also mentioned. As R says, these actions and gestures are "saying things about friendship" without having to rely on spoken language. These ways of extending hospitality - giving, lending, doing jobs, having coffee, offering and partaking of food - are a way of signalling the desire for friendship moving beyond the initial encounter. As 'literacies of doing' they open up opportunities for everyone to both offer and receive hospitality in the ways that are available and make sense to them.

Alongside these developments, something that has often been discussed amongst organisers and volunteers within this group has been how to avoid or break down categorisations of volunteer and refugee, along with parallel host/guest, migrant/local oppositional identities. In the early stages of the Conversation Café especially, there were quite defined volunteer and attendee roles but, as participant J says, there was a wish to move from the idea of "beneficiaries" more to "partners" while at the same time acknowledging that this is a learning process and holding on to an awareness of the factors that might limit this happening. There is an undeniable contrast in this case study group, between volunteers as more economically and socially secure individuals, with unquestioned settled status as full citizens, often retired with an increase available time, and more precariously positioned, racialised refugees. This is especially apparent in the context of austerity and the hostile environment. We 'bring our own stuff' (as participant R said p115) in this sense too. Clearly inequalities are at play in multiple ways but, within the scope of this study, the focus is on power dynamics that are

affected by the particular ways people encounter each other through the Conversation Café and other interactions. The aim has been to pay attention to when these relations, often set out as binary couplets such as host/guest and migrant/local, are reproduced and also to when minor and transient disruptions to these categorisations occur through the *ways* we encounter each other. I think it is not inconsistent to say that these interactions and the meanings they mobilise have mixed potential. They can, even inadvertently, perpetuate the narrative of otherness prevalent in relation to refugee migrants, however they can also offer alternative narratives that do not lock people into a static set of relations but allow for more complex, nuanced and fluid ones.

5.6 Not simply reciprocity

In Chapter three I referred to Chadwick and Hemmings in relation to working with the discomfort of inequalities. Here I draw on Hemmings (2012) again as she critiques ideas of reciprocity in the context of researching across inequalities with racialised groups specifically. Although she is writing about research, I would like to explore these ideas in connection with acts of welcome because they similarly involve relating across such differences, and because the notion of reciprocity is something that comes up, often as something to be valorised in activism around welcome. Hemmings suggests that seeking reciprocity can be seen as a way of 'balancing the books' in order to make ourselves feel more at ease about unequal power relations. Interestingly she holds that two sets of relations can be at work together; the reproducing of dominant power relations can happen even while attempting to overcome differences, the contradiction being hidden, according to Hemmings, within a discourse of care (Hemmings 2012). I concur with Hemmings that the wish to diminish the significance of classed and raced differences cannot be transcended by a "feminist will to connection" (p152), rather it can even encourage a "sentimental attachment to the other" (p152). Rather than seek the balance of reciprocity, there is a need to complicate any simple account of give and take. In doing so there can also be some undoing of pre-determined and reductive identities often ascribed to people in narratives of un/welcome for transnational migrants.

Ideas connecting welcome with notions of two-way flows within power relations came up in interviews in different ways, framed as helping, asking, sharing, or learning, for example.

> And I always/almost feel it's - within our world it's almost a duty we have as part of our, I don't know what the word is, to be of, to give friendship and help to other people, if you can. And it's not just giving but sharing I think, sharing as I found out at the Conversation Café C and it's a wonderful thing. (Interview with Participant F)

Sometimes, almost contradictory language was used to talk about this issue and I get the sense that it is something all volunteers wrestle with, and that it is not always easy to find suitable language to describe. I emphasise here (as was also stated in the methodologies section) that the language of interview participants is spontaneous - unlike that of the researcher who has benefitted from the opportunity to spend time thinking more precisely about these issues. Some are expressing themselves in a new language. It appears that for the Syrian contributors, the issues around give and take are not something that preoccupies them – it did not come out strongly in their interviews.

Participant A values the practical support that AToS offered the newly settled families: "Town of Sanctuary help us more than anyone". She combines it with the idea of welcome in how she talks about it.

> I like the helping from Town of Sanctuary because if we need anything they help each other and they make us happy…everybody say hello and welcome anytime, whatever you want just ask us, you're welcome. (Interview with Participant A)

I do not think there is an expectation of reciprocity in relation to this material and practical support from either the givers or the receivers, in recognition of the economic and material circumstances of the Syrian families.

Several participants talked about variations in the conditionality of hospitality, in terms of cultural norms regarding levels of formality, informality and reciprocity. The two

Syrian women who spoke about it had quite different accounts of how this worked in their extended family and friendship circles in their lives before coming to the U.K., and now here. And as D says in response to a comment from me about individual experiences not necessarily being representative of wider cultural norms, “my country same - everyone have a different life”, reminding me that we should avoid stereotyped versions of hospitality based on the homogenisation of other cultures. Perhaps the most telling comment on this topic was in conversation with a participant where we agreed that volunteers had probably been to the houses of the Syrian families considerably more than the other way round. This is on an informal basis but also through invitations to significant life course events and occasions in the lives of these families, visiting new-born babies, birthdays, engagements, and weddings, taking place in the home or hosted in community venues. I think it is important to acknowledge the affective intensity of these occasions, where people are invited to share in how these displaced and resettling families celebrate and create these milestone events, in new and old ways, navigating the limitations and opportunities of their new context. Invitations and attendance at these events goes beyond spoken language. There is something in the act of invitation itself, and through gift giving, through enjoying food, through dancing that makes spoken language just one element of an interwoven bundle of communicative resources.

Volunteers have of course offered hospitality in their homes and R comments on the open invitation she has been offered too and how the sentiment is welcomed.

> When we go to P’s house to cook that make us happy and welcoming and when we go to your house that make us happy or to J’s house - always she say come to my house welcome anytime. R say, everyone say. That make us happy. (Interview with Participant A)

One contributor had a strong sense of it being ‘incumbent on us’ to help the Syrian families know about the community they now live in. She recalls experiences of friendship and generosity in other countries (including Syria where she had previously travelled as a tourist), “often from people who have least”. She specifies that her feeling that one “must help in the world” is about giving back, but stresses that this is not

necessarily to people who give to you. She stated that she did not like the word volunteering and found AToS less imbalanced than other volunteer experiences she had had. She also talks about “sharing not giving, learning not giving” and says you “don’t want to feel like you are giving all the time - you have to allow people to give”. As another participant H says, you “feel uncomfortable” if (always) in a “bountiful position” - there need to be opportunities to be hospitable back. These phrases indicate that, on the one hand, sharing and learning feel more equitable and yet there is also an unease in the knowledge that some members of the group (i.e. volunteers) have more resources at their disposal and that this unevenness in positioning might prevent others from giving back. As Cecile Vigouroux (2019) writes, granting hospitality comes with the host’s entitlement to set up criteria for guesthood. However, I would argue that the events and practices discussed throughout this chapter indicate that the refugee members of the group have not been passive bystanders as guests, and that opportunities to offer welcome have not been simply ‘given’ by hosts or dutifully paid by guests as a debt of reciprocity. I sense that they spring from a desire to just do the same as everybody else and to practise their own means of joining up our lives and creating bonds of friendship and familiality.

In the context of the reciprocity, of being welcomed and feeling welcomed, the issue of desire for acceptance surfaced in two conversations with volunteers. There was talk of withholding certain things about themselves in case it drew attention to differences between them and the Syrian families, and which might compromise being accepted by them. There was also discussion about avoidance or silence on some issues for the same reason (unwillingness to ask people not to smoke in the house, unwillingness to enquire as to why the food provided was not eaten although it was halal). I find it interesting that the emphasis in relation to welcome is often on the acceptance of the newcomer, but here there is evidence of a concern about acceptance *by* the newcomer. What has been set out above does not fit the simple two-way flow of reciprocity. Contributors describe how through expressions of welcome the associated guest/host, local/newcomer, giver/receiver roles are complicated through a variety of responses tied up with concerns such as acceptance, social norms, a desire to find ways of connecting across difference and inequality. Literacies of doing enable a variety of

responses and facilitate a process of learning. I wonder, however, if at times these activities also have a propensity to mask differences as well, creating a space where we do not have to think about them. But I think what matters most here is that these opportunities and limitations have been discovered, worked on and developed over multiple encounters. Angharad Closs Stephens (2022) in her work with performance artists, finds that through dance the complexities of hospitality could be "reframed as the challenge of considering what to do with those socialities and the energies held between us" (p132) and this seems to be useful for this kind of activism based on sociality too. A topic that seems to incorporate a lot of the ideas that have been covered so far and what happens with the lapse of time, is the topic of food, which I now devote a section to.

5.7 Cooking and sharing food.

I devote some space to the subject of food here because the offering and partaking of food is often associated with welcome and that is no exception here. The cooking and sharing of food features strongly in AToS activities and in people's minds when they talk about the group. The contributions of research participants build a picture of what a wide range of forms this has taken. Within the group there have been unplanned shared breakfasts, special occasions in people's homes and community venues (including the celebration of family reunion), and outdoor cooking in people's gardens and at the camping weekends. There have also been more public community events, cooking demonstrations, awareness raising fundraisers and larger scale ticketed 'Syrian Suppers' at the Abergavenny Food Festival. These events are also rich sites of informal learning, especially if awareness-raising through more public events is thought to be a form of learning.

All, in their different ways, are enactments of welcome and hospitality expressed through practical tasks associated with the planning, shopping, preparing and sharing of food. Considered as a literacy of doing, these activities do not rely on spoken language to communicate meaning for individuals both within and beyond the activity itself (as highlighted by the different ways people have spoken or made images in relation to this).

Figure 12 (and larger version Appendix I: WhatsApp threads from AToS Case Study) is a composite image of the WhatsApp thread that I initiated during lockdown, asking group members to post pictures about what we had done together and link it to the theme of welcome. As has been noted previously, WhatsApp works well as a mode of inclusive communication. The thread of this group is very predominantly focussed on food.

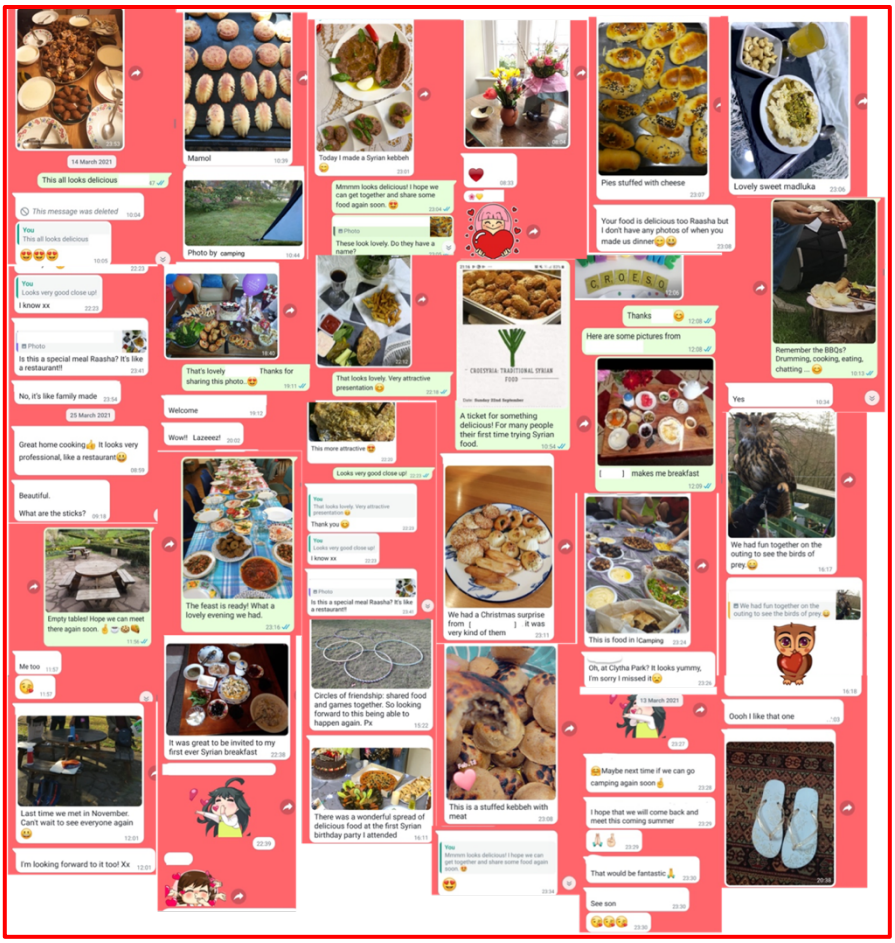
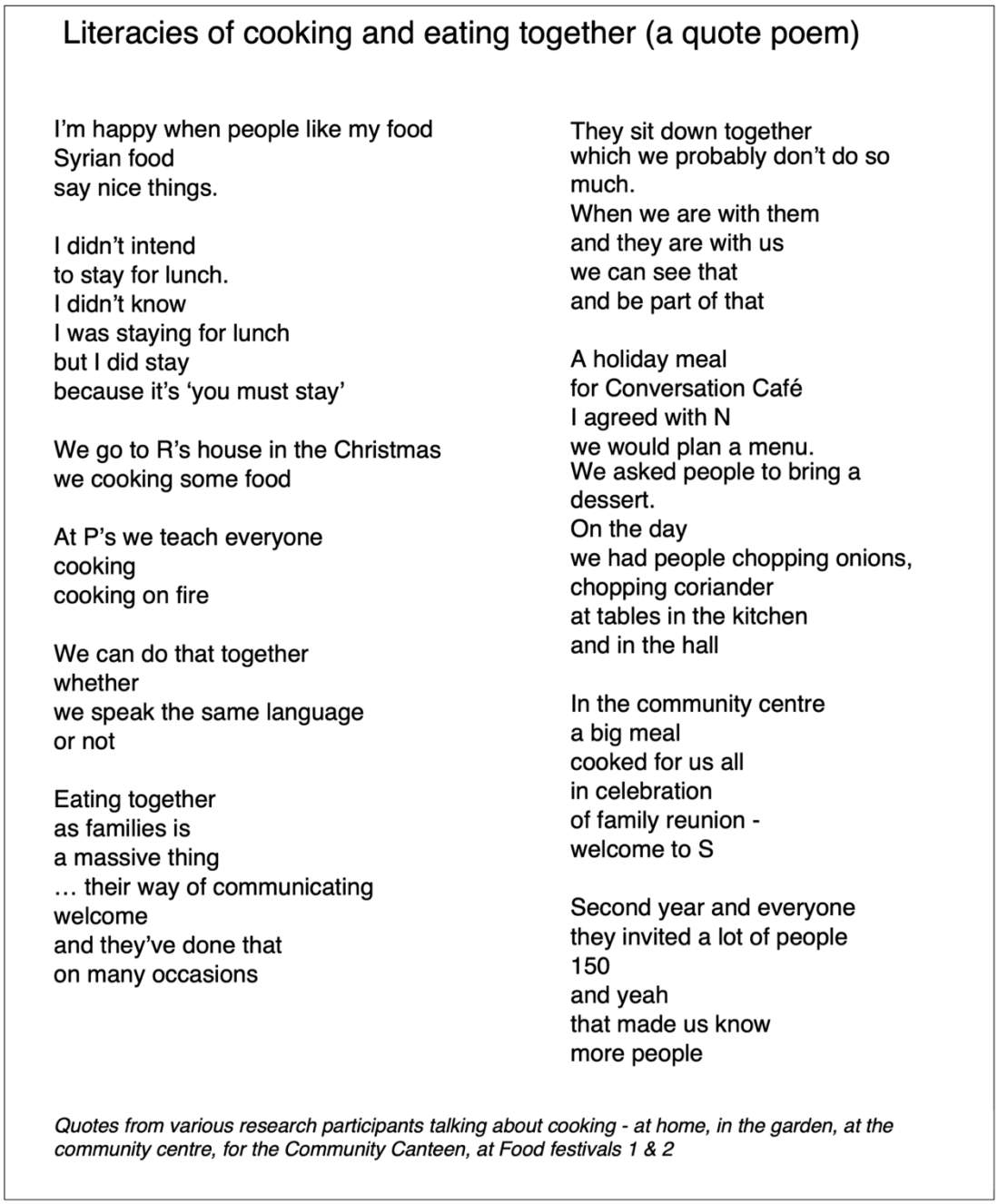


Figure 12: Lockdown WhatsApp threads - talking about welcome means food conversations

It includes many photos of Syrian dishes, questions about the food pictures, emoji-led appreciation of them, memories of particular meals and hopes for reuniting for more shared meals. It is notable that it is mainly the Syrian women who are displaying their culinary expertise while the rest respond with compliments and memories of food-based occasions. In contrast, the contribution of images from volunteers on the theme of welcome is sometimes less direct – shoes, an empty table, flowers, hula-hoops, an owl. But all these would be understood in their reference to occasions and events that have been jointly experienced, demonstrating that the group has reached a stage where

explanation is no longer always necessary. The language of communication takes on a new form in this sense, as silences are no longer gaps to be filled but are the silences of familiarity when some things no longer need to be said.

I have also created an arrangement of participant quotes about food (Figure 13) taken from interviews. These lent themselves to being arranged in poem form. Breaking up the lines seems to better reflect the variety in how English is spoken and bring out subtle meaning within their phrasing. It focuses attention on them as fragments of



Literacies of cooking and eating together (a quote poem)

I'm happy when people like my food
Syrian food
say nice things.

I didn't intend
to stay for lunch.
I didn't know
I was staying for lunch
but I did stay
because it's 'you must stay'

We go to R's house in the Christmas
we cooking some food

At P's we teach everyone
cooking
cooking on fire

We can do that together
whether
we speak the same language
or not

Eating together
as families is
a massive thing
… their way of communicating
welcome
and they've done that
on many occasions

They sit down together
which we probably don't do so
much.
When we are with them
and they are with us
we can see that
and be part of that

A holiday meal
for Conversation Café
I agreed with N
we would plan a menu.
We asked people to bring a
dessert.
On the day
we had people chopping onions,
chopping coriander
at tables in the kitchen
and in the hall

In the community centre
a big meal
cooked for us all
in celebration
of family reunion -
welcome to S

Second year and everyone
they invited a lot of people
150
and yeah
that made us know
more people

Quotes from various research participants talking about cooking - at home, in the garden, at the community centre, for the Community Canteen, at Food festivals 1 & 2

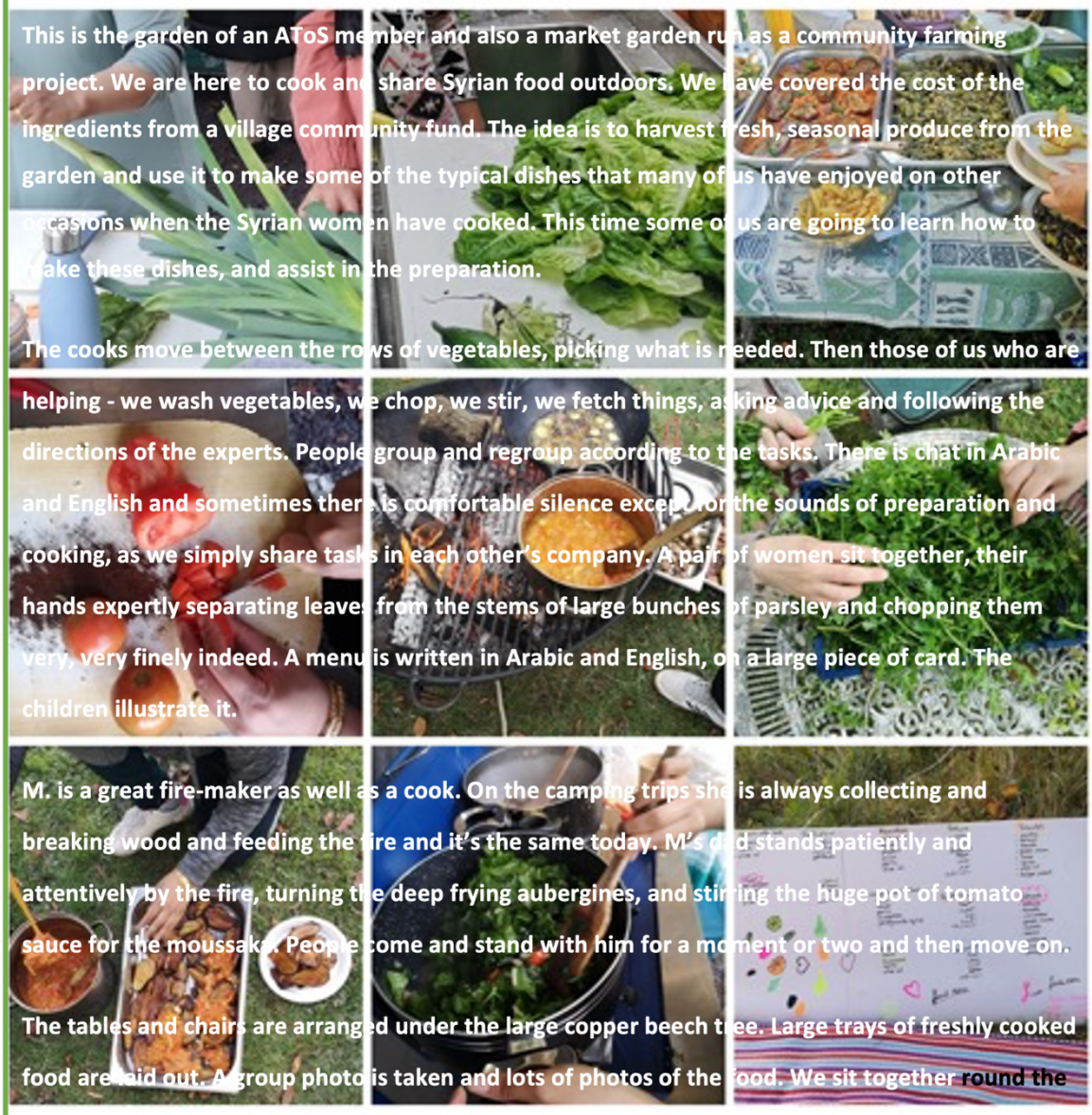
Figure 13: Quote Poem - cooking and eating together

language with individual specificity and also, in combination, forms a representation of the breadth of interest, feelings and memories around sharing food.

The quotes also show that the interest in food tends to flow one way – with an almost complete focus on Syrian food with the Syrian women as the providers and experts and the rest of the group as curious consumers. I would say the food focus has been predominantly led by the Syrian women and supported by the group. Having celebrated it, there is however a valid critique of the fact that refugee women as good cooks is often the only way they are represented more widely. This narrow view of valuing food hospitality and food entrepreneurship by refugees in general is problematic and perhaps the group are sometimes complicit in this. I think there is a tendency for Syrian food, along with other non-European cuisines that are associated with refugee success stories, to become exoticised as traditional and authentic and from elsewhere, which in some ways reflects a broader view of refugee migrants themselves as from traditional, unchanging communities from elsewhere. In terms of the dynamics of hospitality, instances of hospitality around food are spaces where those who hold the advantages of a social positioning, which typically confers the role of host on them (volunteers in this case), may be somehow relieved to take the role of guests in order to undo some of the inequality they recognise in their relationships. Seen in terms of what it means to the resettling migrants themselves, it appears that food is something used to communicate welcome in a way that is an entirely everyday expectation for this group of families, but it can also say things about cultural pride, about displaying women's skill, and about claiming the role of host. (I must note also however that there is a man in the group of resettled families who is a very skilled baker).

Continuing on the subject of food, what follows is a description and discussion of an event that was one of the first 'in person' events that took place once people were allowed to meet again after the pandemic restrictions (Figure 14). This is based on my own observations and reflections.

It's an autumn afternoon in a small village. About twenty-five people are gathered in a garden. Everyone knows one another. Most people have been here before, but it's been a while because of the pandemic, so it is a welcome face to face gathering.



Afterwards some people take seats around the fire – chatting or just staring into the fire. Someone sings a song in Arabic; someone sings a song in English. Men, women, young and old, get up and dance - holding hands in lines, circling, facing each other. People know the steps or try and follow the steps or do their own thing. It reaches a natural close and the clearing up and the leave taking begins.

Figure 14: Cook-out in the garden

The afternoon described above was a blend of activities that allowed being together in this space to take shape through what we did, what we said, what we were able to say (in terms of shared spoken language), and what we did not need to say. It also allowed people respite from speaking at all. This did not come out of nowhere, it is the 'story so far' of the building of repertoires of spoken and unspoken language and of connections between people, the development of ways of being together that co-constitute place. The ease and informality of the atmosphere, the development of a shared language of welcome and collectivity, has grown out of the slight awkwardness of the early CC meetings described elsewhere. These literacies of doing have been a way of developing connections, nurturing feelings of familiality and friendship and collectively writing new stories for ourselves and each other about migration, hospitality and belonging. It has also actively shaped the spaces we find ourselves in. We have come into being both individually and collectively through our encounters, as have the spaces we have created. These spaces are quite ephemeral as we move in and out of them to other spaces in/of our lives. This has not been automatic, it started as we have seen with some uncertainty, with constructed modes of encounter, with trial and error, working with and on the resources available.

A language of hospitality is created through doing things together. English is not the language in which it is expected to be expressed, and competence in English is not required. As R says when talking about ways we connect without speaking - cooking together (as was the case on this occasion) can do this.

> ….without speaking just to help each other. Even when, you know, I'm cooking - I need this one, this one, (you) just bring it to me.
> (Interview with Participant A)

I put forward that through the literacies of doing things together guest/host relationships can be complicated. Wider power relations are not overcome but there are small instances in which the relations are disrupted or "put into solution" (Phipps 2019 p23 quoting Raymond Williams 1997). If we are to talk of hosts in this scenario then there are many - the family whose garden we are in, the funders, the gardeners, the cooks, the lift givers, the fire tenders, the entertainers. It is a group history beyond

initial encounters that has led to the idea for this event being initiated, the preparation (getting funding, planning, shopping, pre-event visits to the garden), the roles people take (knowers of some things, learners of other things), the knowledges that are shared and created, and how the event unfurls. In terms of rurality, the opportunities afforded here by the garden space, are quite specific to the rural setting (as well as social positioning) and the kinds of things that are done together and being outdoors together is not unusual for this group; camping, walking, picnics and barbecues have all taken place, in gardens, parks, and on hillsides.

The event described might sound an idyllic rural scene and, through talking to others, it was generally seen as a memorable occasion. One participant described it as 'authentic' in the sense that it was not contrived, it did not feel like an intervention by some people on behalf of others. However, there is a possibility, and I picked it up at this event, that as people become more familiar with a shared language of participation over time, this could lead to feelings of exclusion for some newer others. Although language is conceptualised here as dynamic and participatory, according to Pennycook (2010) language practices form into a sedimentary accumulation over time. I offer other ways of thinking about this that, in my experience, fit with what is happening here. I view it as a cumulative rather than a layering process or, to put it another way, a process of gaining familiarity, or getting more practiced at the *doing* of this shared language that has developed. It was remarked on in the interview with Participant J (and I remembered it too), that the Conversation Café has not been without its exclusionary moments too. Despite Participant A's point in relation to Conversation Café that, "we talk about our news. If someone is new we ask the questions", as Participant J mentions, when a new woman came along, who did not speak either English or Arabic (the spoken languages of the group) she did not return. I think it is worth considering whether this was not only because of not sharing the spoken languages of the group, or about being from a different country, or about whether people included her by asking her questions or not, but more about the history and development of our language practice as a group becoming less accessible to those joining in. This can also be true for new volunteers.

