Creative Writing as a Socially Contextualised Practice: A Narrative Inquiry into Supporting Refugee Social Integration through Non-formal Education in England

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Declaration

Statement of Originality
I declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The material (presented as my own) has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for a degree at any other institution

Parts of this work have been published as conference proceedings in national conferences:

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role of creative writing groups as a platform for non-formal education in supporting the social integration of adult refugees in England. Grounded in the Social Identity Approach to Health and Well-being and the Writer Identity Theory, the study examines participants' perspectives on their sense of self, social support, and agency to resist stigma within their host society. A qualitative, narrative inquiry was conducted with 11 refugees in England, aged 20–50, from eight African and Middle Eastern countries. The dataset comprised 21 in-depth interviews and 33 creative writing samples, offering rich insights into participants' experiences.

This research addresses a critical gap in refugee studies by prioritising refugee voices and exploring underexamined areas of meaning, support, and agency within creative writing groups, while uniquely incorporating creative writing samples to provide a deeper understanding of participants' experiences.

Three key findings suggest that, first, creative writing groups provide a reflective space for refugees to develop a positive sense of self and improve their well-being. Second, they offer critical social support and a space for shared identity as refugees and writers which strengthens bonds and reduces isolation, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Third, participation enables refugees to gain agency, reframe their identities, resist stigma, and enhance social integration within host societies.

The thesis establishes two innovative perspectives by integrating the Social Identity Approach and the Writer Identity Theory. It first demonstrates that refugees can create new social identities through a common fate. It also extends understanding of creative writing groups beyond their role as social cure spaces, revealing potential social curse processes, not only in social support but also in the dimensions of meaning and agency. The study provides evidence for the role of non-formal education and creative arts in refugees' integration, providing valuable insights for initiatives supporting refugees' empowerment and social inclusion.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to those who profoundly shaped my academic journey.

To my late father, Dr. Afif Budair, who accompanied me through the first year of this PhD, always eager to read my writings on refugees, yet left this world before witnessing its completion.

To my mother, Sabah Baker, who has always been my source of strength, unconditional love and prayers.

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This thesis presents a story of patience, consistency, and growth.

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Abbreviations

UK: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
SIA: Social Identity Approach
SIT: Social Identity Theory
SIMIC: Social Identity Model of Identity Change

Chapter 1: Introduction

This is the bridge of vision
Built of desire and belief and time
I built this bridge with hope and education
I built it with responsibility
This is the bridge of vision
- George

1.1. Overview

This thesis investigates the role of creative writing groups in supporting the social integration of refugees and asylum seekers in England. Grounded in the Social Identity Approach (SIA) prevalent in health studies, the Social Cure perspective suggests that social identities, which are shaped by group memberships, can have a positive impact on an individual's well-being and provide meaning, support, and agency (Jetten, Haslam and Alexander 2012). However, refugees and asylum seekers often face significant challenges, including social stigma, which can lead to exclusion, marginalisation and reduced access to resources (Fino 2024). Social stigma may intensify feelings of isolation, making it more difficult for refugees to integrate into host communities (Toyoki and Brown 2014).

This thesis adopts a narrative approach to understand the perspectives of adult refugees and asylum seekers on their social integration and the potential of creative writing groups to provide a platform for refugees and asylum seekers to resist social stigma, empower them to reclaim their voices and challenge dominant narratives. This thesis focuses on creative writing groups for refugees and asylum seekers in England, acknowledging that support levels and related funding in other UK-devolved regions may differ (Bouttell 2023). Moreover, as a researcher, approaching regions like Scotland and Wales presents challenges due to logistical barriers and differences in access, which further influenced the decision to focus this study on England. Nonetheless, understanding the challenges and successes in England could help inform and shape similar efforts in other regions of the UK.

This chapter explores and consolidates the definition of a refugee as a key term and the complexity of the refugee category, followed by the contextual background of the study in three areas: social integration of refugees from the United Kingdom (UK) government's perspective considering English integration policies and debates in the field, adult education in refugee communities in England and art projects for refugees.