Returning to the rural scene in the garden, one might not expect to see this mix, this formation, these practices, in a village garden in rural Wales. It does not fit the prevailing perception of the rural. And we could then question why it might be considered surprising that there are globally connected spaces outside the city. The rural is globally connected in many ways but this highly visual and sensory pocket of activity, albeit on a tiny scale, belies with some intensity, and in a particular way (in relation to migration and mobilities), the perception of the village as an unchanging, bounded, community. The fact that it is an event for the enjoyment of the people attending – not something contrived to inform or show others – perhaps serves to insert its presence in the village as a narrative of normalising the global in the local. This makes an interesting comparison with the more public exhibition event in the same village, described in the Chapter 8.

What can also be said is that the tensions of inequalities do not get cancelled by this gathering, which I take as representative of other gatherings as well. Concerns regarding inequalities more broadly, and also potentially reflected within the AToS activities themselves, are voiced more by volunteer women participants, perhaps because of the unease they feel from their advantaged positions and a need to make sense of them. These concerns have not come through in the research so clearly in relation to the refugee women so their views on this remain unknown in the context of this study.

5.8 The planned and the incidental

The creative workshops that were initiated as part of the research brought out key themes in relation to the processes at play in the engagements of AToS members in group activities and how these develop over time. As such they deserve their own space. The methodological rationale and the procedure of the creative sessions has been described in Chapter 4 but to briefly reiterate, two sessions of the Conversation Café meetings were devoted to creative practice set up by me as researcher as part of the case study. The prompt was to create images related to the things we had done together in the Town of Sanctuary group. The sessions did produce some images of events and outings (the camping trip, a table of food, a visit to the owl sanctuary) as

well as some images more generally related to the group (local scenery, women and a baby, a family group) but perhaps more interesting were those not directly related to the prompt. One woman chose to follow a childhood memory and use a technique she had learned at school of sticking tiny balls of coloured tissue paper in clusters representing flowers (see Figure 15 a). I tell her that watching her hands working with/shredding the tiny pieces of green tissue reminds me of the fine chopping of parsley to make the tabouleh salad that has often been eaten at their tables. She laughs and says that is just what they had been saying amongst themselves in Arabic, a reminder that not everything is shared as we speak languages alongside each other, but also how a familiarity with each other's domestic activities brings a response that we discover is shared. Participant R chooses to represent the annual event the Syrian families participate in, where they sell food (Figure 15 b) She has given them clearly differentiated (and almost recognisable) appearances.

Figure 15:
a) Paper like parsley (left)
b) Food stall at garden open day (right)

Another woman makes a picture of Conversation Café as a group of women in hijabs, and two white women surrounding a baby – people are brought together by the close grouping of the figures but at the same time it visually reinforces difference through the figure of the blonde blue eyed white woman and the women somehow defined by their wearing of the hijab. This indicates to me the difficulty of recognising but not essentialising difference.

One man enthusiastically came to both sessions. In the first he made an image of the camping trip but in the next one drew several powerful black and white imaginary landscapes, simply because he really enjoys drawing (see Figure 16 a). He is animated in

his reminiscence of trips out to the countryside with his art class in Syria and he gestures around him indicating how they observed and drew the landscape and sky. These two pictures bring in other times and places, even places that are not anywhere in particular.

A pair of participants choose to work together and make a joint composite picture of the distinctive Sugarloaf mountain that we have climbed together, with a Syrian flag on top, a table set for coffee, a heart and the river running through it all – the River Usk that flows through the town (see Figure 16 b).

Figure 16:
a) Imaginary landscape (left)
b) Jointly created image from creative session (right)

This picture brings into focus the particularity of doing things together in a rural setting. There is also something about making known the presence of others through the flag on the summit. There is conversation about the Syrian flag as when it is googled there are several possible versions depending on one's political position. One man who had been reluctant to make a picture picks up on the flag symbol and his picture is just a large flag. Perhaps this is an example that does not fit my earlier argument resisting a pre-occupation with origins, or possibly it is more of a political statement, or maybe just an easier image to make. The conversation that accompanies the making of this image brings me on to the next point.

There is more could be said about the individual pieces that people created, but rather than focus on any further on the products of these sessions, I am choosing to move on to try and represent what was happening with/alongside/ around the making of the images. The image below (Figure 17) is my own response to the creative sessions and

how they represent the nature of AToS encounters more broadly. The collage incorporates pictures of the making process and some of the finished work, but threaded between the images, I have noted the live conversations and actions running through the practice as, rather than incidental, these seem just as significant as the images that we were aiming to produce.

Figure 17: Creative session - images and conversations

What I want to represent here is that what happened in this session is typical of what happens more generally in these practices of welcome, not just this research activity. The incidental actions, gestures and conversations, what happens in the interstices of the more intentional activities, are as worth paying attention to as any planned outcome. I want to suggest that the way that, *within* these encounters and associated spaces created by them, people can take things off in different directions, make new meanings and shape the space by assembling and reassembling the wide repertoire of

resources enabled by literacies of doing things together. It is through this varied repertoire that people can find ways of being together that unsettle the binaries of host/guest, migrant/non-migrant, local/stranger. The particularity I want to mention here is that, apart from Covid interruptions, this group had been meeting in different ways over several years and friendships developed within and beyond the Conversation Café, and it struck me how much of the material produced and the conversations taking place though spoken and unspoken language in the space of this session were based on a familiarity with each other. In fact, there were things we did not need to say at all, as we drew on a shared history and knowledge. I also got a sense that this familiarity allowed people to resist – to not join in, to make images unrelated to the plan, to take the conversation elsewhere. It highlighted how things have changed over time from more planned sessions to much looser arrangements now. The idea of familiarity leads on to the next point.

5.9 Refrains of welcome over time – and silence

I would like to conclude the examples for this chapter with one that takes us back to initial encounters but also carries through as a kind of refrain and also the possibility of silence. When I asked participants about expressions of welcome, I was particularly struck by this Syrian woman's highlighting of the significance of the smallest and simplest combination of a smile, and the two words 'hello' and 'welcome'. This combination of two very simple words and a facial gesture can be viewed as the start of something, an invitation and reassurance perhaps, and they also become something constant and reliable through repeated encounters taking relationships beyond the threshold of welcome and hospitality.

> You know when you're coming here and you don't have any words to speak, they say welcome. First words you know it - hello and welcome and we do the Conversation Café and everybody say hello and welcome anytime, whatever you want just ask us, you're welcome.

> Yes, even when you see me just smile. Yeah, some people not smiling or something like (Me: you mean outside?) Yeah, but we are always

> smiling. Smiling like in here saying hello. Smiling cooking to each other just without speaking just help each other. Even, you know, when I'm cooking I need this one this one, just bring it to me. (Interview with Participant A)

I feel there is a significance in its simplicity and repetition, as a kind of refrain that gives some continuity of meaning as relationships develop. These are the first words we all used, accompanied by a smile, when perhaps we were not sure what else to say, how to respond in the encounter, in the sense Ahmed (2000) puts forward; when none of us "had any words to speak" (Participant A p144) to each other. I pick up from this that the combination of these three simple elements – smile, hello and welcome, repeated as a kind of everyday refrain, are something that matters, and something that doesn't happen in all her encounters in Abergavenny. They are there from the first encounter but also *always* there.

Connected with this, and raised by volunteer participants, is the fairly frequent and incidental practice of greeting and brief conversational exchange with the Syrian families in the street. These everyday meetings are mentioned in the interviews by both Participants R and J, and echoes other conversations I have had about it. Greeting Syrian residents of the town as friends during chance encounters in the street is a public show of welcome and a normalisation of the presence of this hyper-visible racialised group. It connects with the refrain of a smile and the words hello and welcome, described by A. This simple, fleeting but repeated gesture of welcome, whether in private, on the doorstep or in public is not always the greeting A expects in the course of her daily life but can be relied upon from her contact with AToS members. As participant R says, there is a meaning carried in often incidental and 'mundane' events, the "casual drip drip" of small actions such as just being seen in public together. This is of course, particularly relevant to the rural setting.

I suggest here that what has happened over time, as the ways of being together have evolved, is that the fear of the silences mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, decreased. Permission to observe or remain silent seems important and perhaps there was a recognition that, as we become more familiar with each other, and move beyond

the need to speak at the moment of welcome, the silences no longer matter. There may be an understanding that the activities we do together 'fill' those silences or perhaps there are actually fewer silences as we become more adept at speaking to each other through the communicative repertoires we deploy. These short refrains and the space for silence should not be overlooked as part of the collage of practices and spaces that make up the sphere of activity of AToS.

5.10 Conclusion

Drawing on my own involvement and the material produced through research, in this chapter I have examined the space of the Conversation Café and the relationships that developed beyond it. I explored the activities of the Conversation Cafe and other activities that sprang from it, and introduced the idea of 'literacies of doing' to describe the local participatory practices that I see as a key feature of these encounters. These shared literacies, developed through doing things together, allowed spoken language to float among other means of communication, including embodied practices such as cooking, gestures of friendship such as gift giving, and inclusion in both mundane and significant life events. Not everyone used the same communicative repertoires; clearly, some were able to speak more English, or to cook, or were in a better position to extend invitations. In the variety of ways they were articulated, however, the literacies of doing allowed people to find ways of being together in more inclusive ways, where a shared understanding did not rely on competence in the dominant language of English.

I suggested that there are close links between acts of welcome, the language practices or 'literacies of doing' that characterise them, and encounters of informal learning. Taken together I propose that they have a key role in grassroots knowledge creation. I contrasted these practices with more formal ESOL learning in relation to notions of citizenship and belonging. I suggested that these more informal encounters of learning and knowledge production offer the opportunity for a more mutual writing of place, that moves aways from notions of an integration into what is already there.

While recognising the many connections people have outside AToS, my research shows that the more organised space of Conversation Café allowed other connections,

encounters and relationships to develop over a period of time. The binary categorisations of local/newcomer, guest/host were unsettled as people offered, received and responded to encounters of welcome and hospitality in ways that are available to them but not in simple terms of reciprocity. While the ways that were available to them were likely to be contingent on such things as economic position, cultural norms and familiarity with each other, there does not appear to be any hierarchy of status between different enactments of hospitality that people were able to offer or participate in.

Chapter 6: At home with Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary: creating spaces of narrative production

6.1 Introduction

This chapter, like the previous one, focusses predominantly on the AToS case study (see Chapter 4 for full details of the case study). I continue to draw on theorisations of encounters, mobilities and rural space. Language and 'literacies of doing' continue to be a central theme. What shifts is an emphasis towards how practices of welcome and hospitality, expressed through these literacies of doing, shift between different local spaces, and how these spaces connect with other places and times way beyond them. I propose that narratives of welcome, migration, and rurality move along with them, mobilising new meanings for those engaged in these practices and for others they come into contact with.

While they might be seen as very local in scale, these activities are framed by a theorisation that sees the local and global as being mutually constitutive. The rural local in particular is taken to be an active space rather than the passive, unchanging one it is often imagined to be (Agyeman & Neal, 2006; Cloke 2004, 2006; Woods, 2005). Local practices of welcome, including the 'literacies of doing' central to this thesis, are considered to be active in the process of knowledge production, the development of new social and cultural formations, and the re/writing of place.

The engagements and practices of welcome studied here, taking place in a variety of spaces, including homes, gardens, community centres and hillsides, are situated in what are often imagined as the apolitical spaces of the countryside. Issues of transnational migration and displacement are still deemed to be predominantly an urban concern. Global connections of place, through migration and other phenomena, are readily acknowledged in the city but less so in the countryside. This chapter brings evidence to the argument that these often overlooked spaces are always globally connected (Garland &Chakraborty 2004, McKrell & Pemberton 2018, Woods 2006). I propose that

the encounters of welcome are not too small scale and out of the way to have any political dimension, especially if considered as acts of citizenship (Isin 2008, 2012).

I first take a deeper look at the home space as a key site to raise questions about the issues set out above, and I have conceptualised home as a global portal in order to express the way the domestic space works as a site of narrative production through its interconnectedness with other places and times. This chapter also starts to address how narratives of migration, welcome and rurality, created through ongoing acts of welcome, might be mobilised beyond the encounters themselves. To do this I discuss the ways in which stories are shared, examining how they are told to others through spoken anecdote and also through assembling the wider communicative repertoires involved in doing things together in different spaces. Before that however, I would like to introduce this chapter with a response to three images of objects that bring together several points that are key to the discussion.

6.2 Making Arrangements

Figure 18: Arrangement of objects at a home and at an event in a community centre

The images above (Figure 18) show how, working with what was available to him, a man collected together objects representing Syria and also Wales (the tray and the scarf) and arranged them in his home with other decorative objects as a display. Unprompted, he brought them along and arranged them on a table at a Syrian Supper event in a local church hall. In a similar way to the language repertoires already discussed, these objects

have been brought together and assembled in a creative, improvised way to share meaning in an alternative mode to spoken language. This man has very limited spoken English but even if he could speak confidently in English this arrangement of objects might 'say' something unavailable though spoken language, in the same way that literacies of doing might also communicate things and activate narratives beyond spoken stories.

In part, the interest of these objects lies in the fact that they were moved from the home to a more public space and then taken home again. Whether on display at an event or at home, in private or public, seen or unseen outside the home space, these objects continue to carry meanings with them. Responses to an encounter with them is modulated according to where they are and who sees them (Ho & Hatfield 2011). It needs to be made clear that I am not speaking for the creator of this arrangement of objects but sharing my own response to it. In the same way that Ahmed (2000), in her work on encounters, talks about responses in relation to encounters with text, here an encounter with these objects has prompted a response, originally as a friend and AToS member, and now as researcher.

For me, they suggest things about disconnection and connection for people who have been displaced and find themselves in rural Wales. The objects represent continuing transnational connections with the location from which this man and his family have been displaced. Through their shifts in setting, the objects show the interconnectedness or overlapping of the more private and public spaces they exist in and move between. And now, here, as images in a thesis they take a diversion into a different space where meanings become attached to them in relation to a theoretical framework and to academic processes.

Moving away from ideas of integration (as this thesis does throughout), I also suggest the possibility of seeing the objects chosen to represent Wales and Syria, not in juxtaposition, or as one set of objects incorporated or integrated into the other, but as a new configuration. It also presents an interesting reversal of how migrants are often seen; that is as being inserted into the dominant 'host' culture. In this arrangement the Welsh cultural artefacts are in fact inserted into the array of objects from Syria that

dominate the arrangement. Whatever the balance of objects, it narrates a time and place where new cultural and social formations can come into being. It is an invitation to see nothing strange or exotic about these things existing together, to expect the unexpected even in this church hall in a small rural town in Wales.

The fact that the objects representing Welsh culture are rather stereotyped ones perhaps reflects a tendency to focus on understanding each other's cultures as static and traditional. In my experience it is the case that cultures of the Global South in particular, seen through the lens of white western orientalism, are valorised for their so-called authenticity and tradition. Multicultural experiences are frequently severely narrowed in this way. I am not sure how 'Welsh culture' is seen or experienced by this man but I think it is interesting that it is clearly Welsh not British culture that he is choosing to celebrate in some way.

As well as the hopes and pleasures associated with the positive story which I believe this individual wished to express, I cannot help feeling that there might be a sense of loss associated with the objects too. The objects from Syria represent a life no longer lived in that place, a displacement fraught with difficult personal histories caught up in wider political currents. This is not to negate the hope, but is a reminder of the routes and roots through which it has emerged (Gilroy 1997). The relations between the particular mix of people in the AToS group are still affected by these different histories of movement and settlement but perhaps the 'figure of the migrant' as an archetypal and generalised stranger has been given some shape and colour through the repeated encounters of welcome that are our subject.

Figure 19: Invitation to Syrian Supper

This image (Figure 19) is advertising a Syrian meal event in a community centre. The name chosen is the joining up of 'Croeso', the Welsh word for welcome, with Syria, the country whose cuisine and culture is the theme of the evening. It exemplifies global connections embedded within the local and rural. Yet in the description of the food the traditional is invoked again. The 'traditional' tends to hold things in place, not only in the here and now of this

rural location, but in relation to faraway places and cultures often seen through a Western centric lens as unchanging (perhaps similarly to the way rural spaces are). It could be said that, while local and global are brought together through these events, the way tradition is used as a kind of 'hook' can also create a kind of distance through an exoticization of the 'other' that fixes it in another place and time.

The name of the event indicates a kind of double welcome, hinting at the distinctiveness of welcome in Wales as well as the welcome from the Syrian families hosting the evening. It also highlights a reversal of guest host relations. Members of the local Syrian families are no longer (welcomed, tolerated, or unwelcomed) guests of the host nation, nor are they people at the receiving end of welcome by the Town of Sanctuary. For this time and place at least, they are the cooks and hosts of the event to which other residents have been invited. There is also a reversal in term of who are the knowledge holders, as the Syrians now share cultural knowledge (mainly in the form of food) and hold more control over their own narratives. I think that being able to extend this kind of hospitality can work as a way of not just finding, but also actively claiming, a space and place for yourself/selves where you now are.

The developing Nation of Sanctuary narrative is something that local events like this can draw on, positioning them as aligned with and supported by wider Welsh government aspirations (some refugee groups adopting the slogan 'a warm Welsh welcome'). Likewise, the Nation of Sanctuary narrative can be strengthened when stories about these grassroots events come to wider attention. This mutually enhancing narrative is complicated; as stated previously, the devolved Welsh government does not have powers over immigration policy, it can only introduce limited policy measures to support refugee migrants in other ways and help build a narrative of welcome. Regardless of the policy details, these enactments of welcome, from the Nation of Sanctuary to the Town of Sanctuary, to the group of families cooking at a community event, to breakfast in someone's house, take place on multiple scales and it is my view that they all have an impact on each other. The way practices of welcome move between different spaces, and the narratives they take with them, is a key element of the thesis and is carried forward in later chapters, particularly in Chapter 8.

Having brought in several themes through these objects I elaborate on them in the following sections. I examine how acts of welcome create new 'arrangements', or social formations that move between local spaces (as the objects did). I look at how the literacies of doing they engage in carry meaning with this movement, and how they can be counted as grassroots sources of knowledge production and can be active in the writing of place rather than being merely a form of multicultural integration.

6.3 The home space as a global portal for diasporic encounters

In this thesis the domestic space, the household, is of interest as a key site for encounters of welcome and the examination of how as a space it relates to multiple spaces beyond it. In relation to this chapter, nearly all AToS research participants talk about the move beyond the Conversation Café to hospitality in people's homes, how that transition happened and its significance. Five of the six interviews with AToS participants took place in a home environment (either mine or theirs).

Meanings of home are complex and can change across time and location (McDowell 1999 p71). As the literature insists (Brah, 1996; 2022; hooks, 1991; Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999), the home space is a complex site of interrelations between individuals and places that can be both intimate and extensive. It can be variously experienced as nurturing or oppressive, as a place of containment or a restorative haven. It is still often only associated with the private realm, set in contrast with the public sphere. McDowell contests this by asserting that "a focus on the social relations within a domestic space crosses the boundary between public and private, between the particular and the general and is not, as is often incorrectly asserted, a focus on the 'merely' domestic or private sphere" (Mc Dowell 1999 p72-3). Diasporic theory also incorporates a recognition of the tensions between multiple meanings of home associated with what has been left behind, what is experienced now and what the future holds (Brah 1996 p193). Diaspora space allows home to be multilocational and transnational, a hub of criss-crossed relations between people in different places, both virtually and in real life. As Massey puts it, a place called home can be conceived as "the simultaneous co-existence of social interrelations at all geographical scales, from the

intimacy of the household to the wide space of transglobal connections" (Massey 1994 p169).

There is still often a gendered association with the home, perceived as a predominantly women's space. In the AToS group those active in these encounters are overwhelmingly women and all the participants in this case study are women. This merging of associations between home as a private, contained space and with women can lead to assumptions that neither the home, nor women who encounter each other in it, are active in knowledge and narrative creation. I think this is particularly true of the way migrant women (particularly Muslim women) are often perceived in the eyes of others – as home bound and without agency.

When home is seen as a bounded space, with limited lived relations within it, then cultural and knowledge production within it is likely to be seen as reproductive rather than creative. When it is conceptualised in the way I present it in this chapter, as a 'global portal' open to relations with other places and times, then it becomes a place where there are both struggles and opportunities to create new social formations and new narratives. This section looks at the particularities of AToS welcome activities taking place in domestic households, keeping in mind that distinctions between home and beyond home are blurred, and that the home space does not exist apart from wider forces, and global concerns. It examines how the intimacies of these encounters generate stories that move beyond them. It is treated as a site of informal learning, generating knowledges and narratives that grow out of multiple relations with people, places and times both near and distant.

As described in Chapter 5, the more organised events of AToS Conversation Café provided a basis for relationships to develop amongst this diverse group of Abergavenny residents. It was also a key site for different kinds of learning – language learning of volunteers and English for the resettling families, as this quote indicates.

> It has been a huge education for me think maybe about, in terms of my attitude to Islam as a religion and also Muslim culture, which I knew very, very little about and I think obviously my knowledge of

> that has been communicated by the Syrians themselves during times when you are speaking to them, so some of that would have been during Conversation Café when there was a lot of exchange about what's this in Arabic, have you got these vegetables in…what do you grow in Syria, what are your houses like in Syria and that was very interesting because they all had big lovely houses and that changes your concept of what a refugee is. […] And that would have been just through talking or that would have been through some of the topics we decided to talk about initially, so talking about houses.
> (Interview with Participant J)

Increasingly however, the home became a site for these relationships to develop further. Practices such as lending, gift giving and help with practical tasks served as an introduction to inviting people into each other's homes.

> I think I started visiting them socially, maybe to take things to them, I think maybe I started doing things like taking plants or food from the garden because we talked about the fact that they liked beans or something. So then of course you are one to one. So then we would communicate a lot mostly intelligible in English but she [one of the Syrian women] can make herself known very well
> (Interview with Participant J)

Over time the home came to be a place where enactments of welcome, hospitality and friendship took many forms for AToS members and allowed people to sustain and grow social relations beyond the threshold of the initial encounter of welcome. Visiting homes was also seen by interview participants as part of a shift that made things feel more balanced in terms of guest host relations. That said, in Chapter 4 we saw how these relations were more nuanced and complicated than a fixed guest/host relationship that aligned with non-migrant/migrant status, or a simple reciprocity of hospitality.

The interviews suggest that, as well as building friendships, the domestic encounters were seen by those not familiar with Syrian food, cultural practices, and family life, as an opportunity to learn about them. It was also a chance to experience being guests receiving the hospitality of the resettled families now resident in Abergavenny - be it a get together for coffee or a birthday party. As quoted in Chapter 4, one volunteer participant emphasises the importance of "visibly seeing" what goes on in homes, a practice of observing that goes beyond conversing and learning through spoken language. It was noticeable in the interviews with the Syrian women that they did not seem to regard these encounters as cultural learning experiences in the same way that volunteers did. However, describing her first visit to a barbecue at a home, Participant S (below) homes in on some tiny details – observing actions that signal certain relationships of family and friendship and mutual wellbeing. Perhaps there is a subtle cultural element in observing, as a very new arrival in the UK, what might be the norms of men's and women's roles amongst white, long term UK residents.

> When we came your house I am new here. I am happy. My family with me you know. I have a new friend, S. S. is very happy as well. S's husband help her for like plates in the garden and spoon yeah, and water. (Interview with participant S.)

For the Syrian families, visiting the homes of volunteers seems to have primarily provided an opportunity for sociality and familial feelings (the significance of which have already been mentioned in Chapter 5). Interestingly, even as guests they often brought their hospitality with them in the form of food.

Another example of the home as a site into which things are drawn in, re/created and emerge back into circulation, is through language learning, slightly different aspects of which were discussed in the previous chapter. One interviewee mentions the home setting of her learning several times and claims this informal setting, linked with hospitality, is how she has learned English – not so much through English classes. The home setting allows for learning to take place in relation to real life, practical situations, and with an understanding of people's lives at home. The (volunteer) teacher can take

time to understand, to fill in the gaps in an individualised context, and address immediate needs, which is less likely to happen, or at least more difficult to manage in a class. The language practiced through these home visits is not of course confined to the home. The needs that arise, brought to the encounter by the language learner, are often related to events, situations and issues outside the home that they want to deal with. These are brought into the home space of learning. There is also talk that has nothing to do with needs and is the talk of everyday interest and news. What is heard, picked up, translated, learned, tried out, and practised, in the home environment will be taken back out into the world and new encounters. Viewing language as a social and participatory practice, the social space of the home can be a key site in which to participate in language and to experiment with its repertoires before taking it into spaces that are perhaps less welcoming, less safe. In this way language practices are integral to the circulation of narratives into and out of the home space.

The homes that the AToS members met in were the setting for relocated cultural practices, often associated with food. They worked as a space for stories connected to the recent past of multiple shared encounters, to mix with those of an unshared past of transnational displacement. These mixed with talk of the good and difficult aspects of life here and now, and an exchange of family and other everyday news. It was often the time to plan new events and outings outside the home. All these stories were told through both spoken language and literacies of doing. The sounds of Arabic being spoken, mix with the sounds of all kinds of English being tried out. Questions, offers, invitations, mix with listening and quiet observation. We see the sights and incidental activities of the home environment – the snacks on the table for an informal coffee, the party decorations for a birthday. We witness the to-ing and fro-ing from the kitchen, the cooking and setting out of food. Other family members pass through. Sometimes there is music and dancing. What had started in Conversation Café, now included household spaces which became sites to find out about the past, feel connected in the present and look ahead. All these make the home a space connected with places beyond it, past and present, and a site for writing place going forward. In this sense it works as a global portal into which narratives from other places and times are drawn in and are enmeshed with practices (literacies of doing) that shape the home space. Through this

process new narratives are created which travel out of it and contribute to shaping those spaces too.

Despite a desire to move away from the volunteer/refugee division within the AToS group, the case study interviews show some differences in emphasis between these two groupings in relation to how they see these encounters in the home. The three AToS volunteer participants tended to see people's homes as a site of deep cultural and social learning through the development of personal relationships. Learning was mentioned only in terms of home being an important site for language learning by any of the three AToS refugee participants. They tended to view home as a place of hosting, hospitality and welcome where they could build a sense of familiality. The family homes were also the places where the AToS volunteers most often saw themselves as guests.

Despite these differences in emphasis, this section has highlighted how social relationships between AToS members that developed in the intimacy of the home, are characterised by transnational connections with physically faraway places. The informal learning that takes place further connects people with the global in terms of culture, language and heightened awareness of the global forces that brought everyone here. Here in this small town context, the household is a place where we can expect the unexpected – even when unseen except by family members and friends. I propose that the threshold of the home is an entrance not just into the private space (though it is that too) but an opening into knowledges, experiences and stories beyond it. It is also a space where practices of welcome develop and change beyond the crossing of the threshold in the initial encounter of welcome. As people's 'stories so far' intersect in these domestic spaces they bring practices, knowledges, narratives, personal dispositions, and the allowances and constrictions of economic and social inequalities in with them, from other spaces and times. These might be the transnational threads of diasporic space or a deep familiarity with the locality in which everyone now resides. The study has shown how the move into domestic spaces of welcome and hospitality is less likely to have happened without some initial organisation though Conversation Café. This need for more organised welcome may be particularly necessary in the more rural area in which this study is set.

I have described the meeting of AToS members in homes as a kind of hub through which people, activities, ideas and narratives pass, but it is one of many interconnected spaces. As well as family homes and gardens, AToS activities have taken place in many other spaces, from informal gathering to more organised events and trips. People have met and joined in activities together in cafés, parks, and walks up local mountains. There have been events in community centres, both family celebrations too big for the home as well as more public community meals open to all. There have been trips to a farm, museum and castle. There has been an annual camping trip in the grounds of a local family estate. There have been the impromptu passing conversations in the street. While I have focussed on home space so far, because I think it is under-recognised as a space of learning, global connections and activism, I suggest that all these spaces are interrelated and that, as the activities of welcome and literacies of doing move between the different spaces of welcome created by this group, accompanying narratives of welcome, migration and settlement move along with them.

Furthermore, what happens is also influenced by places that are not currently inhabited by participants, as global connections that span temporal and spatial dimensions are brought into the diasporic home. Brah's (1996, 2022) notion of diasporic space comes into play here, holding together the axes of Gilroy's (1997) "routes and roots" which encompass particular histories of movement and putting down, as well as leaving, one's roots. These movements, shaped by the forces of colonial oppression, the class inequalities of capitalist regimes, and the racialised governance of particular groups of people, play out even in these very local and intimate rural spaces (Carby 2021). They are overlaid with the stresses of the government's hostile policies towards refugee migrants in particular. Importantly for this study, which looks at groups of people often categorised as those who have moved contrasted with those who have stayed still, Brah's notion of diasporic space includes the effects of diasporic movement and settlement on everyone, not just those who have been displaced (Brah 1996). Perhaps we can think of all the individuals in these groups being at different stages of un/settlement, but in the wake of very different experiences and facing very different issues in their current lives. It is their coming together in both convivial and also sometimes awkward ways that narrates this un/settlement now that our 'stories so far'

have intersected. These activities and narratives contribute to a shaping of social spaces and formations that are a small but significant (and political) contribution to the writing of place. I also count them as acts of citizenship in their creation of ways of being together and belonging outside the dominant frameworks of integration, compliance with 'British values' and formal immigration status.

In the context of this chapter that deals with how practices and accompanying narratives move between more private and more public spaces, and in doing so unsettle the boundaries between them, this seems the right place to acknowledge that there is a wealth of small acts that go on behind the scenes within the AToS group that never come to light and stories that remain untold. Many needs are met not only outside the public gaze, but also unknown to other members of the AToS apart from those directly involved. What is seen is by no mean the whole story. These are not raised in this study as a specific theme though some examples are mentioned in passing such as helping in the garden or cooking. Some are much more vital such as accompanying people to hospital, finding accommodation, helping resolve school issues. They continue unremarked and overlooked but nevertheless absolutely key to the wellbeing of those that arrive with no knowledge of health, welfare and education systems and inadequately supported by government initiatives.

The attention of this research project, however, rests more on social interaction than urgent needs. As Participant F says, it is about, "doing things that are fun as well as doing things that address needs" and I think this is what the idea of welcome offers – something in addition to immediate practical and material needs. While of course the material needs are vital, this social aspect of life redirects the narrative of migration and settlement away from that of the needy refugee to a more holistic view of personhood. The same participant talks about her experience of joining in AToS activities together as being "good for the soul", something that seems beyond practicality, or empathy or hospitality, but perhaps related to hope.

I now move on to think about how narratives are mobilised by these encounters, firstly in the more obvious sense of stories about them being told to others and then in terms of how the activities themselves, the processes of welcome and the learning and

knowledge production that are an integral part of them, can be considered as narratives, mobilised as they move between these social spaces.

6.4 Sharing Stories

As well as the primary purpose of offering welcome, volunteer participants do talk about the idea of changing people's minds, changing the narrative about refugees, as part of the role of AToS. And passing on spoken anecdotes plays a part in this for them. But equally important in the scope of this thesis are the *processes* at work as well as the *content* in relation to narrative production, and some elements of both are discussed here.

This section looks at the passing on of narratives in a more literal, spoken, anecdotal form by volunteers. In conversation with AToS volunteers, I was able to talk at length and in detail not only about individual and group relationships with the Syrian families, but also about the wider effects of our relationships when stories 'about them' were shared beyond the group. It is a limitation of the study that I have no evidence to show if and how the Syrian women I interviewed pass on stories concerning AToS to others in their lives. This imbalance is detailed more fully in the case study description in Chapter 4, but to reiterate briefly here: I suspect that much of this has to do with the limitations of spoken language in the interviews and some reticence on my part for tackling wider issues if I was not sure they were being fully understood (purely in terms of language comprehension that is). I am aware that the discussion is therefore somewhat skewed towards addressing the contributions of the volunteer participants and my own experience. Whatever the reason, the non-refugee volunteer interviewees were keen to talk about what 'effect' the AToS activities were having in the wider world whereas with the Syrian women interviewees the conversation did not move beyond the AToS encounters into other aspects of their lives and what stories they might recount to others or how they told them. This more political aspect did not seem to be of as much interest to the Syrian women. It raises the questions as to *who* thinks of these encounters as political acts?

This limitation of the material links with cautions about who hears what in relation to the stories of/from marginalised groups, about reproducing some knowledges in more detail than others and therefore reproducing which knowledges become legitimised. The study perhaps demonstrates how the research(er) can share alternative forms of knowledge production from under-recognised groups but also reproduce dominant narratives, within the same project. This echoes how those who are motivated to offer welcome, hospitality and friendship to refugee migrants can also offer new narratives and entrench existing ones within the same project. Even taking into account the central argument of the thesis, that there are many unspoken ways that stories can be told, the fact that this issue is not overcome perhaps reflects the wider problem of whose stories are told and heard.

Turning now to specific examples of sharing narratives, two volunteer interviewees talked about how they retold the stories of their encounters with refugee migrants to family and friends in other social spaces. One (Participant R) mentioned being able to introduce an anecdote with the phrase "One of my Syrian friends…." saying that it makes a difference that one is not making "sweeping statements" but talking about "someone's life that you know". She points out that, in this way, she is sharing the story of her own social life and so "people can see how you to choose to spend it". She talks about how the learning experience of the encounters allows one to inform others, but with 'snippets' of story rather than 'lectures'. She thinks people are generally curious and said, "I would like to tell a positive story - because there is one."

The other volunteer (Participant J) talked about her social contact with Syrian families to others in her social world. She thought that, through being able to talk about her experiences, she observed a shift in the attitude of a particular friend towards Muslims and refugees and how the friend, in turn, was able to challenge a myth about migrants.

> I see her every week and we talk a lot. I quite often come from Conversation Café. But I think that what I've been able to tell her about my experience has changed her attitudes to maybe Muslims, maybe refugees and I know that she says things now that, I might be

> wrong, but I don't think she might have said before she knew about this [……..]. I think her attitude seems to be much more positive and she has actually said… so in the kind of knock on effect she told me about somebody or other, a man in Tesco who was…who came up and was talking to her, they were talking about waiting lists in the NHS and then he said something like, 'yeah well of course if they come from somewhere else they'd be in there straight away and they'd have the best treatment and they'd jump the queue and she said 'Oh you think so? Well, all I can say is that I know that if I lived somewhere like that and I'd been in a war and gone through the things they've gone through I'd want to have come to a country like this' and I thought good on you… (Interview with Participant J)

She also spoke about chatting with her hairdresser whom she knew to have shared a racist post on social media. She hoped that, after their conversations about the resettled families she knew, this person would not do that now.

She also talked about knowledge and personal experience equipping her to challenge racism and recalls an incident where she challenged a market stall holder.

> They [a Syrian couple] were touching some fruit and veg and looking at them and she [the stall holder] said to me 'see those two there, they are always coming and touching the fruit and vegetables, they don't buy, they wouldn't do that in their own country'. So I was really annoyed, so I said 'well actually I know them very well' and I said [mentions something that had happened to one of them] so I've got a lot of time for them and she went 'Oh, Oh' and she sort of backed off but I just felt… and I just walked away. So that's an example. I can't imagine that would happen in a London area where people would be used to whatever people do and that idea that they wouldn't do it in their own country. Of course they would do it in their own country – they are just behaving as they normally do.
> (Interview with Participant J)

What matters in all these cases is not just what is *said* to the people these participants converse with about these matters, it is that these women present themselves as part of a shared social world with the refugee families and demonstrate their own place within these narratives. This last story also references the differences there may be between responses in the city and this small market town and an awareness of the particularity of this context. The exchange is subtly contributing to the re/writing of place as experiences in the home are narrated in spaces such as this marketplace. Almost hidden within the exchange are telling examples of the discourse we use in terms of belonging, with reference to 'their own country'. I can't comment on how the Syrian people in this story would refer to Syria – they might well themselves refer to it as 'my country'. The meanings carried for each speaker are likely to be quite different; the market trader using it to suggest that they belong elsewhere, while the displaced person might be affirming their cultural identity. These uncertain aspects of the exchange highlight the complexity of narratives and their retelling.

I found Michael's (2012) idea of anecdote and anecdotalisation appealing as a way of thinking about this kind of storytelling. This is where a specific incident or event that has affected the teller acts as a kind of "irritant' picking up a range of associations, mixing the real and constructed as it is 'sent out into the world'" (p26). Anecdote is typically about small instances of difference, and "illuminates the ordinary flow of events" (p28). It allows for telling and retelling, reorientations and critical reflection.

> Anecdotalization entails a semiotic and material dialogue between past and present through, and with, bodies, memories, stories, objects and texts. If this conversation is any good, uninvited topics, unexpected insights and untoward issues should emerge, and in emerging should go on to feed the very process of anecdotalization. (Michael in Lury 2012 p34)

Michael is writing about research, and the researcher as storyteller but I think this idea is useful in general for thinking about the mobilisation of stories that move beyond the

encounters of welcome in a variety of ways, the research field being just one. In its inclusion of incidental topics, and its range of resources, it also accords with the ideas of bricolage and literacies of doing that are central to this thesis. I would go far as to say that the process of anecdotalisation could include not only what we say but what we do.

It also has a bearing on the links between research and the world of the researched that are constantly coming up as interconnected within this project, as Michael writes:

> research is not a mere reflection of something (e.g., one's experiences in relation to social or cultural process) out there, but is instrumental in, and a feature of, the 'making of out theres'… as it circulates it shapes the ways in which particular incidents come to be understood. (Michael in Lury 2012 p26)

The stories told by this participant to her friends were retold in the interview and played a part in the co-emergence of researcher and the researched, and also our other identities and relationships as activists and friends. And they feature, retold again, in the academic space of this thesis.

Both J and R talk about how 'all of us are passing on stuff'. They both indicate that they believe the fact that they are 'personal stories' rather than a 'general principle' makes a difference. We talk about it as a small scale ripple effect. Participant J says, with reference to those involved as volunteers with AToS, and gesturing around her to indicate a wide and perhaps random range of places and people,

> So, I do think whoever you talk to, so all of us in our ways will be. That will be going out there (SF talking at same time *'A ripple thing going on*') Yes, I think so and obviously that's small scale.
> In terms of the ripple effect going outward, I absolutely think it's to do with knowledge and knowing the people. (Interview with Participant J)

For this person *knowing* is key – knowing people and gaining knowledge about their lives. This has been a recurring theme not just in terms of informal learning as discussed in Chapter 5 but also, I propose, in terms of knowledge production as the ripples move out beyond the encounters themselves into other spaces. The effects of these might be small, the stories might not travel that far, but as 'all of us' are contributing I think the image of narratives related to overlooked knowledges "going out there" is a strong one.

While individual, complex stories of life for refugees can break up the generalised image of the 'figure of the migrant' and remake it as an individual person, the notion that the sharing of personal stories one has been told, is an effective way of changing people's negative attitudes to refugee migrants has problematic aspects to it. Two important points come to mind. One is that care must be taken that stories of trauma are not sent out into the world without the consent of those whose experience they are. We have a responsibility of care towards the stories and the people who told them to us and we do not know where the stories will go or how they will be used. This aspect of storytelling was brought up in the methodologies section but is clearly just as important in the world outside research, though as I have at several points claimed, this 'inside' and 'outside' is something of a false distinction. Particular thought must go into decisions about retelling stories if a spoken language is not shared. I make this as a general point with no judgement on any participants as I believe it is very likely (and I know for sure in the case of Participant J) that they had consent. Also, I think it is something we are very likely to have all done at times and subsequently wondered what our motivation was and whether we should have.

The other point on this I want to make is something I have referred to elsewhere: the question of why such individual, intimate and private stories should be thought of as such a powerful basis for changing views, when the consequences of historical and current regimes of inequality, oppression, and systemic racism seem so self-evident in the world at large. Clearly the output from media, government and other powerful channels can (by design) obscure and distort these realities. Perhaps it is a form of resistance to this that demands these individual stories to be told. In a further twist in

relation to the power dynamics of storytelling, it is more likely that, re-told by white people seen as already belonging, these stories will be listened to and given more legitimacy by others. As many have advocated, the case for migrant led activism, where refugee migrants are in control of their stories, where they are heard in their own right, is still crucial. Finally, it is important to say that the story telling is not exclusive to the refugee members; stories of austere upbringing (as was shown in Chapter 5), family loss and other personal background stories, whether about everyday or more profound matters, are also shared by volunteers.

The stories generated by these interactions of welcome form part of a pool of newly formed knowledge resources to be shared, but they come with an important responsibility we have to others in an encounter, including this encounter between researcher and researched. The experiences volunteers had in people's homes also gave them resources with which to feel more confident challenging racism that they come across in their everyday lives. But I have also discussed how there are complicated and important issues related to gaining of knowledge, through very personal relations and the retelling of stories, that go beyond the stories of everyday social events to include experience of displacement and trauma, with their continuing legacy and reverberations in the present. Perhaps the responsibility lies in discerning between the effects of sharing stories about the past trauma of others, and the sharing of stories based on the everyday activities or planned events that we are all party to now. This is not to make any judgement about what should or should not be shared but to highlight the process. As discussed, the idea that you really come to know things only through individual experience, close relationships and proximity is problematic, but for the volunteer AToS participants, it clearly brings general principles to life and enables them to feel surer of their views and to challenge racism in more concrete incidents but also through challenging the narrative of unbelonging specific to this rural context.

In the previous section I looked at how spoken stories are told and retold. I'd like to think now about how the 'literacies of doing', identified as significant in this thesis, relate to narrative production and storytelling and how this kind of narration might offer something different to stories related as spoken anecdotes. I am interested in the way that these encounters and activities become the narrative itself, as people and

practices move between social spaces such as homes, the street, community centres and outdoor spaces (some of which have been described in Chapter 4). These include more organised events such as the Syrian Suppers, planned and informal get together in people's homes, and incidental meetings in the street. Some are repeated events and some are one-offs. Some events such as going on outings move out from and return to more regular spaces such as Conversation Café and the home. The individual encounters are small, local and temporary but the ongoing loose formations of the group have had some continuity and endured.

The practices of welcome that have developed beyond the initial threshold of hospitality through local, improvised and adaptable language practices, made up of spoken and unspoken repertoires (conceptualised here as literacies of doing) are not only shaped by the spaces they move between but actively shape them too. I suggest that this is also a process of narrative creation. As mentioned elsewhere, I prefer to think about the process of these encounters as narrative, rather than a story that is somehow produced as something separate from them, with a content that can be pinned down. The process of informal learning through doing things together feeds back into new encounters where these new knowledges come into play and this circulation is a way of emphasising how the process is ongoing. I suggest that this process of knowledge production and narrative creation certainly has a bearing on how those within the group understand each other and make sense of their differences. I would argue that it also extends beyond the group, not only in the form of stories relayed to others as described in the previous section. People who are not AToS members come into contact with these processes – at community events, or something as simple as seeing Syrian families being greeted as friends in the street, or seeing a mixed group climbing a local mountain together, or having coffee in a local cafe. These things might well go unremarked in the city but, in this environment, they are more likely to be noticed. As Participant R says in relation to greeting the Syrian families in the street, "it says to other people, these are my friends". Another way the 'ripples' move beyond the group is that individual AToS members are of course constantly moving into other spaces having been affected by the encounters in ways that carry something forward into those other spaces. Whether they choose to 'tell' a story or not, people

move forward having learned things through what might be deemed unexpected encounters in a rural town.

I think one of the things that differentiates this kind of narrative production is that it is not 'owned' or passed on by individuals. It therefore avoids some of the 'pitfalls' identified in the mode of narration described in the previous section. The process of shaping social spaces through doing things collectively, not necessarily altogether but in small and changing groupings, contributes to the re/writing of place in small ways. I visualise them as small 'patches' in an overall collage of place. I wonder if this idea of collage can be imagined as one where pieces, overlays and combinations shift and change. This conceptualisation, where literacies of doing are seen as participatory and social, and as collaged and cumulative, but not in a fixed arrangement, makes it an ongoing process of more collective narrative production.

I think it can be said that acts of welcome are more self-conscious activity in a rural context where the number of transnational migrants is very tiny. The numbers of resettling families that AToS connects with is very small, and this makes the kind of group formation and its internal relations very specific to this context. The roles that people take, the bonds they form, the activities that are organised could not happen *in the same way* in a place where there were a large number of refugees. The process of narrative creation is also therefore local and particular, yet not in the sense of being bonded to a place. As I have argued, even the so called private spaces of the home are globally connected and the ripple effect of stories, however they are narrated, goes to places unknown.

Participatory language practices allow people to share stories by means of varied spoken and unspoken repertoires of resources: through conversations, observations and what I have described as literacies of doing. I consider all these practices of welcome as encounters of informal learning. Knowledges about each other are extended and complicated, and they become entangled with wider issues of migration, settlement, power and injustices. People engaged in these activities create new cultural and social formations and activate new narratives through creating spaces beyond the initial crossing of thresholds of welcome, through being together in what Bulley refers

to as “spaces of co-existence” (Bulley 2017). It is through this process also that we are constantly brought into being as we respond to new encounters with others (Ahmed 2000, Bulley2017, 2023, Gill et al 2022) rather than meeting with already formed identities.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how enactments of welcome and hospitality take place in a variety of spaces including the home, community centres and outdoors. I focussed particularly on the home as an often overlooked site for welcome, informal learning and knowledge production. I proposed that the home space is a key site for encounters of learning and of knowledge and narrative production. I also showed that it is a globally connected space relational to other places and times that feed into the process of narrative production. Each space draws from or influences another, shaping and shaped by the encounters and activities that they move between them.

I examined how stories are shared through retelling as spoken anecdotes. This can work as form of resistance to racist narratives, particularly those influenced by a rural setting, but also comes with responsibilities to ensure that they do not cause inadvertent harm. I then looked at how literacies of doing can be regarded as alternative ways of telling. I have proposed that knowledges and experiences brought into the social spaces of these encounters, whether home or community venues or in the street, are shaped into new stories by what people do together. These stories are mobilised as people, activities and objects move between spaces. They are always being retold, individually, but also as small scale collective acts. In this way, literacies of doing can work as an alternative process of shared knowledge and narrative production. It is their happening that is the story.

Overall, the encounters of welcome create new local knowledges, emerging through the changeable configurations of people, objects and practices that constitute them in new and repeated encounters in various social spaces. The narratives that emerge from these encounters are told and retold through spoken and written language, literacies of doing (cooking, language learning, walking, outings etc), and by creating a visible

presence through bodies and/or objects. I have shown evidence that relations of guest and host, migrant and local, are unsettled as people explore ways of being together.

Out of this comes an understanding that all kinds of out of the way spaces are important sites of knowledge and narrative production on a range of scales from the home to more public events – all in this more rural context. These activities and stories seamlessly enmesh the local and the global. They provide a view of the rural that departs from persistent imaginings of it as either peripheral (the view from the city) or as the preserve of traditional values and culture that are deemed apolitical through their presentation as normative or naturalised.

Chapter 7: Picture Postcard Conversations

Figure 20: Collage of postcards images, and fragments of text

7.1 Introduction

This chapter and the next one draw principally on the MO (Migrants Organise) case study. What distinguishes the MO case study from the AToS group is that it is concerned with people's responses to *visiting* the Welsh countryside from the city rather than being permanent residents. Unlike the refugees in the AToS study, who arrived as family groups with full refugee status through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme and were resettled as residents in Abergavenny, the migrant participants in the MO group are predominantly asylum seekers and refugees living in urban areas, often in very precarious circumstances and separated from close family members. These factors and the specific research methods used mean that, while some of the themes that emerged overlap with those in previous chapters, there are also new ones.

This chapter is built around the processes and material produced from the postcard exchange. Through creating postcards, participants looked back on their original encounters with people and spaces in a particular spot in rural Wales. It builds on, and adds complexity to, the concept of 'literacies of doing' and the significance of home as a global portal which have already been introduced. These conceptualisations take on new shape and shades as they now relate to the particular situated nature of the encounters in this case study. Two more distinct themes for this chapter also emerged

through the postcard exchange. One feature that stood out, was the varied ways of being in a place which were expressed through the images and text of the cards. The other prominent theme was participants' representations of the natural world and how they relate to imaginings of the rural and its image as a place of respite. Theorisations of mobility, space and language continue to frame the discussion around these themes, as does the notion of modes of encounter. In this chapter this includes encounters with landscape and nature as well as human interactions of welcome.

While the case studies and methodologies sections (Chapter 3) have described the practicalities of how the methods were chosen and how they played out, this chapter (along with the next one) also presents an opportunity to think about how the research encounters and the encounters of welcome with MO members that are the *object* of research became very intertwined. The research practices created new and different spaces of connection that were significant in themselves (particularly during the pandemic) and also had an impact on what happened next in relation to collaborations with MO. For this reason, elements that might initially appear to belong better in a methodologies section, are brought into this chapter in order to illustrate the complex interaction between research and activism that surfaced in this study. Including them helps emphasise the centrality of processes and practices, such as modes of encounter, language practices, the creation of space and the mobilisation of narrative, as theoretical underpinning concepts to the thesis as a whole.

As already alluded to in relation to the AToS case study in preceding chapters, I am as interested in the *process* of the encounters of welcome as much as the content of any stories that emerge from them. Taking this a step further, I have become more convinced that in an important sense, the encounters themselves *are* the story. There are notable ways in which the research processes with MO, not only the material produced from it, offered valuable insights into key areas of interest. In the Zoom session where we made postcards together, the gestures, sounds, conversation and showing of photos and cards were an important contribution to the research as well as the cards that were created. Themes that are central to the arguments of this thesis (encounters, ways of being together, guest/host relations, language practices, learning and knowledge production, responsibilities to one another across differences, how

stories are told and heard), were enacted through the research processes. I think it matters also, that the opportunities for reconnection between MO members that were enabled by the research project were of particular significance during the pandemic. It is the particular nature of the MO case study that brings the above relation between research and activism into focus and why I raise it in this chapter.

Having emphasised the significance of the process, of course the material of the postcards was also essential to the discussion that follows. The chapter is illustrated with images of the postcards, both individual ones and grouped collections and also my own collages and text/image combinations. As detailed in the methodologies section, I found these collages a good way of representing aspects of the research project. In this chapter I think they go some way to representing how the material produced and the processes combine to carry meaning. For convenience most images are inserted in the text. A number of larger composite images are in the appendices.

I conclude this introduction with some thoughts about how we all got here – to the original encounters of welcome and hospitality and also to the encounters of research. For this I turn again to the theorisations of mobility, space and modes of encounter that are central to the thesis. Thinking about space, as Massey (2005) does, as the intersection of mobile trajectories and constellations of 'stories so far' caught up in wider 'power geometries', (Figure 21) is a postcard I sent to one of the first individual visitors to the house in the village, representing her arrival to an unknown place and thinking about how we all arrived in different ways to a place where our stories coincide.

Figure 21: The road to Llanvapley

The same participant (Participant 2) made this short time lapse video sequence, on one of her later visits. She was quietly hanging out in the kitchen while waiting to leave and spontaneously created it on her phone and sent it to me. (https://youtu.be/qwyO9eU2am8). At the time it brought to mind some of the key ideas around the very varied experiences of im/mobility that brought us all to this house. The tree, animated with birds, evokes the settling and unsettling, to-ing and fro-ing, gathering and leave-taking that mark the encounters with her and other visitors. Our trajectories meet fleetingly within the larger network of interconnected branches that are the wider frameworks in and through which we move. Somehow, we all arrived in this place, though our experiences and stories are so different. We arrived at these encounters through the weaving together of 'stories so far' caught up in wider systemic and global forces, and through (or in spite of) socially differentiated, uneven and unequal experiences of (im)mobility across multiple scales. The alighting and taking off of the birds also evokes the temporary nature of the MO members' visits to the village. The house was not their home in the sense of residence there but, as discussed later in this chapter, as a domestic space it could nevertheless engender feelings 'close to home'.

Remembering the creation of this short clip, I sent Participant 2 a card with a static representation of the birds in the tree (Figure 22) as part of my postcard exchange with her. I was thinking about how we all arrived, in different ways, to the postcard project too, and used it as an opportunity to look back on our temporary convergence in the house and its rural surroundings, and what it meant to us, thus bringing together the encounters of the research practice *and* the original encounters with this group.

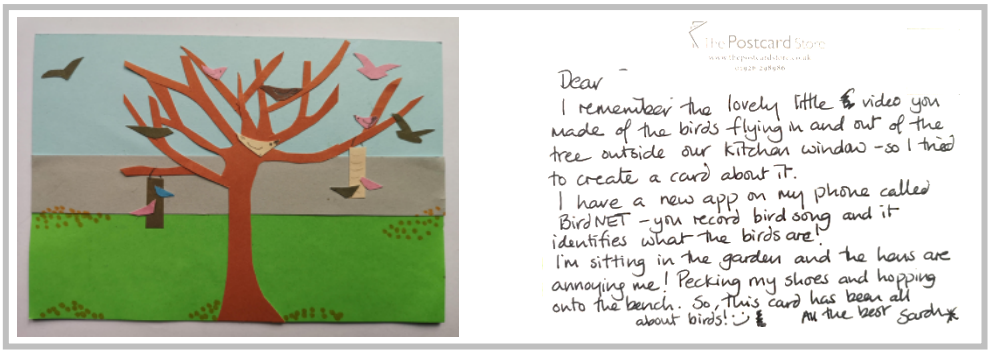


Figure 22: Card to P2, All about birds

Primarily, the use of the space of the house by MO members was designed to allow people to refresh, to find respite, to regroup or to organise - to use it however they wished. It is the case however, that the table we gathered round so to speak, was not a neutral space: myself and my partner were the hosts, at least at the time that the MO members as guests crossed the threshold of welcome. The starting point of my relationship with participants was this particular relation of welcome and hospitality as they came to stay at my home in the village, though this relationship has changed over time and has in significant ways been reversed with some members. Guest host relationships are also reflected in the process of research. Through my intervention as researcher I became, at least initially, the host of the postcard exchange. Since relations of hospitality are key dynamics at work in the face-to-face encounters of the visits to the village and the relations of research, it is perhaps not unexpected then, that the dialogue of these postcard exchanges enacts some of these relations.