The remainder of this chapter discusses the significance and aims of the study, along with a brief overview of the theoretical framework. Finally, the chapter presents my position as a researcher and outlines the remaining chapters.

1.2. Definition of a Refugee

The UK and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) currently adopt the 1951 UN Convention definition relating to the status of refugees as follows:

> A refugee is someone who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (Home Office 2021:4).

The Refugee Convention 1951 should also include those who left for other reasons, such as environmental disasters (Goodwin-Gill, McAdam and Dunlop 2021; Marshall 2011). As this study is UK-based, it is imperative to consider the 1951 definition adopted by the Home Office (2021), which forms the basis for determining whether a person is a refugee and, hence, can apply for resettlement. In the UK, a person is granted the status of a refugee, which allows them to live for a certain period or permanently in the country.

In this thesis, I use *refugees* as a broader term that combines *asylum seekers* and *refugees*. I am aware of the contested nature of the term *refugee* to many other related terms e.g. "internally displaced people, stateless persons, returned refugees" as indicated by the UK and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2023:5). Bouttell (2023) argues that there are no distinctive definitions between a *refugee* or an *asylum seeker*—a person who has applied for asylum but has not had their refugee status recognised yet—and a *migrant*—a person who has changed place of residence—as they overlap and change depending on context. Regardless, researchers must acknowledge that beyond this terminology, all groups face difficulties and home loss. Data generation for this research project took place in a creative writing group for refugees and asylum seekers in England, as will be discussed in Chapter 4. Because the term *refugee is* the

most commonly used term among the participants of this research project, I have adopted it for this study. I will only refer to asylum seekers when it is essential to highlight that they have not yet obtained their official refugee status.

However, the category of *refugee* is connected to racial and socio-political hierarchies (Zetter 2007). Historically, the term was used within international law to initiate actions taken for humanitarian purposes, but it is becoming shaped by social and political factors that racialise certain groups (Zetter 2007). Fee (2025) argues that the *refugee* label can persist as a socially constructed identity given by host communities regardless of legal status or resettlement. This identity is shaped by racialised and class-based assumptions which makes refugees to be perceived through a lens of foreignness and exclusion (Fee 2025). Furthermore, racialisation plays a central role in shaping the lived experiences of refugees and it refers to the process by which individuals or groups are given racial meaning and subjected to unequal treatment due to "global racial and cultural hierarchies" (Coen 2024:2) .As Coen (2024) shows in her comparison of the different treatment of Ukrainian and Afghan refugees in the US that the cultural differences and similarity often determine the level of welcome and support afforded to displaced people. While Ukrainian refugees were considered civilised and deserving of protection, Afghan refugees were framed as potential security threats requiring further restrictions. Rajaram (2018) explains this difference in treatment in Europe reflects their position of refugees within racial and class hierarchies under capitalism, so those from racialised groups are seen as vulnerable and unproductive and therefore less worthy of support in systems that prioritise profit over people.

In the context of the UK, Hirsch (2019) demonstrates how the asylum system in Britain is part of a wider racial state that regulates who belongs through racialised border controls; for example, refugees from Tamil were as less worthy of protection and burdensome in compare to refugee from Vietnam. In countries such as, Sweden, Wettergren and Wikström (2014) illustrate that Somali asylum seekers face exclusion and stereotypes that implicitly question the legitimacy of their claims. These examples point to the concept of global colour line which indicates that the processes of racialisation policy decisions, eligibility for protection, and everyday encounters (Du Bois cited in Coen 2024).

Migration research often overlooks how these groups are affected by inequality and struggle to gain value as human beings within capitalist structures (Rajaram 2018). Recognising the complexity and contested nature of the *Refugee* category is essential for

understanding the ways in which refugee identities are constructed, negotiated, and experienced in host societies.

1.3. Context of the Study

1.3.1. Social Integration of Refugees

The UK has a longstanding tradition of offering shelter to people who are escaping war and conflict. This thesis focuses on non-formal education in refugee community organisations, which is delivered in workshops or short courses and is open to all age groups and does not lead to formal qualification (Yasunaga 2014). Barriers to integration have made the role of refugee community organisations, charity organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) vital to supporting refugees (The Sisters Not Strangers Coalition 2020). This section outlines the contested nature of integration, critical debates on integration in the UK, and discuss the government's policy position.