I think the relationship was evident, in the way some of the first postcard replies I received, contained expressions of thanks to myself and my partner for the welcome shown to them during their stay. This gratitude felt at once affirming and awkward. It is always good to hear that something you have instigated has been a positive experience for people, but there are many people involved in making these things happen, not just us offering the space. This includes those who have simply (or not so simply) taken the decision to come and be here. It made me wonder if my prompt about welcome had somehow inadvertently made these thanks a likely first response. It also raised questions about whether persisting power relations make it harder in general for participants to offer anything but compliments and impossible for them to say anything

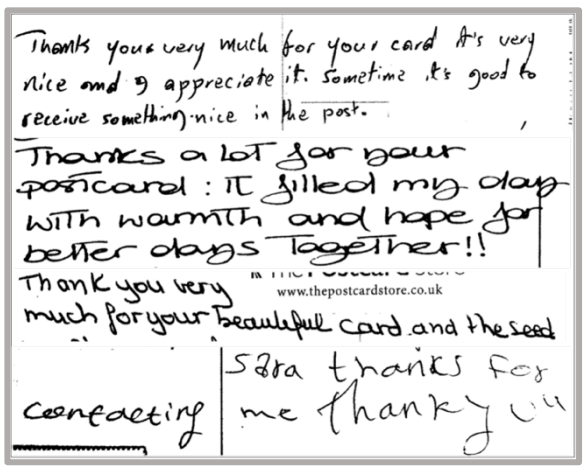


Figure 23: Thanks for the reconnection – composite card

negative about the experiences of their stay, out of politeness to their host. Several initial responses also express gratitude, related to the present; saying how glad they are to be re/connected through this project. Figure 23

The process of research might in this way have been shoring up my role as host even more. There is also the concern that the response of thanks is tied up with wider societal expectations of gratefulness from migrants and refugees (Shukla 2017). In balance to this, I think language and convention play a part; the simple language of thanks is a good starting point and we all use it for many situations in daily life. My cards to them were also introduced with thanks, for joining in the project, and later on for cards I received from them.

As exchanges developed and people began to make images as well as write, expressions of thanks receded as new themes emerged. I would say also that the relation between sender and recipient changed as responses and dialogue developed and participants became the senders too. This seems to echo the idea already discussed in previous chapters, that relations change beyond the threshold of guest host encounters. Relations have indeed changed with those participants who have come to stay repeatedly over time. As Ahmed (2000) says – modes of encounter open up possibilities of where we might go from here that are not limited by fixed guest/host relations or hospitality to those recognised as strangers or as the figure of the migrant. Our modes of encounter shape our ongoing subjectivities and social relations, though crucially they also continue to be shaped by wider power dynamics. The progress of the card exchanges seems to exemplify this as the guest host relations come through more strongly at the start, but then participants shift the narratives into their own worlds and preoccupations. I think it is crucial that the dialogue gave them the opportunity to do that rather than 'recalling' them to the initial prompt and thereby fixing the initial relationship.

The cards that I received from participants, with their combination of image and text as narrative offered a rich mosaic of different things that were important to participants about their stay. Also, remembering their visit at this particular time (during the pandemic) prompted them to think, write and make images about other times and

places. What was immediately evident is that refugee participants did not on the whole write about themselves specifically as migrants. Any direct reference to the refugee experience, widely conferred as a complete identity on refugee migrants, is largely absent. In this mixed group (where not everyone is a refugee migrant), the prompts for the postcard writing intentionally made no reference to migrant experience as a theme. I think its absence nevertheless highlights that it would be a mistaken assumption to expect it to be a preoccupation. There is one exception to this that will be specifically written about further on.

7.2 Ways of being in a place

Overall, the postcard exchange produced a wide range of responses from participants and I followed their leads in my replies to them. Although the conversations took different directions, what linked many of the cards together was the way their creators expressed the varied ways it is possible to *go to* or *be* in a place, and the associated feelings that are integral to this. Recalling Pennycook (2010), the writing of postcards is a language practice where writing, image, memories, anticipations, sensations, and relations to place are bound up together. It is participants' interesting perspectives on relation to place that is the subject of this section.

The language is in some instances poetic and the descriptions sensory, not just in relation to landscape and nature but also when describing everyday activities of sharing a space and especially in relation to feelings. I find the language used by people speaking English as an additional language is often very creative and evocative in its freedom from conventions. The main thing that counts here, is that the language practices of the postcards created a space for things to be told in a way that otherwise might not be told, or heard.

7.2.1 Covid, freedom and restriction, memories and escape.

The postcard exchange took place during the pandemic lockdown period. While reference to Covid19 does not dominate, the different ways it changed people's relation to place, at least for that period of time, is alluded to in several cases. Participant 3, an MO staff member, brings up some aspects of im/mobility that are pertinent to this particular group and to the times we found ourselves in (Figure 24).

She mentions being fortunate to have her family around, but also talks about the challenges of keeping family and work together during the pandemic and the difficulty of finding peace in her house. This contrasts with my card to her, mentioning my feelings about the emptiness of my house.

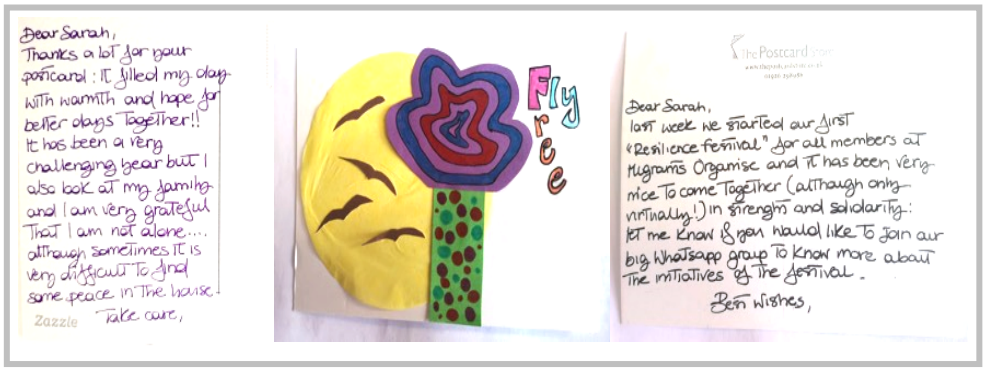


Figure 24: What does it mean to fly free. Participant 3

Her reference to being grateful to have family with her, perhaps also highlights a contrast to the many migrants she works with who do not have family here and have been alone. Her second card features a tree, some birds and the words 'Fly Free'. I think it is interesting that freedom is depicted here as mobility not tied to any particular location. Relation to place can take the form of an unwanted attachment to a particular place through an imposed immobility. Maybe this message is to wish us all the freedom of increased mobility post Covid. I think it also says something about her commitment to the work she does with refugees and asylum seekers, whose im/mobility (and that of their families who are not able to be with them now) continues to affect their lives so much. Her ongoing efforts to secure their status and improve their welfare, also has a sense of movement, a movement towards some freedom from the anxieties and deprivations caused by a hostile environment. Working at this time would have highlighted what was widely reported – that the Covid lockdowns affected people unevenly, exacerbating the effects of the hostile environment and the politics of austerity that already affected migrants disproportionately. Secure status and social and economic security often go hand in hand with the freedom to move on many different scales (Ong 2005), be it locally or to reunite with family.

The text of her second card is practical and work focussed, but also expresses how solidarity, strength, challenge and hope, are still being made available even if just through digital means. She invites me to join in another project that MO were running online during the pandemic. The value of online gatherings as spaces of togetherness at this time is noted by her and I think that the online spaces of the research project – the Zoom and WhatsApp group, as well as the remote space of the postcard exchange itself, can be appreciated in this way too. For this participant and me, the postcard has also become a way to do practical business, expand connections and join up different bits of what we are all doing. Although unable to think about future projects in detail, we can hold on to ideas by staying connected in different ways, and engage in a slowed down form of planning. This card helps sets the scene for the postcard exchange as a way of being together though physically apart. It is an end in itself, as well as providing material for research. It is another example of how the research practice and activism became interlinked.

Participant 4 (See also Appendix J: Postcard Conversation with participant 4.) writes about the 'eerie reality' of London during lockdown and how it is like a 'prison courtyard'. In a later card he sends an image he has made of a smiley face (Figure 25) and, while the accompanying text acknowledges 'losses' during the pandemic, his image and text convey the idea of smiling through it and keeping the connections going. Hopefully the postcards have played a part in doing this. For me, receiving the smiley face emerging from the envelope produced a moment of lightness and this balance of light and shade, of heaviness and lightness of topic, was characteristic of many of the cards.

Figure 25: In between places Participant 4.

Another individual wrote about turning to memories as a means of escape during the restricted mobility of lockdown, transporting them from the city where they were located, to other times and places.

> It freshen up all the old memories we shared together. It was like flicking though old albums. (Postcard text, Participant 2)

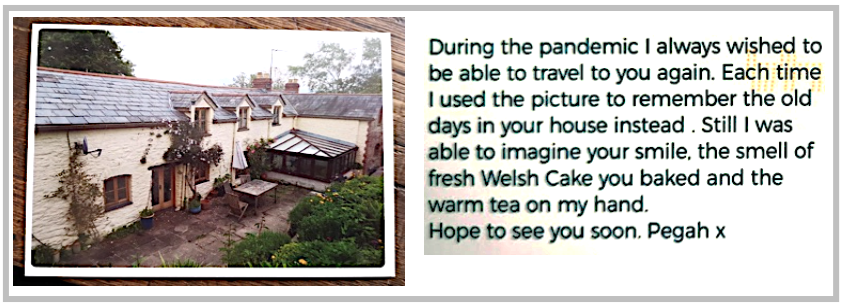


Figure 26: Remembering the old days. Participant 2.

For Participant 2, who has visited on many occasions, the house seems to work as a holder of memories and she chooses an image of it as her first card. She uses it as a way of accessing memories, sensations and vivid sensory experiences associated with her stay (Figure 26) such as the "smell of Welsh cakes" and "the warm tea in my hand". She brings something about the house into the space she is in now - lockdown London - and those ideas then travelled back with the card into the house where I received them here in rural Wales. The house and the back and forth of memories and experiences through the cards, leads me to revisit the idea of the household space as also being intimately connected to other places and times.

7.2.2 Spaces of homeliness

For several participants, reflecting on their experience of staying in a home(ly) space, the house seemed to be an activator of memories, experiences and feelings tied up with places and times far beyond it. As they looked back at their visits from the time of the research process, it sparked associations across different spatial and temporal dimensions. The social relations and activities associated with other places and/or times and the attendant sensory qualities, atmospheres, and feelings they stirred, were brought together with their current situation and with memories of their encounters in the house. These connections and this complication of distance and proximity, then and

now, are consistent with the notion of diaspora space that runs through many aspects of the thesis.

It also recalls the idea already proposed in Chapters 5 and 6, that a domestic space – even this temporary home space - works as a global portal. Experiences from other places and times are drawn into the home space and, reshaped, move beyond it again as part of a process of narrative creation. In the research process itself the postcards as objects became entangled in this idea, as they moved between the homes of participants and the doorstep of the house they had stayed in and back again, carrying narratives centred on the house but also bringing in other times and places. The stories told through that process now also move into the space of this thesis and in the next chapter we will see how they also moved into other, more public spaces.

Moving beyond the expectations and conventions of thanks that were evident in the earlier stages of the postcard exchange, in order to think about what it *is* that people are appreciative of, we find this expressed several times as the chance to feel certain things - a 'family feeling', feeling welcome, comfortable or at home. As Gill mentions in relation to a refugee project in Sheffield (Gill 2018), welcome as "the positive reception of [a newcomer's] presence" (Gill 2018 p91) is something people must *feel.* The particular kind of welcome and hospitality referred to in the cards relates to sharing a domestic space, the house provides a site for quotidian activities that are appreciated as a familial and homely atmosphere. I intentionally use these adjectives, rather that the nouns 'family' and 'home', because participants' experiences and feelings are not conveyed as a substitute for unavailable family or for a home that has been left behind, but more as an awakening of feelings of wellbeing that come from doing ordinary things together in a welcoming environment. Furthermore, as discussed previously, family and home as entities can be fraught with tensions as well as concepts of comfort. During their stays as individuals and groups MO participants shared everyday tasks, cooked, walked, wrote, danced and shopped, amongst other things. Concepts of bricolage and of literacies of doing continue to be helpful as a way of thinking about these activities as the collaging of resources, working with and on what is available, to form ways of being together across difference, that are not constrained by fixed identities.

The significance of everyday activities is not confined to this house but resonates with experiences of other places physically far away and distant in time. For example, the trip

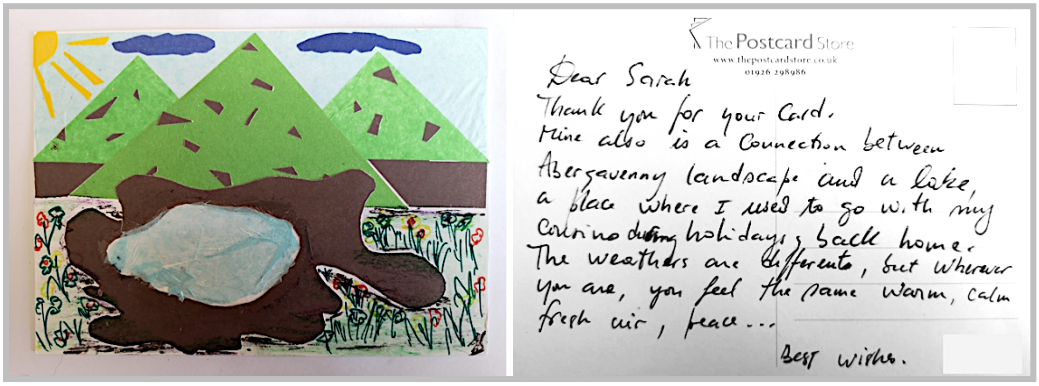


Figure 27: Merging landscapes. Participant 4

to Wales reminds one refugee participant (Participant 4) of a holiday with his cousins before he came to the UK and the everyday events of a temporary spell of sharing a living space. His postcard picture (Figure 27) seamlessly combines the hilly landscape of Wales with a lake visited on his previous family holiday. Like the overlaying of transparencies, that builds a complete picture, or like a double exposure in photography, the two places merge. Although a landscape picture, the accompanying text of his cards, and his explanation in the Zoom session, focus on the similarity of activities and feelings associated with these places. Familial (or perhaps companiable) feelings are closely linked with the everyday activities that come with being together in a shared domestic space. It is things like the waiting for the shower, sharing rooms, gathering round a table, that bring together the two different holidays and the feelings of home.

> So when we went to Abergavenny, where we live in the same way…having other guys around me…, your own mattress and very nice and amazing. And make a queue to have your shower because M can spend one hour … (laughter from others). (Participant 4, Group Zoom)

The sense of familiality that comes across as important to participants hints at something beyond simple guest host relations. Overall, the images and text of the cards together with the spoken conversations from the Zoom sessions, suggest that a sense of home can be felt, through our relationships and what we do together, even in

temporary encounters, rather than being based on or tied to a fixed relation to a particular location. Particularly because of the transient nature of these encounters it can perhaps better be described as a sense of 'homeliness' rather than home. As Brah (2020) suggests, this idea of 'homeliness' is a better way of describing what is sought after in the diaspora experience.

The focus on everyday ways of being together is also a reminder of lives lived before arriving in the UK. It reminds those of us who are not refugees, of what sometimes gets lost in narratives about them – the significance of everyday life. What this contributor also brings to our attention (Figure 28), is the sense of release that comes from not solely being noticed or recognised (as the stranger) through social and racialised categorisations. It is simply being seen for his humanity that seems to allow feelings associated with family and home to arise during these periods of time.

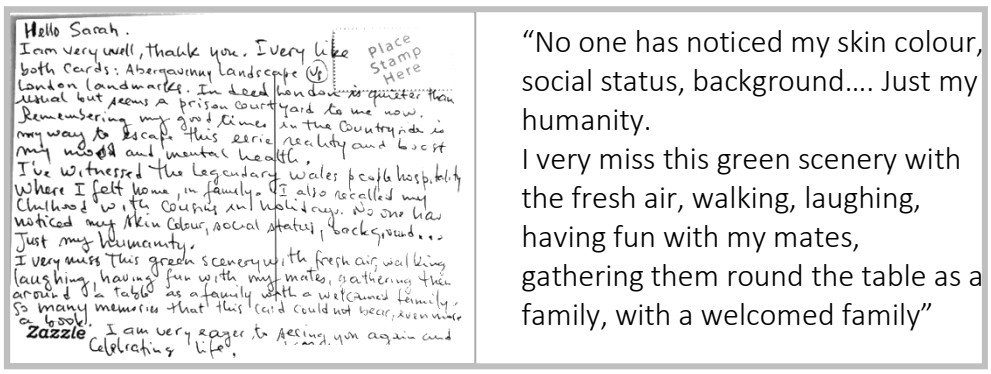


Figure 28: Participant 4, Postcard text

There appears to be an association between something that these temporary breaks over, and what some aspects of life felt like before the attribution, by others, of a refugee identity that often occludes all else. This connects with the idea of respite in the next section – what is being appreciated here is not only rural respite from the city but respite from an imposed identity. This freedom from the confines of a particular identity supports the notion of modes of encounter (Ahmed 2000) that I have been working with. It does not erase difference and inequality and it does not deny the ways people might choose to hold multiple, complex and changing identifications or senses of belonging relation to different groupings of people and also attachments to place. I insert some personal writing here, about my own sense of place in relation to the house.

Doing the laundry: a reason for being here.

I live in the house where the Migrants Organise members came to stay. The positive nature of the reconnection with them, prompted by the research process itself during the pandemic, were mixed with a feeling of loss. I missed some of the same things that they wrote and made images about as they remembered their visits. I missed people individually, and also the collective experience of the full house. It triggered a realisation that, despite actually being here, the 'reason for being' in this particular home had drifted out of sight during the pandemic and left an empty space.

This poem was written in response to a poem created collaboratively by participants during one of the writing retreats that took place in the house, facilitated by writer in residence for MO, Kat Lewis. The topic of doing the laundry was chosen by her as an everyday activity that everyone could relate to. They did so in amazingly varied ways which were then drawn together as a piece by Kat (Lewis 2020 p53). Their poem was read aloud as we sat round the kitchen table at our co-host's house, just before the group all set off home. My poem was written just after they left. I posted it on the WhatsApp group for everyone. What I didn't know then was that the house would stay empty for much longer than expected.

Laundry poem

Often, it's a pain
doing the laundry.
But today
as I walk through the empty rooms
gathering the bed linen from the sleeping places
taking it through the house
to the washing machine
I think of you all.
I see you and hear you -
and miss you already.
The air still buzzes around the house
with your vibrations.
I will wash the sheets
but I won't wash away the time
spent together.

The afternoon wears on.
We hang the first washing out to dry
in the warm kitchen.
It darkens outside.
The house settles
but the old walls will hold this new energy.

By tomorrow
the sheets will be fresh
and ready for you
whenever it is
you come again.

The poem also touches on something I think about quite often – that there is something about the thick old stone walls of this Welsh house that hold something about people, known and unknown to me, who have lived in it or passed through it, in the past and now. The house holds space for more lasting periods of activity and also for more transient encounters – the varied tempo and different rhythms at which people come and go. There were agricultural workers and carpenters living here in the past. It almost fell into ruin and was restored. Now here we are, with the comings and goings of an extended transnational family with very varied freedoms and constrictions of movement which dis/allow them to come here or stay here. Ongoing relations with MO members that started with welcome but also developed into family friendships now join the mix. I think about the reaching in, to the tiny rural space of this house, of global histories and wider power geometries, as Vron Ware and Hazel Carby write about so illuminatingly in relation to place.

The house is perhaps too solid an image, too much like a container to be attached to the fleeting encounters of this project but, as the physical and social space that these people and practices pass through, it helps as a way of holding them in place for long enough to think about them. The more open framework of the tree and the birds (described earlier) is another way of imagining it all. I find it hard to settle on just one or the other.

7.2.3 Separations, connections and in-between spaces

As evident in the postcard conversation between me and Participant 4 (see Appendix J: Postcard Conversation with participant 4.) my cards to him focussed on quite a simplistic contrast between places, between city and countryside and also between the two rural spaces of Wales and the rural spaces of the country he grew up in. His cards come back with much more complex ways of relating to two places. We have already seen the merging of places (Figure 27). In this case, on the back of his 'Smiley face' card (see above – Figure 25) there is a graphic representation of Abergavenny and London, with the participant placing himself – his name - on a connecting line between the two places. There are many ways to read this – maybe he means he is the connecting link, or that he wishes he could move between these two places, or that he feels somewhere in between them.

Adding another layer of complexity to this idea, two participants mention the separation of self in relation to more than one place – existing between two parts of oneself as well as between two places. In one case, attachment to place is described in terms of leaving part of oneself behind but perhaps in the knowledge that it remains accessible and can be reclaimed again at some time in the future. In another as an enforced and painful separation for an unknown period time. Participant 2's image is based on an actual photo of a walk up a local hill, taken on one of her visits so is very specific in terms of time and place and she writes about this separation (Figure 29).

"always one part of my heart is in Wales between those lovely majestic trees and mountains"
Participant 2

Figure 29: Participant 2, On top of Skirrid Fawr

There is a sense that what has been left in Wales will be waiting for her on future visits (post Covid), whereas in the contribution below from Participant 9 the separation

described is seen as something beyond his control and perhaps beyond repair. In the only card he sends (one of the readymade ones), Participant 9 acknowledges that what he writes about is not a direct response to the prompts that were sent out. He writes at length – spreading off the card onto the information sheet. There are abrupt changes in tone - he thanks me repeatedly for contacting him, says he is fine, then talks about the terrible situation in the country where his family members still live, and his fears for them there – he says, 'I live here but my soul is there with my family and my people' (Figure 30). He is writing the card physically in one place but in a very real sense somewhere else. He then switches to talking about our dog, asking me to say hello to her. Composing a reply took some thought and felt inadequate. His two short visits to the village feel very disconnected to his current troubled and urgent relations to place. I feel distant locationally but also in the sense that I cannot help and have little to offer. All I can do is acknowledge his fears and agree with his thoughts that you can be physically in one place but your soul in another. Like him I mixed this with a lighter note - my picture is of our dog with a speech bubble saying hello. This exchange reminds me of many times in my experience of ESOL teaching and also activism where everyday conversation can take a turn that moves an encounter unexpectedly into areas of trauma where differences in experience in an inequitable world are suddenly stark and insurmountable.

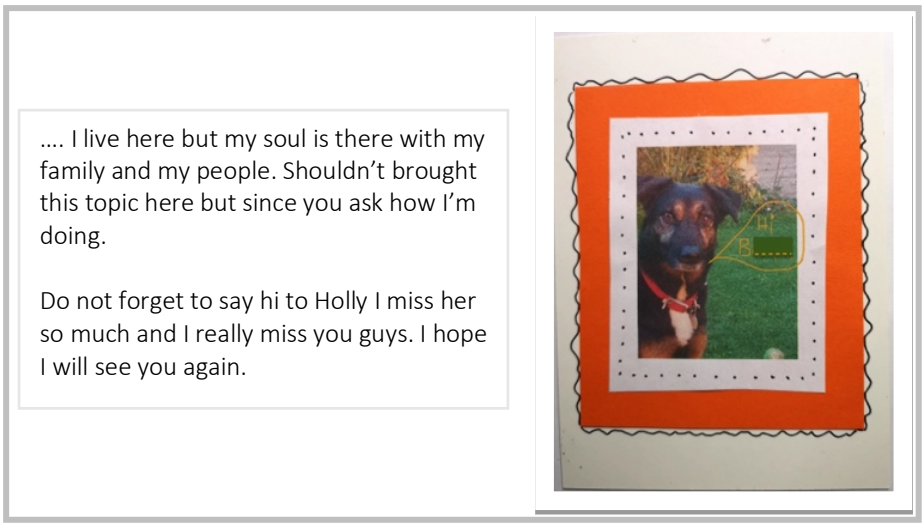


Figure 30: Participant 9's words. Picture from SF reply

The heaviness and lightness of the topics in his card are a reminder of the backdrop to any respite found in visits to the countryside for refugee migrants but also shows how the practices of everyday life, such as that picked out by the memory of the dog, are also worked into the picture and perhaps this 'lightness' is something that these visits can provide though of course they do not overcome the huge insecurities and difficulties that these visitors face overall. As we saw in the example above, these visits do not just provide respite from the city but a temporary suspension from the heaviness and oppression of the asylum system.

I would like to touch on the notion of empathy here in relation to my response to this participant and also more generally, because the idea of empathy is in my experience invoked quite frequently within the encounters of welcome and hospitality that are the field of research. The researcher as activist is implicated in this too. As Claire Hemmings (2012) states in relation to researching across differences and inequalities, empathy cannot be taken as a "basis for engagement with others" (p153) or deployed to resolve differences. It tends to flow one way, between those who see themselves as more fortunate and those who are seen as more marginalised – a flow that reinforces those hierarchies. Hemmings (2012) links it with problematising the depoliticising idea of reciprocity, already discussed in Chapter 4. Somehow, both these sets of relations can be at work together, maintaining dominant power relations even while trying to overcome differences. I concur with Hemmings that valorising these concepts can work, even inadvertently, to maintain existing power dynamics.

Angeles and Pratt (2017) also critique the concept of empathy in research with transnational or marginal groups, in the sense that it is not something to be simply utilised to relate "across violent histories and deep geopolitical-economic inequities" (p270). While empathy is most usually seen as connective, there is "potential for appropriation and projection on the part of privileged subjects" (p270) particularly in contexts of inequality and injustices. Related to this, I agree with their claim that we should not seek or expect an approving response to a show of empathy, in fact it may be refused (Hemmings 2012). In the case of this card and this participant, for whatever reason there is no further reply from him. He was not the only participant to have this single brief exchange of cards but for me it points to a need to remain attentive to the

fact that in research and in the kind of activism studied here, those who offer empathic support are often quite peripheral to the lives of those towards whom their empathy is directed (Hemmings 2012).

Angeles and Pratt (2017) explore this topic in relation to their creative research practice and I think this links well with the postcard exchange as a creative practice. I have referred earlier to Angeles and Pratt's approach as a model for ways in which I have tried to work. Though far from claiming the postcard project as being an exemplar of their approach, I think it provided a good way of exploring some of the knotty issues involved in this kind of research. And again, while these scholars are talking about researching across difference, the same power dynamics could equally apply to those involved in practices of welcome.

> We offer explorations of empathy as one of the many possible triggers and pathways to social change, without assuming that they provide a quick fix toward ethical practices or progressive social transformation. We present reflexive and analytic assessments of critical-creative practices as contributions to democratizing research production and dissemination. We elaborate on empathy as a visceral site of power knowledge, particularly when there are hierarchical power relations and structural inequities involved. We argue that critical-creative practices complicate empathy in ways that bring into being not just accessible but usable knowledge, but also raise new questions and challenges for these practices and their practitioners. (Angeles and Pratt 2017, p276)

Hemmings brings together other scholars' work on alternatives such as the idea of 'bearing witness',

> as a form of intersubjectivity that presumes power inequalities and does not rush to resolve them (Borgeson 2010). Bearing witness does not assume a common position or even the possibility of one, but it

> does assume recognition of the other as a subject.(Hemmings 2012, p152)

I think Ahmed's (2000) framing can be brought back in here – that of generous modes of encounter that do not deny the complications of 'strangerness' and inequalities, but also offer a way forward beyond recognition of otherness, beyond the threshold of not knowing and towards a form of new knowledge production that can be, as Angeles and Pratt stress, "usable" (Angeles and Pratt 2017 p276).

Returning to my response to Participant 7, I think a degree of empathy was almost an automatic response. I cannot know how my response was received, whether as a flow of empathy or as something else. I hoped that echoing the light and shade of his writing was a way of keeping things moving forward, but I think for him the 'terms' I had set out for the encounter (the short chunk of text and image and the prompt) were constraining – as demonstrated by the spreading of his text beyond the card - in a way a kind of refusal of the terms of the exchange.

Paying attention to who does not engage is not within the scope of this project but is an important area to consider. Hawkins (2019) warns against making the assumption that joining in creative practices is inherently *good*. I think this raises a related question: whether creative practice, and indeed the literacies of doing that are a central element to this thesis, if seen as uncontroversially 'good', are prone to masking inequalities and difference? Although masking may not be quite the same as *reinforcing* existing unequal power relations, the outcome might be the same – that is, the power relations will continue to go unchallenged. In relation to the idea of bricolage, not everyone has access to the same resources, and here I include the spare emotional resources required to participate. For those experiencing the reality of living in a relentlessly hostile environment that imposes the kind of separation this participant writes about, one's attention is understandably directed elsewhere. This research story is a small example of what is more crucial to recognise in the practices of welcome themselves, that there are those that do not participate, who do not relate to the modes of encounter initiated by volunteers, who choose not to direct or invest their emotional and other resources towards these practices.

7.2.4 Distance, proximity and passing moments

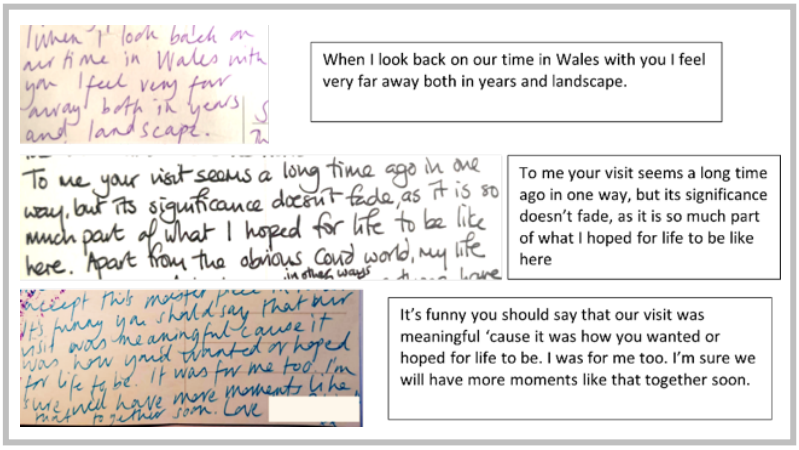


Figure 31: Fragments of postcard exchange between myself and Participant 8.

Distance and proximity in both time and space, are key concepts that can be drawn out of the exchanges of the cards. Ideas of distance and closeness in relation to past events, as well as anticipations and hopes for future returns to Wales, are expressed in a variety of ways. How far participants feel from their experiences in rural Wales, is I think influenced by the confinements of the pandemic. It also relates closely to the degree of lasting significance they have had that resonates in the present.

In the dialogue (Figure 31) between myself and the person who led a writing project at the house (Participant 8), we express feelings of distance across time and space, but also proximity through the enduring significance of the encounter for us as individuals. There is also a sense of transience in that these temporary ways of being together somehow capture what we want or hope 'life to be like' even if only for passing 'moments'. I think the idea of the passing moment is important. As has been consistently mentioned in this thesis, the wider power geometries that perpetuate the inequalities that play out even in these out of the way rural corners, are not overcome in these moments but perhaps they give a glimpse of what 'life might be like' in a hopeful sense that can be kept close and carried forward.

I bring in Alison Phipps' (2019) contribution to decolonising practice here. Decolonising is a term that has become widely deployed in different ways. I think the specific mode

of understanding that Alison Phipps, drawing on Raymond Williams, brings out here, helps fill out this idea of passing moments.

> Decolonising is, indeed, the changing of relationships of power, control and dependency into ones where there can be a shift towards an equality that was not possible under the previous arrangements. It may well be that many of the hierarchies are still intact afterwards, and the categories of race, gender and class are still doing their work within the structures of social relations, but the fact of these relations having been 'in solution' as Williams (1977) describes it, means that simultaneously a new set of relations come into being. (Phipps, 2019, p23)

Phipps also insists that it is not only at a large scale societal level that decolonising can occur but also in small scale encounters – such as the ones I am concerned with in this study.

Many of the relations to place expressed in the postcards speak to the concept of diaspora space which, as set out from the start, is key to this thesis. In this theorisation distance and proximity are complicated; people and places, spaces of 'home', are not simply here or there, and relations to place are not simply divided between then and now. What came across within the narratives of the cards was this complex picture of how distance and proximity can be experienced. For diasporic groupings their histories and current situations make for particular and complex relations to multiple places and times. Significantly however, in relation to the composition of the mixed groups that are the object of this study, Brah (1996) maintains that even those who have not had experiences of diasporic migration and resettlement (such as myself and Participant 8 in the exchange discussed above Figure 31) are still implicated in theorisations of diaspora space since we are all active in shaping the same spaces. Theorisations of diaspora space are not at odds with Massey's (2005) conceptualisations of space which say so much about how our stories come to intersect and how spaces shape and are shaped by collective social practices, such as the ones described in this chapter through the cards.

The cards indicate that the space of the house, the rural setting, the temporary visits, were tied up with complex relations to other places and times. Through the literacies of doing, including the everyday activities and creative practices that people engaged in during their visits, and the associated memories and sensations they activated, different times and places were brought together, emphasising again the domestic space as a globally connected one. At the same time there were also heavier feelings circulating. Forced separations from people and place because of wider forces such as global conflict, migration policies, and also the pandemic, were perhaps felt particularly keenly during the time of the lockdown postcard exchange. Ideas of distance and proximity, togetherness and separation, have also been at play in the research process as we have found different ways of being together through digital and postal connections and the deployment of resources such as memory, image, text, and spoken language.

7.3 Rural Landscapes

7.3.1 Respite

Natural landscape was a theme in both image and text of the postcards, at least initially. As evident from the illustrations scattered through this chapter, several participants made images of and/or wrote about mountains, trees, rivers and animals. Some landscapes were peopled and some not. The visual and written representations of rural scenery are unsurprising in that staying in a rural location, driving through it and walking in it, is one of the features that made their stays in rural Wales different from the everyday landscape of their current urban lives.

As well as visual descriptions such as ‘gorgeous scenery’, ‘nice view’ and ‘majestic trees and mountains’, words like ‘haven’ and ‘peace’ and ‘calm’ are used by several participants in relation to their visits, evoking the benefits associated with the countryside. These words are perhaps curious since the predominantly (perhaps glaringly) white, spaces of the UK countryside are known to often be experienced as unwelcoming by those racialised or minoritised as other. Rural settings are often seen as remote from the social concerns of the city, as apolitical, but they are far from immune to the consequences of the increasingly hostile environment created around asylum seekers and refugees. Any feelings of discomfort in relation to the rural have not

been raised or written about by participants. Perhaps the reason for this absence lies in the intimacy of the micro-environment of the house, being hosted and accompanied in activities beyond the house by people seen as local through their whiteness. Perhaps it is this proximity to whiteness which has masked any potential discomfort for those who might otherwise experience it. Also, the persistence of power relations running through this postcard exchange may mean that participants, as former 'guests', have held back from mentioning more negative or difficult aspects of their experience.

Feelings of respite associated with these visits are not just about finding peace and tranquillity in a rural landscape often presented in contrast to an urban environment. As highlighted in the previous section, what people found relief in was a communal or familial everyday experience and through this, perhaps surprisingly in light of the potential for unwelcome discussed above, a freeing from the imposed identity of the 'figure of the migrant'. The timing of the project was also a factor. Looking back from the time of the pandemic to events that were over a year before, feelings of respite were brought into the present as participants found an 'escape' from lockdown restrictions through both their memories of rural spaces (perhaps tinted with a nostalgia?) and also the welcome reconnections of the research process itself.

What comes across in the material produced by participants is the significance of the everyday activities that are part of being together in a place, and how these mundane activities create an atmosphere of family, home, comfort etc that was welcomed. Creating welcome can be about allowing these feelings of everydayness to flourish. Perhaps the significance of the rural setting is that it features as an actant in this. It may well work to enhance the feelings of wellbeing that rural space is so often seen to be associated with, but I take the view that it is one of many actants that contribute to the individual and collective feelings engendered by and circulating through these encounters.

7.3.2 Knowledge of nature

It is important to recognise that while rural Wales might be a new experience, it is not participants' only experience of rurality. When we visit a market garden in the village

here (belonging to a family who have co-hosted MO participants at times) one asylum seeker participant (Participant 5), chats to me about the vegetables and fruit, mangoes, lemons, oranges, grown on her family members' farm, and her regular visits to it before coming to the UK. Participant 7 talks about living in a village, what they produced, and also how things changed when they cut down all the trees for building. The same contributor also expresses his general liking for agricultural landscapes (Figure 32). Participant 4's contribution requires a mention again too (Figure 27) in relation to the dialogue he and I have through our card exchange (Appendix J: Postcard Conversation with participant 4.) and in the Zoom session. His cards refer to holidays in rural settings in the country he grew up in. I ask rather obvious questions about contrasts in what I assume to be two very different rural contexts. His response, through merging the two places visually, and through his text, is much more about how, while the physical features such as the weather might be different, the similarities of atmosphere and the mental state they induce is more significant; "the weathers are different but wherever you are you feel the same, warm, calm, fresh air, peace".

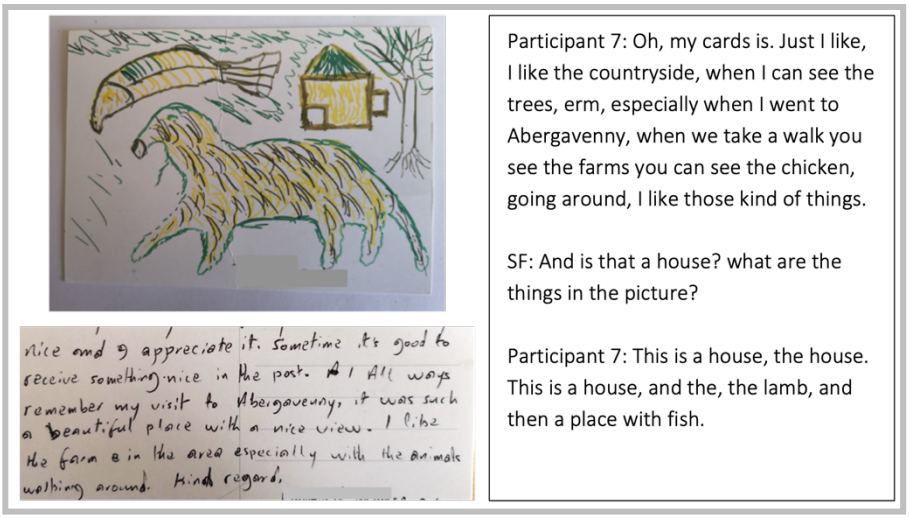


Figure 32: Participant 7, Agricultural landscapes

Misleading assumptions made about migrants and city dwellers being disconnected from knowledge and experience of the natural world or rural ways of life can feed into exclusionary, racist narratives centred on the idea that migrants are out of place and do not belong in the countryside. Two of the postcard dialogues in particular challenge this. Rather than broad landscapes, these exchanges feature details of seasons, animals, tomato growing, and wild plants, that illustrate an engagement with the natural world

as a part of life - *within* the city as well as beyond it, wherever it is to hand. Participant 5 (see Figure 35, Figure 36 and Appendix G: Postcard Conversation with Participant 5) focusses on vegetable growing in her London garden and shows how she is attuned to the passing of the seasons as she observes the peak of blossom time on the tree outside her window.

Participant 6, was the main organiser of food and cooking during the two group visits made to the village by MO members. Though based in the city she demonstrates a growing interest and knowledge of edible plants (see Figure 33 and Appendix K: Postcard Conversation with Participant 6.) She speaks in the Zoom session about how this interest is rooted in her family history and why she has made a flower image for her postcard. The suggestion related to utilising these skills on a future visit brings different places and times together in the way that has been seen repeatedly through the cards and related conversations of the Zoom sessions.

> P6: Mine are basically flowers, I always loved flowers, because I grew up in my grandma who was really like taking care of flowers planting flowers she used to spend like all day in the garden. And since the lockdown I started to learn more about wild flowers and how to identify them what's their name what's some of them are edible so I'm pretty obsessed with flowers in general.
> *SF: So when you come. When you come again, we can go for a walk and we can find our dinner in the fields. You can pick it for us, you can identify it and then cook it.*
> P6: My name also means flower in Romanian so yeah. I was predestined.
> (Group Zoom session)

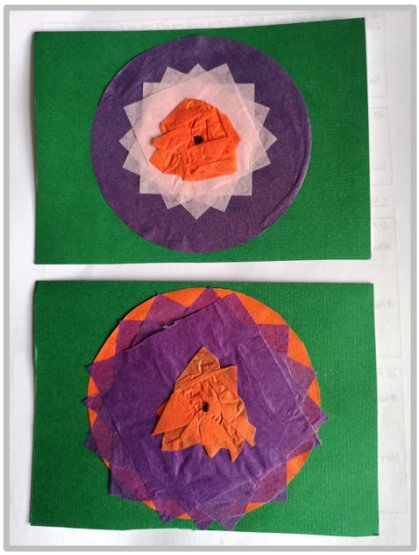


Figure 33: Flower cards by Participant 6

In my postcard conversation with Participant 6, I respond to her flower card with reference to this conversation and the possibility of a future visit (see Appendix K: Postcard Conversation with Participant 6 for full conversation with P6).

While initially the countryside of this area of Wales might have been unfamiliar, two contributors, who have visited repeatedly, have come to know the locality and in their postcards they name particular physical features they have become familiar with - 'Skirrid' a local mountain, and the 'River Usk'. As described earlier, Participant 2 bases her picture on the very specific location of a photo taken during a visit on top of local mountain 'The Skirrid'. (see Figure 29)

> ***SF and others:*** *Okay. Ok. Work in progress*
>
> P2: You know what, I'm trying to make a card like this, I don't know if you can see it. (Holds up phone with photo taken of me and her on top of Skirrid during her first visit)
>
> P6: Oh, that picture from.
>
> *SF: That's me and P on the top of Skirrid*
>
> P2: Yeah.
>
> P1: Oh wow
>
> (Dialogue from Zoom card making session)

Below is an extract of Participant 1 speaking in the Zoom session, showing and describing the card he made (see Figure 34).

> **P1:** Well obviously, you know those two er mountains are Skirrid and Sugarloaf and you know, where we - I really miss those, the time being in, you know walking on the hills, it's really refreshing and, yes, the River Usk.
>
> **SF:** *Oh yeah.*
>
> **P1:** I really, really miss that. You know I want, really want to dip myself, like you know inside the river and come out. Um. Such a holy water. Yeah, and the, you know, flowers, as P6 says, and (*swan?)* you know the nature, nature. And the sun is different when you know when it comes through there. I think P2 shown me one time through the window, oh look at this view and look at this, yeah you, so yeah when I, when I see this the sun's comes out from there, comes out from the hills it's really, you know heart-warming. Yeah, I really miss. It's been it's been a year passed. And the birds…
>
> **SF:** *I remember the first time you came when you swam in the river, in the River Usk. And other times we've always been to the River haven't we.*
>
> (Conversation with Participant 1 in the Zoom session)

Figure 34: P1, Skirrid, Sugarloaf and The River Usk. Participant 1

The familiarity these contributors have with features of the local landscape signals a change of relationship not just with people but with place, that has developed beyond the threshold of welcome. Though their visits are still mediated through the hospitality of others, they begin to claim these spaces as significant for themselves, and there is something about the naming of them here that adds to their claim.

7.3.3 From the particular to the imaginary

Images and descriptions move from the very specific and local in time and place to the other worldly and imagined futures. Participant 5, as seen below and in the conversation of her cards (See Figure 35, Figure 36, also Appendix G: Postcard Conversation with Participant 5) writes in detail about the natural world very close to her everyday life – what she looks out onto in the city and what she looks after in her garden.

Figure 35: Participant 5, Blossom and Mars

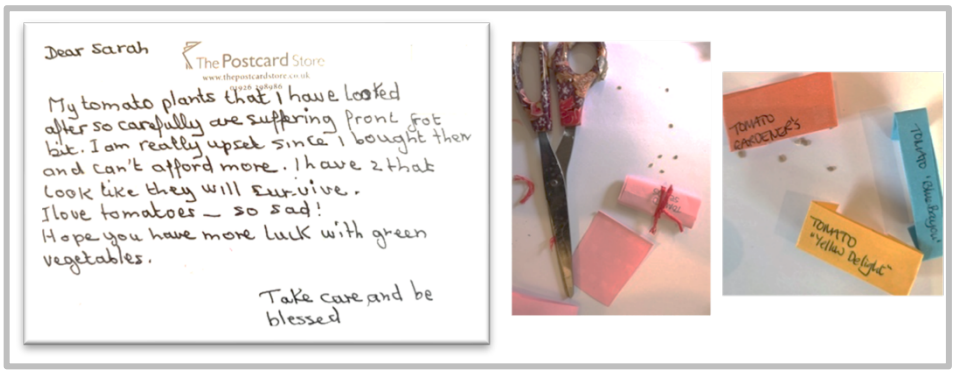


Figure 36: P5, The story of the tomato plants. SF posts her some seeds with the return card

However, she also makes images of imaginary plants in imaginary places set both in the past and in the future (Figure 35 and Figure 37). This may well be a simple pleasure in creative crafts and an opportunity to make something that is free from any particular prompt. The cards were created with great care and she sent more than one each time. It was nice that the process of the research project offered something that this participant clearly enjoyed enough to spend time on. I am interested though, in this imagining of a natural world that is specifically set far away in an unreachable place and time, and also her hopes directed at a nearer and reachable time –a summer which is Covid free.

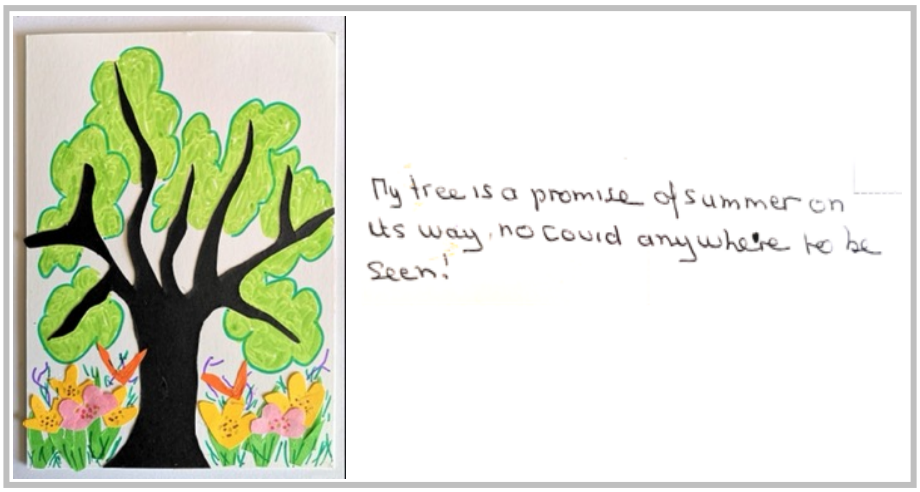


Figure 37: A Promise of Summer. Participant 5

Up till now the thesis has emphasised that everyday experiences are very significant in the narration of these encounters – but is important to note that this does not exclude the limitless scope of the imagination. It sounds such an obvious point to make, that it is important to represent both migrants and non-migrants as people who imagine things - within the scope of their own lives and also far beyond it - but unfortunately these are the aspects of personhood that are often left out of narratives about migration as refugee migrants become dehumanised in public discourse about them (but without them).

Overall, the different stories told through the cards unsettled the idea of equating nature only with the rural. Participants accessed nature and put their knowledge of it to use wherever they happened to be in both the city and the countryside. Knowledges about plants and trees, past familiarity with rural places, growing familiarity with natural

features in the Welsh context, all go to show that the there is no basis to the widely held perception that migrants are city dwellers with no experience of the natural world. I would go as far as to say that the reason this is not recognised, and that migrants are made to feel unwelcome and out of place in the countryside, is because people continue to drive and sustain narratives of white supremacy framed as the preservation of tradition and as protection against the threat of urban incursions into rural spaces. As Burdsey (2011) suggests (in relation to the seaside but it could equally apply to the countryside), people visibly from minoritised groups are not portrayed as natural occupants – they might visit but they do not belong. Migrants from racialised groups are often seen as intruding from the city (De Lima 2004). By extension the rural (like Burdsey's seaside) "embodies and sustains whiteness on behalf of the nation and exclusion from this particular landscape implies exclusion from the nation as a whole" (Burdsey 2011 p547).

Awareness of how uncomfortable the white gaze can be for black and brown visitors to the countryside has been raised by groups (such as Muslim Hikers, Black Girls Hike) committed to normalising not just the presence but the participation of minoritised groups in rural settings and activities. Efforts to push against narratives of unbelonging by inviting and welcoming these groups in to enjoy these spaces can be seen as counter conduct to divisive narratives. However, I think it can only ever be considered partially successful if, as in the case of the MO case study, it is dependent on those seen as local and 'in place' hosting them and accompanying them. Initiatives *led* by minoritised groups, where active claims are made on rural space, rather than welcome being offered by those seen as already belonging, are more likely to be successful in changing the landscape of who is felt to belong in rural spaces. Importantly though, this does not underestimate or undermine the many aspects of their visits that participants have highlighted as significant, and the feelings of welcome they have experienced through their hosted visits, especially as this kind of activism of welcome is not necessarily measured by the same criteria of success as those mentioned above. In fact 'success' (or lack of it) is not a word I would necessarily associate with the kinds of activities under discussion in this project. It is also important not to homogenise all rural populations as consistently anti-migrant and unwelcoming.

7.4 Responsibilities for what comes next

As already alluded to, the research practice, the immediate situation of the pandemic, and the further development of work with MO beyond the research project became very intertwined. The postcard exchange, along with the WhatsApp group and Zoom session associated with it, made space not just for research but also a welcome reunion during the pandemic, helping to overcome isolation and reconnect people. The WhatsApp and Zoom spaces offered an immediate re/connection while the card exchanges worked in a slower timeframe, bringing people and places together in a dialogue stretched over time and space. A dialogic practice was facilitated that allowed time for reflection. Things were said, through a combination of image and text, that had not been said at the time of the visits. The temporary sharing of the household and much later the exchange of postcards were instigated for very different reasons and took shape in very different spaces, but they are inextricably linked encounters and they became less easy to define as either research or activism as they produced material not only for this thesis but also led to new encounters.

Out of the social bonds formed through the history of this group, and the continuing narrative of the research, I felt a responsibility emerge for me - to try and sustain the connections with and between participants made through the project. The content of the cards often expressed wishes to return. Many participants, including myself, signed off their cards with expressions of hope that we might be able to meet again and that people might be able to come to Wales again, comments such as “I am very eager to see you again and celebrating life.” (P4). Asking people to speak about their memories, means those experiences do not stay located in the past but come into the present and are projected into to the future and, in this sense, I felt a responsibility in taking these wishes forward in some way. This was not an unwelcome responsibility. At the time I thought it would be a great outcome if our connection through the project mobilised and assisted with the planning of future encounters, that it became the basis for something new to emerge. Luckily enough, with the help of some funding (see acknowledgements), something did happen – the exhibition that will be covered in Chapter 8.

It was through the mobile objects, digital technologies, language practices and creative processes that relationships between us as individuals, between researcher and participants, between institutions of academia and MO as a voluntary organisation, and between research and activism were able to make a move forward at this time. The project worked as a welcome intersection between activism and scholarship that was mutually beneficial. I view all these encounters, whether for research, or as a form of activism, or as new experiences of 'everyday life', as processes of learning and knowledge building and this is perhaps what matters more than trying to define the boundaries between them.

I conclude this chapter by raising some questions about how the cards tell different stories taken individually or collectively. In the sections of this chapter, they have been examined in detail individually, collected together where themes have emerged, or arranged as conversations where the dialogic nature of the exchange has seemed important. They have also been brought together as collaged fragments, serving as a way of collating knowledges. I think this helps represent the blend of spoken and unspoken participatory language practices at work in these encounters that are small scale, quite transient fragments of people's lives. It also suits my intention to represent epistemic uncertainty through suggestions, glimpses and arrangements that nevertheless have some kind of substance taken together. It feels closer to the form of knowledge production that takes place through transient encounters of informal learning. It also reflects my interest in this not only as 'researcher as bricoleur' but also as an activist. Acts of citizenship have been described as cumulative – I suggest here that they can also be pieced together to form a landscape of small events, even behind the scenes.

The quote from Participant 4 below speaks of the scale of the images and small chunks of text that are the cards.

> there are so many memories that this card could not bear, even more a book. (Participant 4, text from postcard)

It is all inevitably incomplete and often narrates only fleeting moments. There is something quite impermanent in the idea of 'freshening up' and 'flicking' through photos and memories that P2 talks about (see quote from P2 page 182) but at the same time something quite substantial in the materiality of sending and receiving cards (Fig 38) as also mentioned in the case study in Chapter 4.

Figure 38: Putting things in the post

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I used theorisations of mobilities and space to think about how people came to the encounters of welcome under discussion. Through the medium of the postcards, I looked at the different ways people expressed being in a place and how these articulated with Brah's (1996) theorisations of diaspora space as ideas of separation and connection, distance and proximity, home and away from home, came into play. It was also clear that the pandemic influenced relations to place at the time of the project. These different and complex ways of relating to place are important to the narratives of migration that are activated by these encounters. It is worth noting however that it is not only migrant contributors who touch on these ideas, supporting evidence of the idea that we are all implicated in a world of migration and all experience different kinds of im/mobility.

It was evident that sharing a household space and the everyday literacies of doing things together lent themselves to familial feelings of homeliness. For refugee migrant participants the welcoming space of the household allowed aspects of personhood beyond that of the migrant to come to the fore. Guest host dynamics were certainly still at play, but were brought beyond a fixed or universalised set of relations. Ongoing encounters and shared practices, be they through repeated visits in the past, or the continued dialogue of the postcards in the present, plus the opportunity to look

forward to future opportunities to be together, indicated the development of relations beyond the threshold of initial welcome.

The chapter went on to show how the contributions of participants challenged some of the more mainstream conceptions of rural space, the natural world and migrants' relation to it. A respite in nature was certainly an element of what was enjoyed but this was conveyed not only as a respite from regular life in an urban space but also as release from a fixed identity, and the relief of gaining access to the familial feelings of everyday collective living. Nature featured as an important element in people's lives wherever they were – in the city, in rural spaces and in their imaginations. At the time of creating the cards, the memories of the visits and the connections made through the card exchange also provided a form of respite from the isolation of the pandemic. This narrative of the rural and of migrant knowledge and experience of nature is one that is mostly overlooked and goes unrecognised, and it is hard for it to currently gain much ground in the prevailing discourses around refugee migrants.

Throughout the chapter I highlighted how the processes and social relations of research, not just what was produced, helped shed light on relations and ways of being together during the short rural breaks that are the subject of research. I have emphasised this to support my argument that the encounters, relations and practices themselves, with all the comforts and discomforts that circulate around them *are* the stories. Also, even though mostly out of the public eye, I suggest that these acts of welcome can also be looked on as collective acts of citizenship, working towards alternative forms of belonging, and the shaping of the rural spaces that they take place in. The chapter also covered the link between research and activism and the responsibilities that entailed, which will carry us forward into the next chapter as we see what transpired in that regard.

I maintain my argument, introduced in previous chapters, that though power relations may be temporarily suspended, and the experiences may be restorative in some ways for those involved, these modes of encounter based around welcome and hospitality do not overcome inequitable differences. This does not prevent us finding ways of being together and finding solidarity through a shared desire for creating a less hostile and

more hospitable environment for migrants, even in these rural corners. Perhaps the way the cards ranged from focussing on the specifically situated encounters in Llanvapley, the reality of the current situation, past memories, and also reaching out to a possible future and also an impossible imaginary one, reflect the complexities of these encounters and are both an acknowledgement of the difficulties of where we are, as well as a hope or imagining that things can/could be different.

Chapter 8: The Picture Postcard Exhibition, creating new encounters

Figure 39: Banner in the hedge - advertising the exhibition

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter the intersections of 'stories so far' and the formations of people and activities that constituted the spaces of welcome in Chapter 7 now move into a new encounter and a new phase of the project. Discussion around the themes of the thesis does not lose sight of the intimacy of the domestic space, but opens it up beyond the more closed dialogue between researcher and participants that formed the postcard exchange. It is now centred on what happens when a small number of participants return and the cards and their associated narratives are carried forward into the community space of the village hall, and the new encounter of a public exhibition. This provided the opportunity to share the cards more widely and invite people to add to the collection of narratives. What was new and different about the exhibition was the specific intention of creating new encounters with the cards and their creators, activating new experiences of learning, knowledge production and narrative creation. This chapter turns to how a new space is created, not only by the display of cards but by the varied literacies of doing that were engaged in by visitors to the exhibition, who arrived to the encounter by different routes, and for different reasons, and with multiple relations to each other. It examines how individual and shared narratives were brought into the event, and how they were reshaped, rewritten, and redrawn there. It

suggests ways in which these narratives re-emerge to have a life beyond the event. This narrative mobilisation has been discussed before in Chapter 5, but there is an intentionality to this new encounter which differentiates it from the AToS case study and the postcard exchange.

The exhibition brought many themes of the research together and some new ones emerged through it, but the overall shape to my argument remains the same. It is that modes of encounter, language conceptualised as social practice, knowledge and narrative production, are intimately linked to each other and to the co-creation of space and ultimately the writing of place. It is also that dynamics of welcome and spaces of hospitality are open to shifting relations. As Bulley (2017) puts it, they are contested "spaces of co-existence" that are not defined by fixed identities or universalised notions of welcome. In this situated example, I examine how the encounter of the exhibition, and the literacies of doing that circulate around the display of cards, allow people to find ways of being together across differences, in a specific rural context. I look at how people, objects and activities co-constitute the space, and produce knowledges and narratives that endure beyond the event itself.

It is organised around a loose narrative thread as a way of drawing attention to the processes at work in the return visit of MO members, the preparation for the exhibition, the event itself and some thoughts about what happened beyond it. This sequence of events coincides to some extent with the opening up of possibilities beyond the confines of the pandemic. The more linear narrative element does not displace the idea of bricolage, of pulling multiple elements together; rather it tells the story of how this working with diverse resources unfolded over time. The background and methodological aspects of the event are described fully in the Migrants Organise Case Study in Chapter 4, and the postcards themselves are discussed in Chapter 7, but some additional thoughts and reminders are inserted into this chapter where necessary, to help situate the discussion more explicitly. I have consistently referred to the relation between scholarship and life beyond it, but it is in this stage of the project that the overlap became increasingly blurred overall. The comment made by Bissaillon et al (2019) in relation to their collaboration on photo essays, where they are "blurring

boundaries between everyday life and research practice, individual and collective conversation, work and pleasure" (p1026) resonates strongly in this context.

I start by thinking about the shift of the encounters, activities and accompanying narratives from the space of the household to the more public space of the village hall. I then examine the complex relations of hospitality at work in and around the exhibition event. I move on to address how the collage of activities and the new formations of people, objects and environment that created the space of the event, can also be considered as a form of narrative production. I finish with thoughts about how these narratives are mobilised beyond the event and also what traces they might leave behind.

8.2 The narrative shift from home to village hall: mobilities and the global local

The practices involved in the preparation for the event, and the weekend of the event itself, show how more private and public space, local and global, rural and urban cannot be seen as discrete entities or binary concepts. Rather they are considered here as relational spheres, and all active in the 'happening' of this project. Notions of mobility help make sense of this. The event involved the movements of transnational migrants who had in recent times made repeated journeys between London and rural Wales. As visitors, they brought global experiences and stories shaped by global forces into that environment. It also entailed the movement of objects, as the cards moved from the doorsteps they had landed on, into the community space of the village hall. Narratives prompted by the micro-local space of the house had resonated, as we saw in the previous chapter, with faraway places and times. These global narratives now travelled with the cards, and with the returning MO members and myself, into the local, yet more public, space of the village hall. Rather than thinking about pre-existing, defined spaces or scales it seems more helpful to think about how the mobilities of people, objects and narratives contributed to the creation of this temporary space.

The importance of holding the event in the village had a number of aspects to it. One was to come full circle so that the MO members who had participated in the postcard

exchange could return to the house and the village and be part of setting up the exhibition, and could see their contributions being displayed in a more public space. Linked to this, was the intention was to create new interactions between the cards, the project participants, and people resident in the village and beyond, allowing for the stories told through the cards to be activated in new ways and new stories to be instigated. I was keen to give what had started as a more private, home-based project, a more visible and tangible presence in the village, though as consistently argued, the space of the household is not private in the sense of closed – it is at once intimate and globally connected. I wanted to explicitly place the global in the local/rural, to introduce what might be unexpected into the overriding imagining of the rural as traditional, and by inference also static, homogeneous and unsurprising. Almost inverse to this, was the decision (described in Chapter 4) to set up the exhibition of globally connected stories as a homely space. This was to emphasise the importance of the domestic space as a site for global narratives to be drawn into, and to re-emerge re-told. Overall, I was keen for it to be on the village scale in order to explore and enact the relation of the rural local to the global; I wanted it to be enjoyable and thought provoking. At the same time, it is important not fall in with the homogenising narrative about rural populations that I have critiqued, by making assumptions that the residents of this village are unaware of, unconcerned with, or hostile towards migrants. Some visitors to the exhibition had their own family connections with the issues shown at the exhibition (as evident in one of the postcards made at the event (see Clip 2). The last thing I would wish is for the event to be presented as a way of asserting an authoritative stance in relation to the people who came.

The mix of tasks in preparation for the return visit by MO members, and for the exhibition itself, illuminate the role of researcher as scholar activist. They reflect the fact that this was a time to personally welcome back visitors as well as organise a local event which in turn doubled up as a research project. For myself, there were practical domestic jobs to be done associated with hosting visitors in the home, there was the liaising with MO staff and members to organise travel arrangements, there was the walking from house to house in the village delivering invitations to the event, there was

the writing of a booklet for an exhibition audience, not to mention thoughts about how this would eventually be written up as academic work for a PhD.

In the end only three Migrants Organise members were able to return on the dates of the exhibition (some having to drop out because of last minute legal and health appointments), but the three who came were key in setting up the display, and being part of the event. Once the MO members arrived, as well as enjoying the fact that they were back in the house and reconnecting with the co-hosting family in the village (homely spaces away from home), we started on practical tasks. We made several trips carrying shelves and boxes from the house, through the village to the hall – a hyper visible and unexpected group along this rural road. The three of them arranged the cards and objects, carrying their globally connected narratives, on the shelves in the centre of the hall and I quickly let go of any themed plans I had for the display. Even in the process of preparation, we revisit the idea of the global in the local and spaces of home and beyond home.

The short film clip in the link below was made spontaneously by one of the MO participants once as we finished preparations.

Clip 1: ***Everything is ready****: https://youtu.be/QKtl0Yzv12M*

It records the exhibition space and its surroundings ready and waiting for visitors. It takes the viewer from the road, where the banner advertising the event was embedded in the hedge, down the path to the pavilion, past those who have been setting things up and finally inside the room, swirling around the exhibits and pulling focus in and out of details. For me it conjures up the feeling of apprehension and expectation prior to this event, and the not knowing, in relation to how this new mode of encounter will work out, what people's responses will be and how we will emerge from it individually and collectively. As Ahmed (2000), Bulley (2017) and others insist, we do not come as ready constituted beings to these encounters but are shaped by them, and cannot know where they will take us. The film records the space and its objects before they are activated in dialogue with visitors. The same participant suggested and made the mandala flower arrangement (Figure 40) as a sign of welcome for visitors to the

exhibition, at the door of the hall. The presence and input of these MO friends was very reassuring for me. This highlighted how relations with and between MO members at that time had moved beyond the initial encounter of welcome. It was built on relations of hospitality developed in the context of their stay in a home environment in the village, as visitors welcomed from London. With some of them it had developed through repeated stays (and in some cases, further contact outside these visits too). These relations had then developed and changed through the reconnections of the postcard project and the virtual space of WhatsApp and Zoom. Now the event of the exhibition changed them again. This opens up the following discussion of shifting roles and relationships in the wider context of the exhibition and its visitors.

Figure 40: Objects of welcome outside and inside the exhibition space of the village hall

8.3 New encounters: guests, hosts and strangers

The village hall was the site of a new encounter, for all of us – for me as scholar/activist, for MO participants and for those who came along to see the exhibition. As hosts we (myself and the three participants who returned) did not know what to expect – who would come, how many, how would they respond, what would they do? About fifty people attended over the one afternoon and one morning the exhibition was open (some key people on both days), enough to create a buzz in a small space, but on a scale where people could interact with the display, the activities and each other with some ease. What I had not expected was for it to come together as a kind of community social event – a fitting scale for the material on display. There is no room here to go into detail about the very interesting and contested ideas around what community is and its inclusive and exclusionary potential but, briefly, I take the word community here to be this transient gathering of people. They may have had many reasons for coming but

their connecting point was the willingness to come to the event and engage to a greater or lesser extent with its content.

People's reasons for coming, their prior knowledge, how much attention they paid to the material, their responses and participation were varied. People came from the village in response to the invitations delivered and publicity in the local newsletter. Some of these were people who I knew, some I just knew *of* (people who lived in or had connections with the village but I did not know personally), and some were unknown to me. A number of interested friends came from further afield. Several volunteer members from Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary (AToS) came. On the Sunday it was announced in church, so a few people who had not planned to come drifted in after that. Some people knew each other, one or two were reconnecting after a long time. I realised that some of these key relationships represented the interconnected threads of my own life as well as those of others. It is also important to acknowledge the fact that there were people who received invitations but chose *not* to come, though I have no information on this. I did receive one apology from a local resident which I will mention because it provides an interesting inversion of the unexpectedness of the exhibition content introduced into the village scene. I received a text message from her explaining that she could not attend because they were busy with making the silage (a seasonal farming task), a reason that would be so unexpected in other contexts, places where an exhibition on this topic might be more usually displayed.

There are more details of who came and notes on what their connections were and what they did in Appendix L: Notes on attendees at the Postcards Exhibition I mention these relationships in some detail as the idea of who is the stranger and to whom, is important here. Though there were people who were strangers to each other in the sense of not knowing each other, the three MO members, because of their racialised identities, were likely to be recognised as stranger than other strangers. As Ahmed (2000) insists, it is only when the stranger comes close that they become recognised as such. And here they have come close in the sense of being an unexpected presence in the village. Perhaps the difference here is that they were invited as guests, and therefore it is known that they are not considered strangers by everyone.

The event threw up different configurations of guest/host relations that are relevant to the key questions of the research project and speak to the idea that these are not fixed or binary, and that it is even possible to hold both roles simultaneously in some contexts. I lean towards framing them more in terms of the responsibilities of hospitality, of how we encounter others rather than as identities of host or guest, particularly as these are often aligned with other binaries of identity such as migrant /non-migrant, local and stranger. When this happens, both these oppositional identities are reinforced as mutually exclusive and definitive rather than the more unstable and changing aspects of personhood that they are. The preparation for the event and the weekend itself brought everyone involved into new spaces and encounters where the possibility of new roles came into play, but always built on the history of existing ones. These histories have, in turn, been shaped by wider forces that move people into particular positions in relation to each other at different times and in different places. In the case of this event, existing roles and relationships such as guest, host, MO member, researcher, friends, village resident, London resident, were all up for shifts and changes - or for reinscribing.

An important aspect of this was how the exhibition introduced local residents to the spaces, activities and relations that some of us were already familiar with. In this sense, local residents in some ways now became the strangers. They were now in a position of unfamiliarity, crossing the threshold for the first time into a space that represented an existing familiarity between others, including those who would more usually be recognised as strangers – that is, racialised refugee migrants. As such, the participants, as former guests, became the hosts for this event. I think there are further layers of complication because despite 'local' visitors to the exhibition now being guests and in a position of not knowing, yet the migrants and their stories might *still* be seen as the strangers in the context of this being a rural space. At the same time, people in the village may well have felt that the village itself, represented by the village hall, was in some sense hosting the event. And it is the case that it was well supported by those that run the village hall and the village newsletter. The fact that the exhibition was organised by a household in the village whose residents, though relatively recent, had

to a certain extent been accepted as local themselves, could well have made it more likely that it would be supported – or one could say *welcomed* - as an event.
My host role was that of inviting and welcoming people to the event but I had an additional host role towards the participants who were my still my guests as invited visitors. I felt this role most strongly in terms of a responsibility towards them in the context of the event. My hope was to create a mode of encounter where the 'strangerness' of some over others could be questioned. This was primarily via the stories represented by the cards, but the presence of the MO members also brought up the potential tension of these relations of un/belonging and strangerness being felt by the MO members and/or others present, and my responsibilities as a host. What happens when hosts have a sense of responsibility towards guests who might be regarded as strangers by others? Our responsibility to others is a big question, alluded to in the literature (Ahmed 2000, Edkins 2019), which I raise here in relation to the awkward dynamics of being white 'local' hosts welcoming racialised minoritised individuals and groups into predominantly white spaces where the intention is to find ways of being together. As has been mentioned previously, rural spaces can be unwelcoming for minoritised and racialised groups, and personally I am often anxious that refugee migrants staying in the village will experience racism during their visit.

These relations tie in for me with responsibilities and uncertainties of my part in relation to the roles that the MO visitors might want (if any) to have on the day. P1 had an obvious one of leading the dance sessions, the others less so. On the one hand, perhaps I could have suggested that the MO participants could speak at the event or actively introduced more people to them? On the other hand, it seemed appropriate not to impose any expectation that they should have a 'public' role on the day. It seemed important for their presence be normalised, and not based on reinforcing their presence solely as 'the refugees'. It was important that they felt welcomed, but not only that. There were different roles and attributes to recognised, such as creators, holders of knowledge to be shared, people with a claim of familiarity with the village, and hosts. Also, as visitors who wanted to just enjoy themselves like everyone else. Without shedding responsibilities towards these particular visitors, I suggest that, in line with the overall thesis, the images and text of the cards along with the literacies of doing that

circulated around them on the day, formed the language that was the focus of the event as much as any spoken language. It was not an event for holding the stage with talking – the only brief moment for this was my short thanks to everyone at the end of the second day. As we shall see, in the next section, this repertoire of communicative resources includes conversation but as just one of many forms of dialogic communication and ways of being together.

While it was felt to be a 'success' in many ways, and many aspects were joyful, I am keen to avoid romanticising the rural scene of this event. It wasn't without its discomforts in relation to setting it up, trying to get things right with participants, and how people responded. There were complex relations of welcome and hospitality, with the tensions inherent in that that were likely to be felt by some more than others.

8.4 Literacies of doing; spoken and unspoken narratives

The idea of doing things together being a mode of encounter and a form of knowledge and narrative production continues to be central to discussion in this chapter. The

Figure 41: People, postcards and activities at the Picture Postcard Conversations event

exhibition and event encompassed varied forms of activity, deploying a range of communicative resources from image, text, the voice, music and embodied movement. These were influenced by the atmosphere and environment of the rural space, both inside and outside the hall. People were invited to participate in whatever way suited them –looking at the display, making their own cards, reading the brochure, dancing, having tea, walking round the field. Inevitably, around these planned activities, many incidental actions, moments and connections took place. With the composite image (Figure 41) I try to illustrate some aspects of the shared experience and what has been considered throughout this thesis as the mode of encounter. As can be seen from the image, people browsed the cards, picked them up, handled them, turned them over, looked at the images and read the text. Sometimes people broke off from perusing the cards in order to have a conversation with another visitor, and then returned to the cards. Some people sat and read the brochure, some people took it home. A couple of people watched part of the rolling slide show. There were also those who came and left quickly - reluctant to engage with it at all. A couple who are quite active in village life, and hold some status in it, came in response to the church announcement, but stayed only very briefly and looked uninterested, if not uncomfortable, when they realised the topic of the display.

Figure 42: New conversations

Although the reason people came, and the heart of the event, was the display of postcards, the conversations and connections that circulated around them were of course diverse and not necessarily 'about' the cards. The scale of the event meant people were able to meet, reunite and chat. There were many more conversations and observations than those inserted into the image above (Figure 42); these are only those that I took part in or overheard (my attention was mainly occupied with my role as a

host). The language of conversation floated around the space, drifting around the cards on display. Taking language as a multifaceted process, we can say that these two language repertoires were intertwined, the spoken conversations combining with, extending and elaborating on the narratives of the cards, adding new layers of meaning to them for the time they were in this particular context.

While continuing to emphasise the importance of language as a participatory process and also maintaining my interest in process as much as content for narrative production, there are one or two conversations I would like to relate, as they touch on aspects of popular narratives relating to migration and belonging. I was particularly struck by one conversation initiated by a couple who had previously lived in the village who had heard about the exhibition while visiting family in the village that day. They were the very first visitors to the exhibition. It became clear that they did not really have an idea of what they were coming to and asked what it was all about. Their response to my brief explanation of the project was to ask and talk about how long people had lived in various houses in the village (including my own, which longer term local residents persist in calling 'J… and L…'s house', the names of the previous residents who moved out 5 years ago).

This response to the event reminded me of the question that migrants often get asked: *how long have you been here?* ('here' usually referring to the UK), often accompanied by the twin question '*where are you from?*'. In either context, referring to length of time in the village or in the nation, the question is hinting at seeking a measure of how much a person actually belongs. This assessment is made by the questioner in these instances. It is about how much someone belongs in eyes of others, not a person's own sense of (not)belonging. So it seems, in this rural context, everyone can be asked how long they have been here, but I think only some people are likely to be asked where they are from. For migrants racialised as other, based on assumptions about appearance, accents and language, these follow up questions are bound up with the idea that they can only really belong elsewhere however long they are here. I wonder if the fact that the exhibition is focussed on the experiences of transnationally displaced migrants who are temporary visitors to the village, rather than permanently resettling here, makes a

difference to how it is received in the village. And by extension, any welcome extended to the people 'behind' the exhibition is conditional on their *not* staying.

The exhibition took place at the time that many Ukrainian refugees were being hosted by individual households in the UK, including in the Abergavenny area. A couple of visitors asked whether the cards were made by Ukrainian refugees or whether there was local involvement with them. This seemed to be people's reference point for refugee issues at this particular juncture. There were difficult conversations to be had around this time (May 2021) as the local activist group Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary (AToS) had chosen not to get involved in the response to the influx of Ukrainian refugees on the basis that there was a strong, well-connected network of sponsors/hosts that would support them. This was not the case for other refugee groups, particularly those living in rural areas with no networks of their own diasporic communities to plug into, and the focus of the local group remained with those who might otherwise be forgotten as their stories pass out of the news. Migrants Organise (MO) in London, as always, continued its wide remit of not differentiating between or categorising migrants. Another query was whether the cards were made by Syrian refugees, perhaps attributable to the fact that the resettlement scheme focussing on Syrian and now Afghan refugees was the best known about in this rural location. The MO members who were the creators of the cards are asylum seeker migrants from a very wide variety of national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. I think this exchange reflects the homogenising of refugees according to the latest group that receives media attention. None of the postcards mention origins, they were not labelled in any way to indicate whether their creators were refugees, other kinds of transnational migrant, but the preoccupation with where people are from persists.

I now move on to describe other forms of activity, the 'literacies of doing' both planned and incidental that took place, and pay attention to how they contribute to creating a space of narrative production. I start with a practice that was an important element of this mix – the making of new cards by visitors to the exhibition. Many of the visitors created postcards in response to the event and the display. They sat at the table provided and used the craft material to make images and compose text. They chatted while they did so, or used it as a time where they did not have to talk. The newly

created cards made by attendees at the event were pegged up on a line suspended on the veranda for the duration of the event (see video clip below).

Clip 2 Fluttering cards: https://youtu.be/cZcbu6Lcyzg

These cards extended the dialogue already started by the postcard exchange. As well as individual cards, some of which are looked at in more detail below, I think it is important to see them all together (as in the video clip) as they tell a different story collectively, through the variation in response that the event elicited. Some cards were created as a direct response to the displayed cards, some spoke to the themes of welcome and migration more generally and some were about the village and its rural environs (flowers, vegetables, animals, buildings). Taking some of them individually first, in order to illustrate the different themes, the example below is a direct response to the display (see Figure 43). This card maker has referenced the MO postcards, and their creators, and the village – all in one short sentence. I like the way she has referred to them as 'artists' – an identification far from migrant, local, guest or host. And also the fact that she picks up on how the village 'meant something' to them, leaving this 'something' open to the multiple meanings that were suggested by different contributors to the exhibition.

"How lovely to see the postcards and know that Llanvapley has meant something to the artists"

Figure 43: Visitor postcard; Bluebell card and text

The two cards below (Figure 44) are centred on life in the village. They were created by members of a family who have co-hosted MO members. Their theme is their rural life here, their market garden (which featured in an AToS event described in Chapter 5) and

the sharing of space, food and beauty. This narration of the village is an antidote to narratives of the rural as a closed space protected against strangers.

Figure 44: Sharing space and food, with love.

The card written in Welsh (Figure 45), is one of the only references to the fact that the event took place in Wales. This participant, in very few words, conveys some interesting meanings about what the event means to him and also some wider aspects of it. One is that this is an organised event where things are being done together – even seeing it as 'working' together. The weather is mentioned which is something I will pick up on later. He has surprised himself by dancing and this echoes the qualities of unexpectedness that the event brings into the village. Finally, he gives his 'address' in quite an ambiguous way – placing himself in the house, with his family rather than in the village field. Or perhaps he means that this village space *is* his home? Whatever it is he uses the possessive 'our' and I wonder who is included in this.

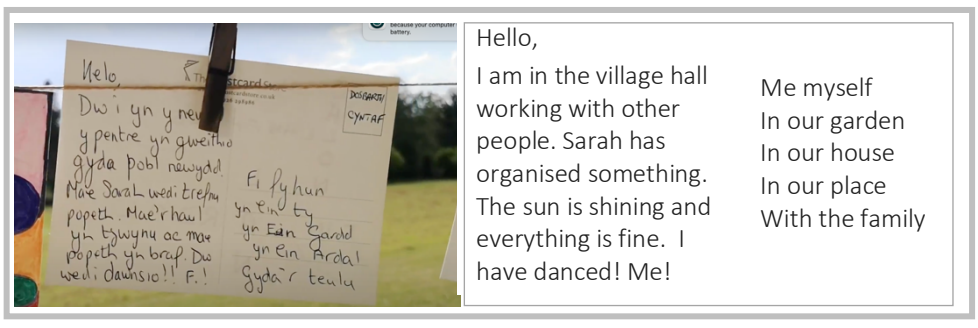


Figure 45: Visitor postcard – Welsh with English translation

For two of the MO participants who made new cards at the event, house and garden seem to remain their touch points (Figure 46) (the one on the left seems to feature the recognisable porch of the Llanvapley house that MO members stayed in). As we have seen in Chapter 7 however, they are often connected to other times and places. The one on the right was prompted by a conversation with Participant 5 that took place in the village vegetable garden, about the family farm she used to visit in the country she lived in.

Figure 46: New postcards by MO participants

A visitor from a neighbouring village, reminds us of historical refugee migrations and of internal migrations within the UK that have made up his family history (Figure 47). This bringing together of different migration stories brings texture and depth to representations of the countryside that are otherwise often flattened, smoothed and homogenised. They also bring some sense of what migration and mobility scholars have

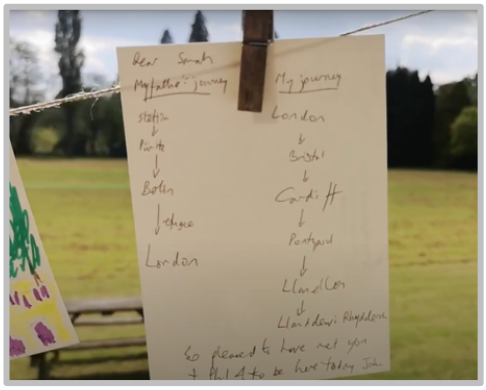


Figure 47: Visitor postcard - family migration story

insisted on, which is that migration of different kinds is everywhere because it is part of being human. Bringing these cards back together as a collection, it is possible to see that welcome and migration are not always referenced directly and are interpreted in multiple ways. Perhaps it is possible to say things through the images and text of the

cards that would otherwise not be expressed. This makes for a more composite picture that breaks up the dominance of any one narrative. Many of the cards in their own way also offer alternative narrations of the rural as a more open, shared, space. It is not that these stories override the dominance of more powerful narratives, and it is likely that the attendees at the exhibition (at least those who stayed) were perhaps more interested in and open to ideas of a more welcoming rural, but it demonstrates that alternative stories *are* present, even in these overlooked corners. In the same way as the dialogues of the postcard exchange took the narratives of the home stays in all kinds of directions, so the new cards take the narrative journeys further. Rather than regarding these stories as a divergence from an 'original' topic or as 'off topic' they are better acknowledged as multiple responses to encounters with others that throw up many different narratives that are not always heard.

I felt that the exhibition had a strong sensory atmosphere that went beyond the visual and textual elements of the postcards, engaging other senses in planned and incidental ways. A movement and dance session (see Clip 1 below) was led on each day of the event by MO member and volunteer P1 who, on previous visits to the village, has often danced in the house or garden with whoever is there, or in the fields on his walks. The sessions were a mix of traditional South Asian music and movement with more contemporary Western styles. There was no prearranged 'story' or theme to the movement – it was for pleasure, for enjoyment, a way of being together, without having to use spoken language. The music was quite dreamy at times, heightening the feeling of placing the unexpected in this rural space. Sometimes it was more up tempo and there was the sound of laughter as people tried to follow P1's movements. People took up space in the field in front of the pavilion, and music drifted across the field extending the presence of the event even further. People to whom this was very unfamiliar gave it a go and joined in. Other visitors observed from the veranda. You can see in the clips some people being drawn into it after watching it for a few moments from the side-lines. I think that this opportunity to connect through movement held people, they stayed at the event longer and it became an easy subject of conversation for people afterwards. It was of course also an opportunity for P1 as an MO member and research participant to take a central role. It is worth mentioning here that he was the first

individual from MO to come to stay in the village, as a refugee member who also had a volunteering role. He has since been many times, on his own, with organised groups and with friends. For me he wraps together the emergence of the project connecting the village with MO, the move from guest to a friendship that has extended beyond the village context, and he was a valuable adviser in matters related to this event. He is also a gifted dancer and teacher.

Clip 1 and Clip 4 Movement and Music in the Air:

https://youtu.be/SXwyKOtyGVc

https://youtu.be/cmbeZbp2jQE

As well as the music and the bodily movement of the dance/movement sessions, there were other sensory aspects to the event. The earlier film Clip 2(page 220) of the newly created postcards pegged up on the veranda, shows the cards are flapping very gently a bit like prayer flags in the light breeze and there is a surprisingly audible backdrop of birdsong. There was a sense of the weather as people moved between the shady cool of the inside of the hall and the bright sunshine outside. There were sweet cakes and tea. There was also the constant background soundscape of light chattering. I take this sensory engagement to be all part of finding ways of being together that go beyond spoken language. The planned literacies of doing (interacting with the display, making postcards, dancing, eating and drinking) had their own sensory elements but were also couched in these contextual sensory experiences - from incidental chatter to sounds of nature.

Bringing all the elements of the event together, the cards as objects, the people and practices that circulate around them and the context, I suggest that a temporary language practice was created from the multiple resources available. The exhibition event highlights how language as a social practice can be viewed in spatial terms; a range of concurrent spoken and unspoken practices responding to and at the same time creating space. These new and sometimes unexpected formations of people, objects

and activities in a rural setting provide rich sites for informal learning and narrative production. As I have argued in earlier chapters the process as much as the content of anything 'produced' constitutes the narrative. The narrative is that this new formation came into being. I think this framing also reaffirms my claim that these encounters and practices of welcome are about new formations not the integration of existing ones. It does not mean they evade the inequalities integral to them, or the wider power geometries that shape them, but it might mean that they can offer possibilities in terms of alternative narratives of welcome, migration and rurality and on claims of belonging, through finding ways of being together. These modes of encounters based on literacies of doing are also actants in the writing of place – in this case the village.

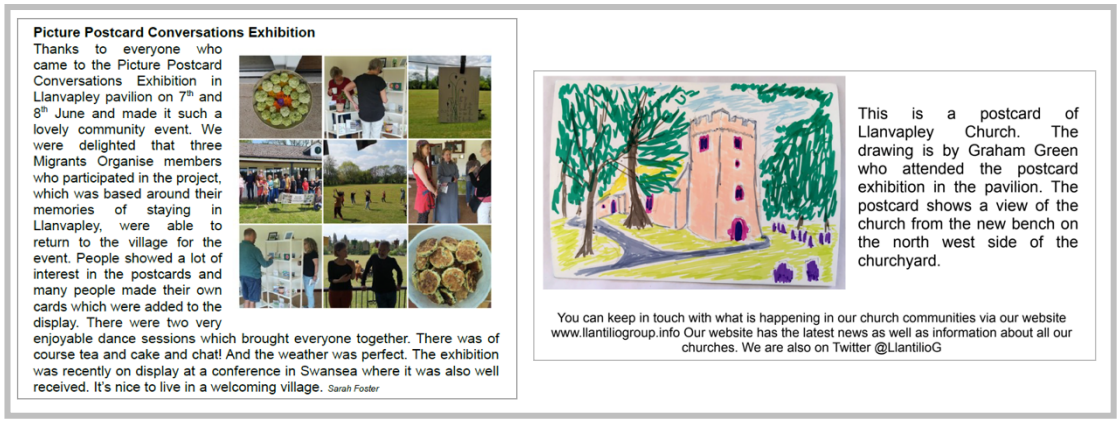
A visual illustration of the new formations that constitute the space of this encounter can be identified in some of the photos of the exhibition (see Figure 42). They show that the postcards were displayed alongside a collection of photos and other objects more commonly associated with village life, on permanent display on the walls of the village hall; group photos of village residents taken at Jubilee events, records of Women's Institute meetings, cricket trophies in cabinets – symbols of tradition and permanence which made for an interesting contrast. The postcards were placed in the centre of what could be described as a very white shaped space (Ahmed 2007); that is, a space shaped by repeated encounters and activities that take for granted the normalisation of whiteness. It cannot be claimed that the dominance of this whiteness was overturned in any way but, rather than seeing the different objects in juxtaposition (which was my original thought about it), perhaps it is more useful to see it as a new formation, even if still very unbalanced in terms of what holds more power or is given more lasting tenure in the space.

8.5 Traces and Afterthoughts

This image below (Figure 48) was taken just after the event, the postcards are still hanging on the veranda but the space is empty of people - a chance to think about what happens to the stories it created now everyone has gone.

Figure 48: Village hall in Llanvapley just after the event

In concrete terms, people took booklets away and I was asked for more. The event was talked about during the monthly village walk and at an open day in the market garden. I wrote about it in the parish magazine (where an invitation had also been published) (Figure 49). Further afield, someone took a booklet to Scotland for a friend whose history goes back to Vietnamese migration to the UK. I heard that it was quoted from at a community project meeting in Newport. And it is reaching a new audience by being written about here. So, in small ways it has mobilised the stories represented by the cards and also brought new people into conversation with them.



Picture Postcard Conversations Exhibition

Thanks to everyone who came to the Picture Postcard Conversations Exhibition in Llanvapley pavilion on 7th and 8th June and made it such a lovely community event. We were delighted that three Migrants Organise members who participated in the project, which was based around their memories of staying in Llanvapley, were able to return to the village for the event. People showed a lot of interest in the postcards and many people made their own cards which were added to the display. There were two very enjoyable dance sessions which brought everyone together. There was of course tea and cake and chat! And the weather was perfect. The exhibition was recently on display at a conference in Swansea where it was also well received. It's nice to live in a welcoming village. *Sarah Foster*

This is a postcard of Llanvapley Church. The drawing is by Graham Green who attended the postcard exhibition in the pavilion. The postcard shows a view of the church from the new bench on the north west side of the churchyard.

You can keep in touch with what is happening in our church communities via our website www.llantiliogroup.info Our website has the latest news as well as information about all our churches. We are also on Twitter @LlantilioG

Figure 49: Local news stories

The exhibition itself has also travelled. It took on a new aspect as it travelled to a conference at Swansea University, where the contrast between the 'homely' qualities of the display and the setting in the institution of the university was quite striking. For me, it looked out of place, rather lost and overpowered by this environment, in a different way to its unexpectedness in the village hall. It gave me some concern as to how the two worlds, that of the academy and that of very local activism, could successfully come together through my thesis – a puzzle that cannot always be easily resolved and is done with some awkwardness at times. Because of a busy event programme, the invitation to make new cards was not taken up in this setting and I was not able to record responses to it. As always intended, the cards, brochures and other objects have now been given to Migrants Organise and are to be displayed in the library space they are working on at their offices in London. I look forward to seeing them there and the new conversations that evolve around them as the process of narrative production continues. There is a circular orientation to this. It is through Migrants Organise that the participants came to stay in the village in the first instance, and as a consequence became part of the research project, so it seems fitting that the cards return to that 'home'.

I think the event has a more intangible afterlife in the village as well. Taking the sensory qualities of the literacies of doing, and the environmental sensations that were their backdrop, I think the narratives of welcome that are created at the event are given a quality that is not 'going' anywhere in particular. The narratives of welcome floated into the air – aimed at no-one in particular. As transient moments they will evaporate, but I think something remains. The activities of the day were given shape by the rural space of the hall and the field and the village, but also shaped it in a way that lingers even in very subtle and imperceptible ways. The clip of the cards suggests the idea of welcome, and multiple and varied responses to it, being something 'in the air'. Similarly, the dancing sessions contribute to a narrative where music and bodily movement are just out there in a field, fleeting moments that nevertheless leave some resonance. I do not regard this mobilisation of narratives 'into the air' as necessarily loss or dissipation. I suggest that traces of their atmosphere can be more lasting. They are also beyond any intentionality in relation to the exhibition event as we do not know how stories mobilised in this way develop of where they go. Angharad Closs Stephen's (2022)

writing on Jo Fong's movement and dance performances provide some very interesting insights in light of these points. She refers to Fong's hope being that the piece that is presented starts a conversation that will be around long after the performance has ended, but also a refusal to think about outcomes (p130), thinking instead about the work's potential for shifting atmospheres "without rationalising or interpreting those shifts as 'good' or 'bad'" (p129). I think this is helpful in thinking about what happens in this form of activism too.

Similarly, it is impossible to know where the stories instigated by this event (and others covered in this project) are going or what their content will develop into, only that the rather unruly process is there and has its own life. There are interesting discussions to be had about whether this unruliness is what marks them out as potentially effective counter narratives as they escape appropriation and work from the ground up. My view is that this is an important aspect of what makes them political.

The exhibition event that is the subject of this chapter follows previous sections of the research project in its emphasis that the creation of new spaces through modes of encounter, where new and sometimes unexpected formations of people, objects and practices come together, *are* the narrative. Turning to Closs Stephens again, this claim can be expanded into something that perhaps points to why these small out of the way events matter. Her claim is that Fong's take on dance performances "addresses the political by asking how we build spaces where other forms of being with others can emerge" (p13/31). Perhaps it is possible to think of 'literacies of doing' in a similar way, as a means of creating spaces that are political in this sense.

For all the reasons set out above that relate to power dynamics, to finding ways of being together across difference and, importantly, the possibilities opened up through knowledge and narrative production I think we can view the event in the village hall as a political space. Centred on modes of encounter with people, objects and activities that bring us, as individuals and communities, into being, rather than on pre-existing fixed identities, it is a temporary 'space of co-existence' (Bulley 2017) that is complex, and at once hopeful and unsettling. It is a space where individual and also collective stories in relation to migration, rurality and welcome that might resist top-down hostile or

unwelcoming narratives were mobilised, albeit on a very small scale with a very subtle ripple effect.

8.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I described how acts of welcome, originally based in the domestic space, moved out into a more public sphere where the stories told through the image and text of the postcards were extended and retold. The village hall became a space where people's 'stories so far' met temporarily and through a particular mode of encounter. During this time people had the opportunity to share space and do things together.
I referred to the mobilities of people, objects and activities moving in and out of these spaces as a way of explaining an interconnectedness of places, scales and times and a dissolving of any clear boundaries between local and global, private and public, rural and urban. I suggested that the exhibition presented a narrative of the rural as being connected to global concerns by bringing stories related to transnational migration into the centre of village life. In an interesting inversion, these global connections were brought to life through very localised and situated memories of home settings, rather than broader more distant perspectives, or extractive stories of migration journeys.
I reiterated the complexities and instabilities of guest/host relations as made evident in the encounter of the exhibition. The discussion also highlighted that however things might move beyond the threshold of welcome, there are still aspects of the host/visitor relation that cannot be resolved easily and continue as discomforting. As put forward at several points in this thesis, when considering relations of hospitality which are seated in inequalities, a neat ironing out of these discomforts is not necessarily what we should be searching for. It is, in the end, only through my struggles to use the words 'host' and 'guest', in connection with acts of welcome, that I find them in many ways inadequate and prefer to see these relations as an untidy struggle to find ways of being together that are open to all sorts of shifts and changes, but never evading the wider power dynamics that do not so easily shift and change.

I described how the 'literacies of doing', a collage of activities blending spoken and unspoken language repertoires that people participated in at the event, constituted a particular mode of encounter that shaped the space. I included the sensory qualities of

these embodied activities and their setting as significant elements in this process. I devoted some space to people's varied responses to the postcard display and the event as a whole, as evidenced through the creation of new cards which developed narrative threads in multiple different directions. I would like to emphasise that the happening of the event was just as significant as the content. As I have proposed in earlier chapters, the practices engaged in, and their movement between the spaces that they create, *constitute* the narratives of welcome, migrations and rurality (which are the subject of this thesis). I suggest that what matters about this encounter of welcome, like others in this project, is how those present find (and may also struggle to find) ways of being together through these practices. Further to this, how through doing so, these acts of welcome can also count as acts of citizenship as people begin to make claims on belonging in these spaces of welcome. And as such they also become political spaces.

I ended the chapter by considering how stories and conversations move beyond the event in known and unknown ways and through varied spoken and unspoken language repertoires and also how they left traces in the village. One way of looking at it would be to think how a snippet of text or an image from a postcard that was picked up and read, or a passing feeling while dancing and listening to the music, or a fleeting observation, or the tactile process of making of a new postcard, not only shifted something for individuals, but also added a fragment to a complex collage of tiny narratives of process that, altogether, could be said to add up to something.

Chapter 9. Conclusions: assembling the pieces

My thesis has shown how practices of welcome for refugees and asylum seekers in the rural setting studied here, create spaces where people are active in seeking ways of being together across difference. I have formulated the concept of 'literacies of doing' to describe the activities that people engage in through repertoires of spoken and unspoken communicative resources. I suggested that this contributes to an understanding of these activities which steers away from ideas of integration, particularly those based on competence in English, towards a narrative where people 'write place' rather than fit in to what is already there. I have argued that it is the creation of these spaces and the movement of people, practices and objects between them that *constitute* the narratives of welcome, migration and rurality that the study set out to explore.

I have used a theoretical framework that brings together conceptualisations of language as social participation (Canagarajah, 2004; Pennycook, 2010) with the idea of modes of encounter (Ahmed 2000). In this way, notions of hospitality to the 'stranger' move beyond fixed identities and beyond the threshold of the initial act of welcome as new social and cultural formations emerge over time through the informal learning and knowledge production associated with participatory language practices. In order to understand how these groups of people arrive at these encounters I have referred to work on uneven mobilities in relation to migration (Adey, 2010; Cresswell, 2006; Sheller, 2018). In order to advance my arguments, I have drawn on a relational understanding of space; one where it is shaped and shaped by the social relations and practices within it (Brah 1996, 2020; Massey, 2005). Moreover, I have argued that the ways in which practices move in and out of and flow between different spaces is also significant, particularly in relation to the mobilisation of knowledge production and accompanying narratives – in this case stories of migration, welcome and rurality. I built on the work of scholars that have focussed on welcome for refugees and asylum seekers in the city (Bagelman, 2016; Darling, 2017; Gill et al 2022; Squire, 2011) by shifting the focus to a

rural setting. I have looked at the particularities of welcome in the kind of rural location that can be seen as out of the way and also very unwelcoming for racialised and minoritised groups. For this setting I have drawn on Massey's global sense of place, Brah's diaspora space, and scholarship that interrogates traditional notions of the rural and also addresses issues of rural racism (Burdsey, 2011; Cloke, 2006; Woods, 2007).

To arrive at the arguments and conclusions of this thesis I used a form of creative bricolage; of working with what was available at the time, influenced by the restrictions and opportunities of the different stages of the pandemic, the make up of the case study groups, our communicative and material resources, my own areas of interest and expertise, and institutional conventions. The processes in this form of research mirror, or even blend with, the practices that are its subject. In the encounters of welcome described here, the deployment of spoken and unspoken language repertoires, the material, economic and social resources available within these mixed groups, the opportunities and restrictions of a rural setting, also constitute a form of bricolage. These resources are worked on by activists, refugee migrants, settled or unsettled residents, or visitors to the rural locations in question, individually and collectively in order to find ways of being together. I have emphasised the importance of taking into account that, within the groups studied and within the research process itself, some people have qualitatively and quantitatively different resources available to them for this process, and that some of these resources hold more power than others within and beyond the encounters examined here. I have advocated throughout the thesis that the tensions between efforts made to minimise the impact of inequalities, yet a recognition that, rooted in wider power structures, they can't simply be overcome, should be worked with rather than glossed over.

Bricolage has also worked in relation to the representation of my findings, reflecting the processes at work in the encounters or welcome. Through working with what is to hand comes a process of creating or assembling something new. I have been drawn to the idea of collage, using image and text, which can represent layers and cross cutting fragments within the same spatial and temporal frame. These fragments can also be weighted differently through the prominence they are given and their relationship to

each other. A landscape is created that helps reflect the processes and multiple literacies at work.

I will now briefly summarise the discussion in each case study chapter. In Chapter 5 I introduced the idea of literacies of doing in relation to the collage of spoken and unspoken language resources at play in encounters of welcome and hospitality. I argued that this shifts the emphasis away from the dominance of competency in English, particularly in respect to it being seen as a mark of belonging to a community, culture or societal norm that is 'already there'. Through these practices new cultural formations come into being, even if fleetingly, and it is these new formations, instigated by the impetus of welcome which I claim can perhaps offer a sense of belonging to something that has been more mutually created.

This chapter also focussed on a temporal dimension, following the development of activities and relations over time, beyond the initial threshold of welcome. It showed that relations of hospitality change over time and that the binary of guest/host relations becomes increasingly unsettled and these terms and concepts becomes less useful in understanding or describing what these relations are. The changes are not based on a straightforward reciprocity but an ongoing exploration of ways of coming together in spaces of co-existence (Bulley 2017, 2023). The wider forces at play sustain the inequalities in terms of what people are able to draw on or offer materially. Without diminishing the vital need for practical and material support, (not to mention political, systemic and policy changes), I suggest that the practices of welcome examined here offer a social connection built around everyday activities, that meet other kinds of needs - of both volunteers and refugee migrants. They also allow other aspects of personhood beyond that of the dependent and helpless refugee, or the settled local, come into view.

The significance of the household space in these activities was introduced in Chapter 5 but elaborated on in Chapter 6 which focussed on the notion of home as global portal into which stories, experiences, memories and practices from other places and times (near and distant) are drawn, before emerging into other spaces reshaped and retold. It examined some potentially problematic issues around the retelling of personal stories

when we have individual responsibilities towards those who share them with us. How is this to be balanced with the potential power of individual narratives to change perceptions for others as they are passed on? The chapter highlighted how knowledges generated from the home and community spaces could strengthen individual challenges to racism. It showed how these small scale acts of welcome and knowledge production might, in small ways, challenge embedded notions of rurality by 'edging in' alternative stories that pick up on the heterogeneity, unexpectedness, and connectivity of rural places; characteristics that come in no small part through the phenomena of mobility and migration that underpin this study. Both these chapters present home and community spaces as key sites of informal learning and knowledge production through the encounters and literacies of doing that are at work within them. I argue that these practices, along with the learning and knowledges associated with them, move between spaces, mobilising narratives of welcome, migration and rurality as part of this flow.

Chapter 7 shifted attention to the Migrants Organise (MO) case study. What was brought to the fore here, through the processes and products of the postcard exchange, was the varied and complex ways that being in a place are experienced. These were shown to be strongly associated with feelings, everyday practices, memories and relationships. It showed how looking at these ways of 'being somewhere' can complicate ideas of distance and proximity as different spaces are brought together over temporal and spatial dimensions. There are also instances however where relation to place can accentuate the pain of distance and separation. These complexities showed participants' experiences and memories of rural Wales to be wide ranging and globally connected.

While participants acknowledged that time spent in rural settings, and memories of it, offered some form of respite from the city, it also highlighted other forms of respite such as a release from imposed identities. This chapter also unsettled ideas of a closeness to nature being the preserve of the rural as we saw people relating to nature in the city and also in their imaginary worlds. There was also evidence that repeated visits to the same place and a growing familiarity with named geographical features went some way to claiming rural space as somewhere these participants had a place in.

Finally, Chapter 8 followed what happened when the stories about place told through the postcards, were transferred collectively from a domestic environment into a more public, but still rural, village setting to form an exhibition. It described what happened when a small number of MO participants returned for an event organised around the exhibition. This created an opportunity for new narratives to come into being as people attending found ways of being together through the literacies of doing that took place - such as viewing the exhibition, creating more postcards, and dancing. These activities were engaged in by people with a constellation of existing, renewed, new and changing relations to each other. It further illustrated the argument of the thesis that narratives move along with these kinds of practices into new spaces and encounters and develop and change as they do so. In this sense, narratives of welcome (and unwelcome), of refugee migration and settlement, and of rurality, are re/created and move in line with the mobility and development of the practices themselves over time and space. It reinforced the idea of expecting the unexpected in a global sense of rurality. It also introduced the idea of not only paying attention to what is mobilised but what is left behind in a place – even 'in the air'.

What these chapters *all* contribute to is a rethinking of relations of hospitality which breaks links with notions of integration and emphasises instead how places and people come into being through the encounters and practices of creating spaces of welcome and finding ways of being together. Finally then, I will draw together threads from these chapters in which ideas central to my research questions have been discussed.

As a reminder here are the research questions

- How do the groups of people in the case studies, encountering each other through expressions of welcome with and for refugees and asylum seeker migrants, make sense of the inequalities and differences between them in relation to their current social and economic position, their widely different experiences of mobility, their language histories, and their sense of familiarity with being in rural Wales?

- What relations of hospitality emerge through repeated encounters and developing relationships that sustain beyond the initial threshold of welcome?
- How do the activities that members of these groups engage in shape spaces, create knowledges and generate narratives about migration, welcome, and rurality?
- In what ways are narratives mobilised beyond these encounters?
- How do the processes at play in these encounters contribute to the writing of place?

There was evidence in the two case studies that people found ways of being together across inequalities and differences through encounters where they actively engaged in doing a variety of activities together. They developed 'literacies of doing' through participatory language practices that assembled both spoken and unspoken language resources. Through these practices shared spaces were created. These spaces were significant sites of informal learning and knowledge production where, working with the resources that were collectively available, people were able to move from positions of not-knowing to knowing (for example about cultural differences, inequalities, rural Wales, Syria, people's different ways of relating to place). These knowledges allowed fuller, more dynamic, and more nuanced pictures of people, places, cultures and individual personhoods to emerge. Individual and collective practices, built around both everyday and more organised events, allowed the development of more sustained relationships in and across the spaces of hospitality in which they took place. Notions of hospitality to the 'stranger' moved beyond fixed identities and opened up new possibilities for ways of thinking and acting. I propose that through these temporary though often repeated encounters, and the practices, learning, and knowledge production associated with them, that people were able to make more sense of the inequalities woven into their interactions and relations with each other. This 'making sense of' does not offer easy solutions and there is potential for reinscribing as well as unsettling the existing power dynamics of these interactions. I think however that, through these encounters, people became more aware of that potential and were attentive to it. The evidence highlighted the responsibilities people have towards others

in sharing new knowledges and narratives and attention to this may also be part of a process by which individuals try and make sense of the relations between them.

I was able to follow the development of these activities and relations over time and see how social relations changed, though always within the context of inequalities that were in place before people encountered each other, and continued into the spaces created by these intersections of 'stories so far'. Of particular interest for this thesis is how relations of hospitality changed. While there are material aspects of welcome, related to people's social and economic status, that clearly impact the particular kinds of hospitality that can be offered, the research showed evidence that there are many forms of welcome and hospitality that work outside these restrictions and allowances. It was also evident that relations of hospitality did not flow in one direction, or in a simple two directional exchange of reciprocity. They were much more complex and changeable than this. Overall, looking at how power dynamics and knowledge production played out over time, beyond the threshold of the initial encounter of welcome, we see binary markers such as guest/host, migrant/non-migrant, local/stranger relations become less relevant or useful to describe what is happening and what matters about these encounters.

The research evidence showed how modes of encounter, and practices grounded in responses of welcome, move between local spaces of activism and sociality, developing, reshaping and being reshaped as they do so. I have put forward the idea that the flows of these people, practices and objects into new spaces and encounters *are* in an important sense narratives. Understood as narratives they are recreated, reshaped, and retold through both spoken and unspoken language practices moving from space to space, and also in more intangible ways, by leaving traces in place. Stories are put into dialogue with others as new encounters take place in different spaces - the hairdresser, the market, during the monthly village walk, at more organised public events, in the landscapes of hillsides, as well as in virtual spaces. Now, in this thesis, the stories are put into conversation with academic literature and theory.

I have made the case that, rather than focussing on what is 'produced', what matters is the *creation* of these spaces of encounter where expected and unexpected, planned

and unplanned things can happen through the literacies of doing I have described. They open up possibilities for ways of being together and they set things in motion, though we don't know where things might go. As Angharad Closs Stephens puts it, in the context of dance performance but I think definitely applicable to the context here, what is important is that this kind of activism: "addresses the political by asking how we build spaces where other forms of being with others can emerge" (Closs Stephens 2022 p130/31)

Taking spoken and unspoken language as a participatory process I chose the term 'literacies of doing' to incorporate ideas of both the reading and *writing* of place. It is the new formations, practices, knowledges and narratives of the encounters studied in this research - the creation of new literacies - that contribute to this shaping of place. Focussing on home and community spaces in particular, the evidence has suggested that stories, experiences, memories and practices which have global genealogies and current transnational connections, cross temporal and spatial dimensions as they are drawn into these apparently 'out of the way', local or intimate spaces. Ideas of place, of distance and proximity, of home and away from home, were seen to be closely allied with feelings, practices and relationships rather than location. Understood in this way, spaces of rurality begin to be seen as connected with a multiplicity of other places and times rather than as fixed, bordered or isolated. As such, small scale local acts of welcome can be seen to challenge embedded notions of rurality and, importantly, contribute to a writing of rural place that includes stories of migrants and migration. The narratives of welcome for refugee migrants which have been highlighted in this study, push for a more holistic view of complex and changing migrant identities and contribute to the building and shaping of a landscape where migration is a real aspect of rural life. The narratives shared about the countryside as a place of respite do not preclude it also being dynamic, heterogeneous, and globally connected. This is significant because it helps disrupt notions of what is and is not considered out of place in the countryside, often linked to rural racism and an unwelcome reception for noticeably racialised and minoritised people.

I argue that my emphasis on literacies of doing comes with a decentring of competence in the dominant language of English as a signifier of what is considered to be a desirable

integration by those driving discourses of refugee migration; an integration that is often considered as the step expected, or even owed, after welcome. The arguments of this thesis have consistently steered away from notions of integration and focussed on how people find ways of being together that are new formations more collectively created. It has been concerned with how people seek to do this through what Ahmed (2000) describes as more ethical and generous encounters amid the tensions of inequality and in the particularity of a rural but globally connected setting. It has argued that these fleeting or more enduring collectivities or social and cultural formations, assembled in improvised and creative ways, and deploying a collage of participatory linguistic repertoires are active in the *writing* of place. My conclusions are not so much about what might be counted as degrees of success or failure in this process, but about the processes at play that can make or allow this to happen. What matters is that spaces and narratives are being created, and that they are generated from the ground up.

The encounters and practices examined here can be considered as overlooked in several senses. For example, the fact of rural refugee presence is sometimes unrecognised or even denied because of the persistent notion that migrant related activity is an issue (or framed as a problem) belonging primarily to the city. The 'literacies of doing' that are central to the thesis do not prioritise the formal learning of English and, as such, are less likely to be considered a significant contribution to integration and citizenship as understood in current political discourse. Finally, these practices characteristically move between the known and unknown, seen and unseen, too-ing and fro-ing between home, café, community venue and hillside. Mostly grounded in these more intimate, everyday domestic and community spaces rather than institutional ones, and in a rural rather than urban location, they don't get wide recognition.

I suggest, however, that there are benefits of being overlooked, of being under the radar. I am thinking here about how it might mean that the pitfalls of being appropriated by public bodies or government agencies are avoided. An example that has been given some attention in the study is the contrast between informal language learning and formal ESOL classes. Being 'left alone' might be a strength. On the one hand new cultural formations such as these go unrecognised, undervalued, overlooked

and unfunded (being run on volunteer resources and contributions) but on the other hand, free from being co-opted, they can be counted as cultures of resistance. These small scale, loose arrangements of people, unconnected with official welcome (or unwelcome) work outside the mainstream, particularly in their rural positioning. Unlike more closely recorded and monitored events and interactions, these activities and any impact they might have, is difficult to quantify. Where and how far the ripples of these stories, told through spoken and unspoken participatory practices go is difficult to know. In one sense they are very grounded in the everyday spaces of the home, in another they are 'in the air'.

I have consistently argued for the need to take account of wider power geometries; histories and current expressions of colonialism, racism, gendered oppressions and the inequalities of rampant global capitalism are always present and follow the practices studied here as they move between spaces in the ways I have discussed. These forces can be recognised and worked with or they can be (intentionally or unintentionally), denied, dismissed, or ignored. While they cannot be transcended, I suggest that the conceptualisation of acts of welcome as a mode of encounter, and the individual and collective responses pertaining to it in the form of the literacies of doing, can have an effect on how these inequities are recognised and taken into account. It is also the case that their effects can be locally resisted and opposed.

If we see these activities as to do with finding and developing solidarities (which I do) then I take solidarity, as Lola Olufemi does, to be a *doing* word (Olufemi 2020 p140). There is no 'blueprint', there is the possibility of harm that might occur; there is risk (incomparably more for some than others), it is messy and complicated. As Lola Olufemi suggests we are right to be "sceptical of clumsy mobilisations of solidary and attuned to its many failings" (p142). Resonating for me with Jenny Edkins' questions around what can be done, about the vital recognition of our interconnectedness, and the need for forms of solidarity based on a shared refusal of unjust governance, Olufemi suggests that "Perhaps a hopeful pessimism is our best chance – we organise across difference not because it solves our problems but because the visions we seek to enact must be able to account for everyone. We are too involved in one another's lives, for better or worse" (Olufemi 2020 p142). My study has shown that (imperfect) solidarities can be

found, even in fleeting moments, that are not based on a shared identity but on a desire for positive change wherever one has the scope to act, and with whatever resources are available.

Combining the themes of discussion together my final point is to argue that these gatherings of small numbers of people, in the home, the village, the town and hillside, should be considered political. This is because they bring together often unexpected formations of people, activities and objects in ways that question dominant narratives of welcome, migration and rurality. They are rich sites of informal learning and knowledge production around these three themes. I would argue that these ongoing acts of welcome can offer alternative ways of belonging and as such can be considered acts of citizenship that work outside formal or institutional governance. I propose that it is these modes of encounter based on responses of welcome, with the collage of developing social relationships and practices they entail, more than any fixed identities, or universalised notions of hospitality, that will influence narratives, possibilities, future trajectories and intersections, and potential solidarities. This brings me to my final comment that some of these futures interactions have already taken place since this study was completed. Though inevitably we need to isolate this window of research in order to complete it, the stories that started before it, and passed through this academic space, are now continuing beyond it.

Appendix A: Participant Consent Form: AToS creative session

Research Project – Welcome for Sanctuary Seekers in Rural Wales
Consent Form

Sarah Foster PhD student, Swansea University

Pictures of Welcome

Thank you for taking part in this research project. The aim of the project is to look at how people in smaller towns and villages outside the big cities in Wales, create welcome with and for people seeking sanctuary.

I am looking at Abergavenny and the surrounding area. The research looks at how the activities we do together create new stories about migration, welcome and belonging - for ourselves and more widely.

I am interested in the experiences you have had joining in AToS activities. This session is an opportunity to make pictures or write a few words about the things we have done together. And to talk while we make our pictures.

Our pictures will be used in my research project and I hope they will also be made into a display in Abergavenny to celebrate what we do.

I might take some notes in the session, but everything will be confidential, and no names will be used in the project.

It is fine to say no. It is also fine to change your mind and stop at any time.

I hope my research will be useful in different ways - not only in the academic world.

Please tick and sign if you want to join the project			
I understand the information I have been given about the project	I agree that Sarah Foster can use the images I give her for her research project	Name	Signature

Name of researcher: Sarah Foster Signature**:**

……

Date……..

Appendix B: Plan for AToS creative session

Creative session – plan

Welcome everyone

Aim is to make something in pictures and words about what we have done together with Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary.

We have lived here for different times, we have different languages, we have different experiences of moving from one place to another. - one city to another, one country to another. We all got here in very different ways and for different reasons but somehow now we are all here! In this small town, in the middle of the countryside, in Wales.

So it's about how people in a group, with very different histories and experiences get together now we are here in Abergavenny.

And although in conversation cafe we talk - we also DO a lot of things where we communicate in other ways - through cooking, eating, walking. I think it is interesting that these things we do are a kind of language too.

And now we can use the language of pictures to tell stories about what we have done together

These pictures are for my university project and also going to put them together in a collage...and frame them and display in Abergavenny - maybe the library.

No names will be used

You can stop anytime and you can say if you do not want me to use your picture.

I will come round with a form to sign. It explains the project (as I have just explained to you) and asks for your permission to use the pictures you give me. Please do ask if there is anything you don't understand

You can make just a picture. You can add some words. You can write in another language - Arabic, Welsh, anything else..
You can draw. You can cut and stick.
You do not have to be a good artist!

So I have made a list to help us think about the things we have done… but before I show my list maybe we can make on to get our memories and ideas going

List of things

- Cooking and eating
- Syrian suppers at community centre (various)
- Gardens

- Barbecues
- Clytha Open day

Events

- Syrian Suppers
- 5th anniversary
- School
- International women's day
- Banner making

Outings

- Farm park
- St Fagans
- Owl sanctuary
- Raglan castle

Walks

- Sugarloaf (various)

Camping

Conversation Cafe

- Community Centre
- Trading Post
- Linda Vista

With visitors

- Arts day (visitors from Cardiff)
- Sugarloaf walk with Oasis
- Other sugarloaf walks

Campaigns and awareness raising

- Donation collections and transportation
- Change the story - on the bridge
- Town centre - solidarity knows no borders
- Refugee Tales Cymru - we cannot walk alone
- Together with refugees - orange hearts

Personal things

- Parties, celebrations
- Behind the scenes

Also - Jan Thomas - (ask to borrow, ask to visit) has asked if we would like to make something from fabric..

Appendix C: Participant Information and Consent form for AToS interviews

Research Project – Welcome for Sanctuary Seekers in Rural Wales

Consent form

Sarah Foster PhD student, Swansea University

Thank you for taking part in this research project. The aim of the project is to highlight and explore how people in smaller towns and villages outside the big cities in Wales, create welcome with and for people seeking sanctuary.

My focus is on Abergavenny and the surrounding area. The research looks at how the activities we do together create new stories of migration, welcome and belonging - for ourselves and more widely.

I am interested to hear your thoughts and feelings about the experiences you have had joining in AToS activities.

I have some prepared questions I'd like to ask but we can also talk about other things that you think are important to say about the subject.

If it's Ok with you I will record the conversation. This is only so I can play it back later and take notes. It will NOT be shared with anyone and I will delete it when I have taken the notes. If you do not want to be recorded that's also fine - I can take notes as we speak.

Everything will be confidential, and no names will be used in the project.

It is fine to say no. It is also fine to change your mind and stop at any time. If there are any questions you don't want to answer - that's fine too.

I hope my research will be useful in different ways - not only in the academic world.

There are also some creative sessions planned for people who would like to make pictures or write a few words about the things we have done together. This will be made into a display in Abergavenny to celebrate what we do. This consent form covers those sessions too.

Please tick the boxes below and sign the form if you agree to take part.	Yes	No
I understand the information above		
I agree to an interview with Sarah Foster		
It's fine to record the interview		
I would prefer you to take notes		

Name of participant: …… Signature: ……

Name of researcher: Sarah Foster Signature: ……

Date: ……..

Appendix D: AToS interview questions

Interview questions

Research questions
How do gatherings of people, encountering each other through blends of spoken and unspoken language, make meanings and create knowledges about migration, welcome and belonging for themselves and each other?

How do they make sense of the inequalities between them, particularly in relation to experience of mobility?

How are new meanings mobilised or activated beyond the encounter itself, what gets told or not told, recounted, or not recounted, through the literacies of these different practices?

Do they say/tell things about migration that might otherwise be overlooked or unidentified?

Introduction to the research project.
We have lived here for different times, we have different languages, we have different experiences of moving from one city or country to another. But somehow now we are all here! In this small town, in the middle of the countryside, in Wales.
I'm interested in how people in a group, with very different histories and experiences get together here in Abergavenny.

Although in Conversation Café, and other socializing, we talk - we also DO a lot of things where we communicate in other ways - not just through spoken language not just through English language. We communicate through cooking, eating, walking, music, dancing. I think it is interesting that these things we do are a kind of language too.

I'm thinking about all aspects of what AToS does

- events for the group – BBQs, camping, walks, outings - farm, owl sanc, St Fagans
- Conversation Cafe - ACC, Trading Post, Linda Vista
- visitors - Oasis walk, arts day
- public events - Syrian supper, 5 year anniversary, international women's day, new MMCA event, Newport
- behind the scenes - individual help/appointments/forms/business/
- relationships/friendships
- campaigning/awareness raising

Questions

Intro
What has been your involvement with Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary? What activities have you been most involved in? What is important about it to you?

Connecting

We all have different experiences of life here and in other places, very different experiences of migration, and very different experiences of language.

I'm interested to know how you think people with such different experiences connect through the things we do together.

How do we make sense of the differences?
Are there any ways in which the activities highlight differences?

Ideas of welcome

Many of the activities are organised around the idea of welcome.

In what ways do you think people involved in the group both create welcome and/or feel welcome (or not)?

Who is creating welcome - who is feeling welcome?
Is it always the same people doing the welcome and the same people receiving the welcome?
Are there any times when we could say that this relationship is changed or reversed?

What stories are we creating and telling

*As I mentioned - although we use spoken language we also **do** things*

How do you think the 'doing' works - how does it help us to say, tell things that would not be possible through speaking.

Rural setting

What difference (if any) do you think it makes that these activities take place in a more rural setting (outside the city - in a small town)?

Are ideas and activities around migration, welcome and belonging different?
Is our response, the way we do things different because of where we are?

What is created and mobilised?

I think of what we do as quite a creative process – we make new connections, stories, understandings, ways of saying and doing things.

What kinds of things do you think are created through these ways of being together?

This could be feelings, objects, stories, relationships, understandings and meanings, language, ways of being together, knowledges.

Our activities are very small scale and local but in what ways do you think the stories we make about welcome, belonging, migration might reach beyond us?

Maybe that's not important?

Unexpected

Are there any moments or experiences that stand out or are particularly special for you?
What are the expected or unexpected things that you have experienced?

Representation

What do you think are the best ways of telling the story of these activities and connections?
What is the story you would like people to hear?

Appendix E: MO Information and consent form.

Picture Postcard Conversations - Project Information Sheet

Introduction

Hello……..

I hope you are well. As part of my PhD studies at Swansea University I am doing a research project. I'd like to introduce my project and invite you to take part.

The project is about how refugees and migrants, have made connections with people and places in the countryside in Wales. I hope to find out about people's experiences of these encounters.

Because of the Covid19 pandemic, visits and activities have been interrupted. I'm interested in how we can stay connected with these people and places. The project offers ways of re/connecting with people now, through sending and receiving postcards

At the end of the project some of the postcards will be collected and displayed, so more people can find out about these experiences and connections. The images and writing on the cards will also be used for my academic research and writing.

Invitation

As you came to stay with us in Abergavenny, I am inviting you to take part in the project. I would love to hear from you, and I would really value your contribution.
But it's fine to say no. It's also fine to say yes now but change your mind later. You can stop any time.

What happens?

If you decide to take part, all you need to do is write your card(s) and find a post box. Everything you need is provided - instructions, cards, envelopes, stamps, are all included.

If you want to, you can join a creative Zoom session where we can make postcards together. It would also be great to speak to some of you on the phone /WhatsApp/Zoom so we can talk more about our postcards. If you are interested, I can give you information about that later.

I hope, when it is safe, there will be another opportunity for you to visit Wales!

Things you need to know

No names of individuals will be used. All information you give will be anonymous. Any names on signed postcards will be covered up if they are later displayed. If there is something you do not want me to use, that's fine - just let me know.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Many thanks,

Sarah Email: [redacted] Phone/WhatsApp: [redacted]

Picture Postcard Conversations - Consent form

It is important that you understand everything before you agree to take part.
Please read the Information Sheet and then tick and sign below if you agree.
Please keep the Information Sheet.
Please sign and return this sheet in the envelope with your postcard.

Please tick box

1. I have read the information sheet and I understand it ☐
2. I know I can contact Sarah Foster and ask questions if I want to, before I sign. ☐
3. I understand that I can stop participating at any time. ☐
4. I agree that any writing or images I give to Sarah Foster can be used in the study unless I ask for it not to be included. ☐
5. I understand that my contribution will be anonymous (my name will not be used) ☐
6. I agree to take part in the project. ☐

Name _____ Signature _____Date _____

For researcher only.

Received by Researcher

Name _____ Signature _____ Date ___

Appendix F: Instructions for MO Postcard Project

Hello, thanks for agreeing to send a postcard. Here are some instructions and ideas.

Appendix G: Postcard Conversation with Participant 5

The first card in this exchange was written on St David's day (the patron saint of Wales), and includes a mention and a sketch of daffodils (the symbol of the day). The correspondence developed around flowers, trees and cultivation – from the garden to Mars!

After voicing an appreciation of the rural landscape, interest moves towards what is around in the city – nature is not absent in urban spaces.

Elements of nature close at hand in the city, were of particular significance during Covid lockdown. Through its WhatsApp "Resilience Festival' group, the wider Migrants Organise community encouraged members to make use of any small green spaces available to them.

The conversation here encompasses nature from the local and everyday to the imaginary and otherworldly.

Great care has been taken in creating layered collaged images .

The conversation reaches a natural close with wishes for a good summer

Appendix H: Invitations and brochure for exhibition

Picture Postcards Exhibition

A display of postcards exchanged with members of London based group *Migrants Organise*, remembering their experiences of visiting Llanvapley.

A chance to make your own postcard about Llanvapley and the surrounding area (or anywhere else you choose!) Catch a movement / dance session in beautiful surroundings (times for these to be confirmed - for contact see below).

Refreshments available

Saturday 7th May 2022 2 pm - 5 pm
Sunday 8th May 2022 10.30 am - 12.30 pm

Llanvapley Pavilion
Llanvapley
Abergavenny
NP7 8SH

Parking on site

For further information, please contact:
sarahafoster@googlemail.com

Arddangosfa o Gardiau Post

Arddangosiad o gardiau post wedi'u cyfnewid ag aelodau'r grŵp o Lundain *Migrants Organise*, gan gofio eu profiadau o ymweld â Llanfable.

Cyfle i greu eich cerdyn post eich hun am Lanfable a'r cyffiniau (neu unrhyw le o'ch dewis!) a chymryd rhan mewn sesiwn symud / ddawnsio mewn amgylchoedd hardd (mae amserau'r rhain i'w cadarnhau - am fanylion cyswllt, gweler isod).

Lluniaeth ar gael

Dydd Sadwrn 7 Mai 2022 2 pm - 5 pm
Dydd Sul 8 Mai 2022 10.30 am - 12.30 pm

Pafiliwn Llanfable
Llanfable
Y Fenni
NP7 8SH

Parcio ar y safle

Am ragor o wybodaeth, e-bostiwch:
sarahafoster@googlemail.com

migrants organise

Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

Invitation delivered to local houses, emailed and in village newsletter

WELCOME!

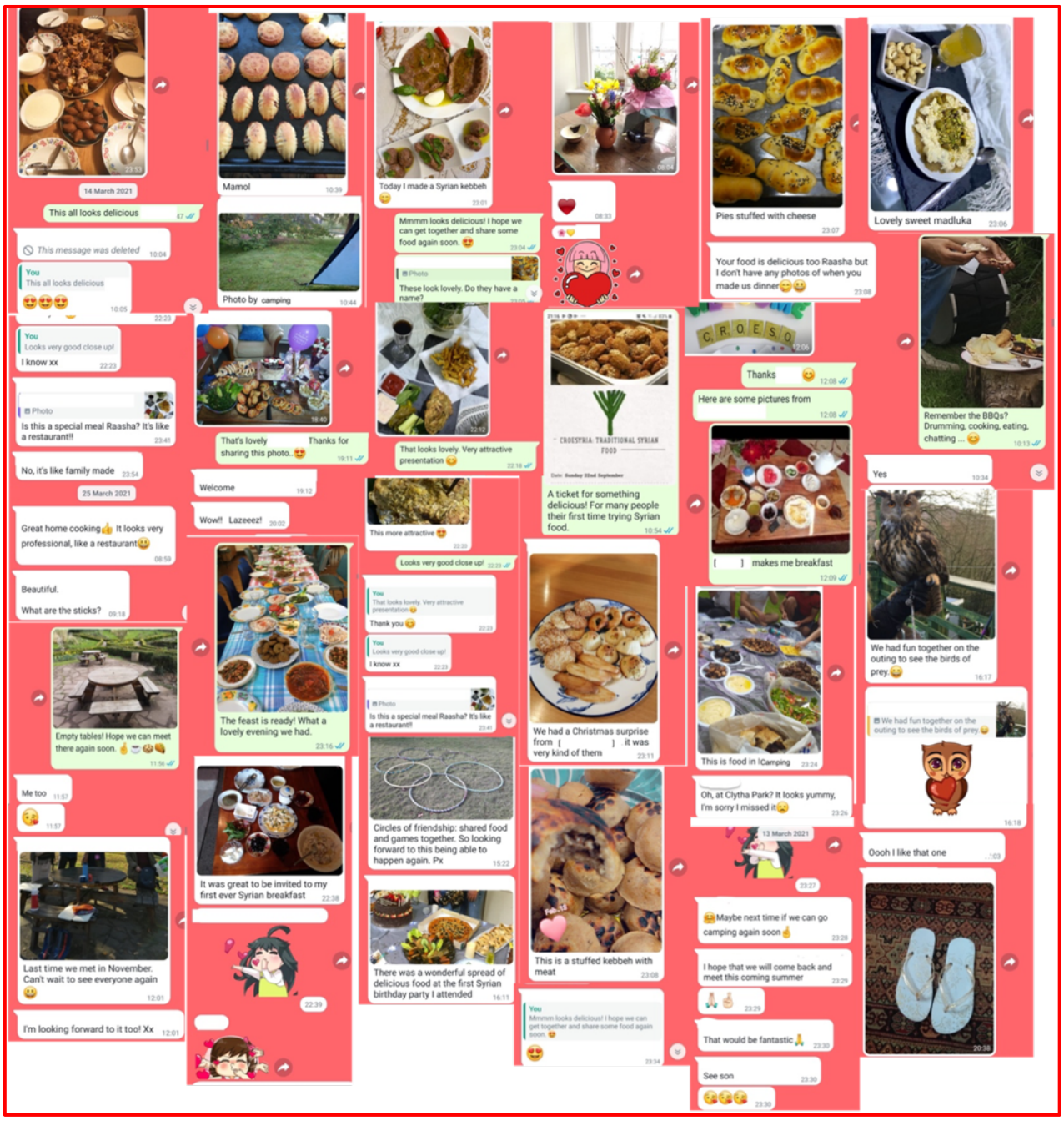
You are invited to….

- ☐ look at the display of postcards
- ☐ read the booklets available
- ☐ make your own postcard about visiting or living in Llanvapley (or any other place you choose!)
- ☐ add some writing or drawing about today on the big paper
- ☐ have a cup of tea and a chat
- ☐ walk around the field and the village

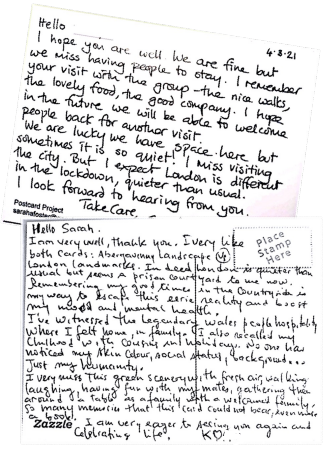
Welcome and invitation message for visitors to exhibition

Brochure for Picture Postcard Exhibition

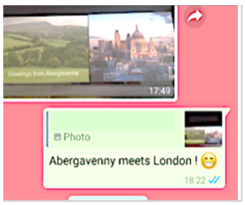
Appendix I: WhatsApp threads from AToS Case Study



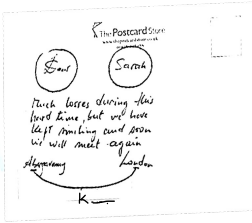
Appendix J: Postcard Conversation with participant 4.

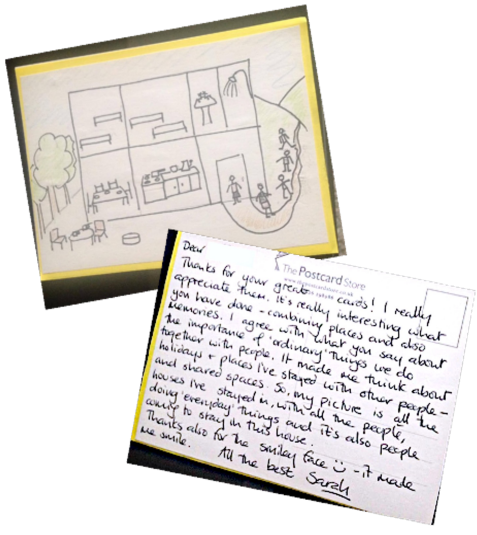


As well as striking descriptions of London in lockdown, and memories of place as a resource for mental wellbeing, the ideas and feelings about place that circulate within this conversation, opened up possibilities of thinking about place/s in new ways



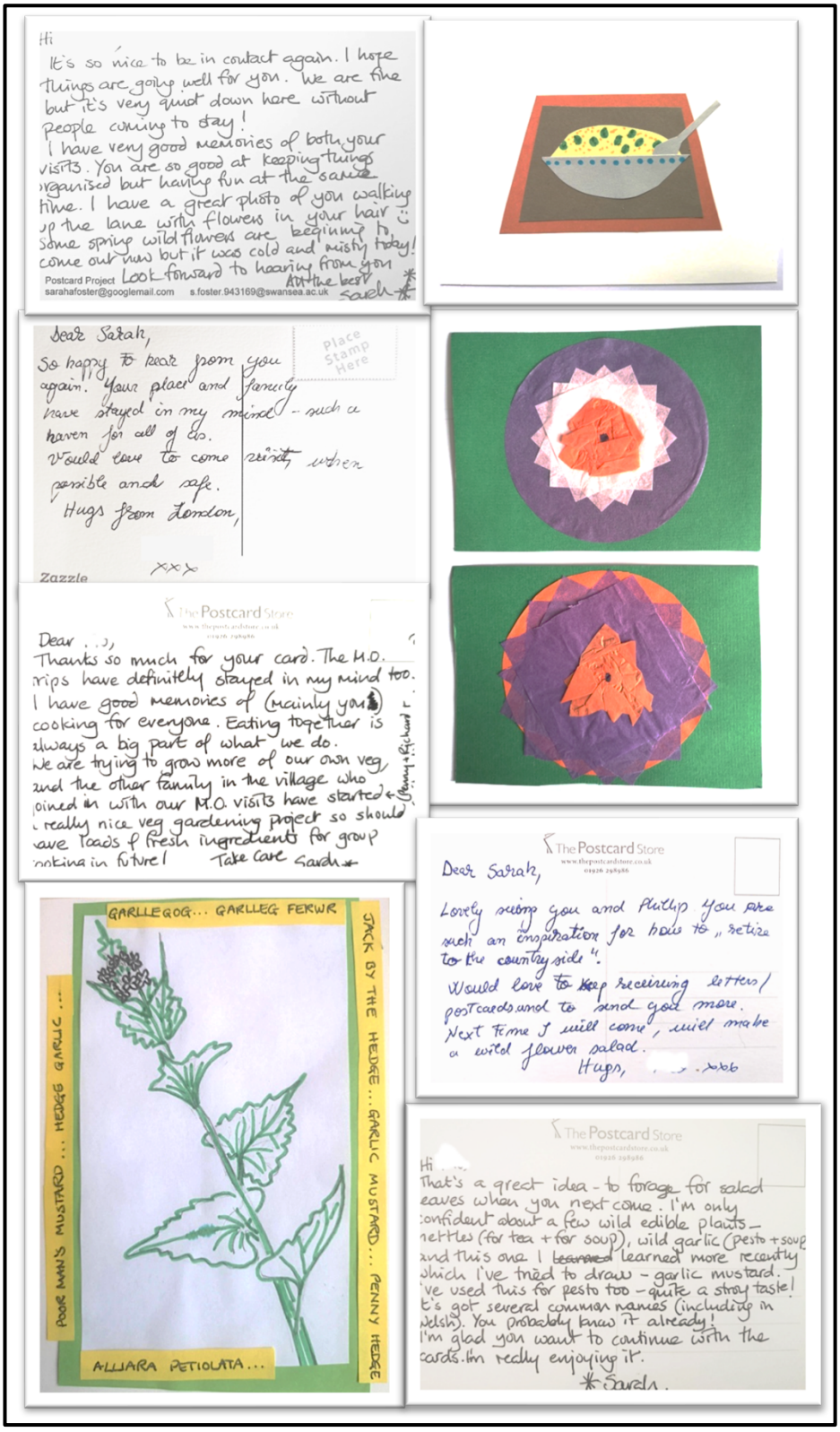
The conversations builds on the theme of connections between different places and times, and the feelings and memories associated with them.
My drawing is of simple linear connections and my writing is about obvious contrasts between places. The response moves way beyond this, combining image and text to represent much more complex ideas about place; the possibility of a merging of places - like a double exposure, and the idea of being positioned in between places.





There is a suggestion that feelings of home and belonging are engendered by what we do as much as where we are, with particular significance given to the feelings arising from everyday activities with others and from being recognised simply for one's humanity.

Appendix K: Postcard Conversation with Participant 6



Appendix L: Notes on attendees at the Postcards Exhibition

Some of the people who came to the postcard exhibition – from notes (mainly) written just after the event

So glad that P, A and L (sometimes co-hosts) came both days and wanted to stay and be part of it.

The first people to turn up were only wanting to know where to park for the church! They came back later as the exhibition had been announced there (probably by L) which was nice.

There were a couple I didn't know who live in the village. By own admission don't do much in the village. They said this when I apologised for not recognising them. They didn't recognise me either. Nice that they chose this event to join in with.

S and N reconnected with C - they'd worked together in the past. N chatted to P1. Both joined in the dancing (they'd seen it from the pub the day before). C also reconnected with R – past adult education links

Two friends brought their grown up sons which was nice. One disappeared to make a drawing of the church for his postcard, (which was later requested for use in the parish magazine)

B and D brought friends they had staying. C said he was moved by what was written on the cards. He asked if they were Syrian - maybe getting mixed up with AToS. They chatted to P1. Their friends spend **a lot of time and care making cards.**

A couple who are quite active and with some status in village life, came in response to the church announcement, stayed only very briefly and looked uninterested if not uncomfortable when they realised the topic of the display.

Two village residents were doing some noisy work in the corner of the field which was competing at one point with the dance music. When they finished, they drove their van across the field past the pavilion as if nothing was happening.

AToS friends came (volunteers not resettled families)

K from London surprised the MO members. They didn't know her connection with me – they know her as an MO ESOL teacher

My life writing teacher came and others discovered that they were also in her classes. I talked to her daughter – we have a study related connection– I was an interviewee for her project

Spoke with G and J about mobilities and injustices

The vicar came –she was interested, she asked about Ukrainians. I had been invited to talk about AToS at the carol service the previous Christmas – the church collection to be donated to AToS, but Covid cancelled it.

I couple from a village a few miles up the road came – not sure how they heard about it. The man worked in theatre (not sure why that came up) and was keen to talk.

P4 and P7 spent time sitting on the veranda, making cards, or dancing. I wonder if they enjoyed the more private time of their stay – revisiting the house, visiting our friends in the village, walking round their garden, eating together, taking about their experiences of farming and growing things.

There were lots of others unrecorded. A few people I hoped would come didn't make it

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