Definitions

Integration is often described as an active process involving measures that help refugees learn the language and culture of their host country and access employment and social support circles (The Sisters Not Strangers Coalition 2020). The integration of refugees is generally a long process, and each individual has a different perspective on the meaning of integration. However, the concept of integration is highly contested. While it is frequently presented in policy discourse as a neutral or inclusive goal, integration can often be confused with assimilation (Bloemraad, et al. 2023). Assimilation is the stage where refugees are expected to adopt the norms and values of the host society without recognition of their cultural identities (Šolcová 2024). Bloemraad, et al. (2023:1) asserts that "successful integration does not require cultural assimilation".

Furthermore, Klarenbeek (2021) defines integration as a two-way process and argues that integration should be viewed as a relational process involving mutual adaptation between immigrants and the host society, emphasising the need to move beyond one-way assimilationist approaches. An earlier study by Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx (2016) indicates that integration is a three-way process involving the migrant, host society, and the country of origin. However, responsibility often falls on refugees (neighbourly lab 2024). In this sense, integration can be experienced as a form of pressure or control, especially when linked to conditional access to rights or services. Dwyer (2009) notes that while some refugees understand integration as a welcoming process, others experience it as a burden and something they are expected to achieve on their own, often under difficult conditions. Scholars have increasingly called for a rethinking of

integration as a multidirectional and relational process rather than a linear journey; integration can be understood as a set of negotiated practices shaped by context, identity, and power relations (Abdelhady and Norocel 2023).

This thesis adopts a refugee-centred perspective to explore how individuals understand and experience integration. The focus is on how refugees perceive and experience integration and the potential of creative writing groups to provide spaces to navigate their life in the host country.

Shifts and Tensions in the UK Integration Debates

The UK's approach to immigration, especially accepting refugees, has sparked substantial debate, influenced by historical geopolitical shifts and economic conditions in the country (Kilkey and Ryan 2021). Over time, migration discussions under various governments have become intertwined with social and economic anxieties. The UK governments have navigated varying degrees of openness and restriction towards immigration. While Tony Blair's government took relatively inclusive steps in the early 2000s by facilitating immigration for economic growth, subsequent administrations shifted towards more restrictive policies. Under David Cameron's leadership, the government committed to reducing net migration, marking a more conservative approach to immigration that continued through the Brexit era and beyond (Mölder 2018). Kilkey and Ryan (2021) describe how the path of migration policy in the UK has created a climate of fear and insecurity among refugees and asylum seekers. This atmosphere has fuelled a discourse in which immigration is framed less as a humanitarian responsibility and more as a pressing social and economic issue. Their analysis highlights how political events, particularly Brexit, have intensified anxieties around belonging, rights, and security, complicating the migration experience and positioning it within broader socio-economic concerns (Kilkey and Ryan 2021).

The shifting UK approach to refugee integration is related to a wider European context in which integration policies are often linked to national security concerns. According to Rottmann (2023:2), forced migration policies in the UK have been increasingly shaped by the politics of belonging, a concept that entails that the belonging of migrants is affected by "policies and national political debates" in media and public in host countries. For example, the UK's focus on gaining refugee status before being allowed to work affects the way media and society presents migrants as threat or dependant on government funds. Hence, national media and political discourse play a significant role in shaping public perceptions of refugees and their integration. The portrayal of refugees in the media as a burden on the welfare system or as threats to

national security further complicates the integration process where refugees face legal and societal barriers to feel integrated (Rottmann 2023). Additionally, Scholten et al., (2017:3) address that the UK has faced a shift of policy towards migrants by "mainstreaming migrant integration" which means moving from policies focused on specific groups to broader and more inclusive policies. Consequently, while these policies aim for inclusivity, they may neglect the specific challenges and contributions of migrant populations (Scholten, Collett and Petrovic 2017).

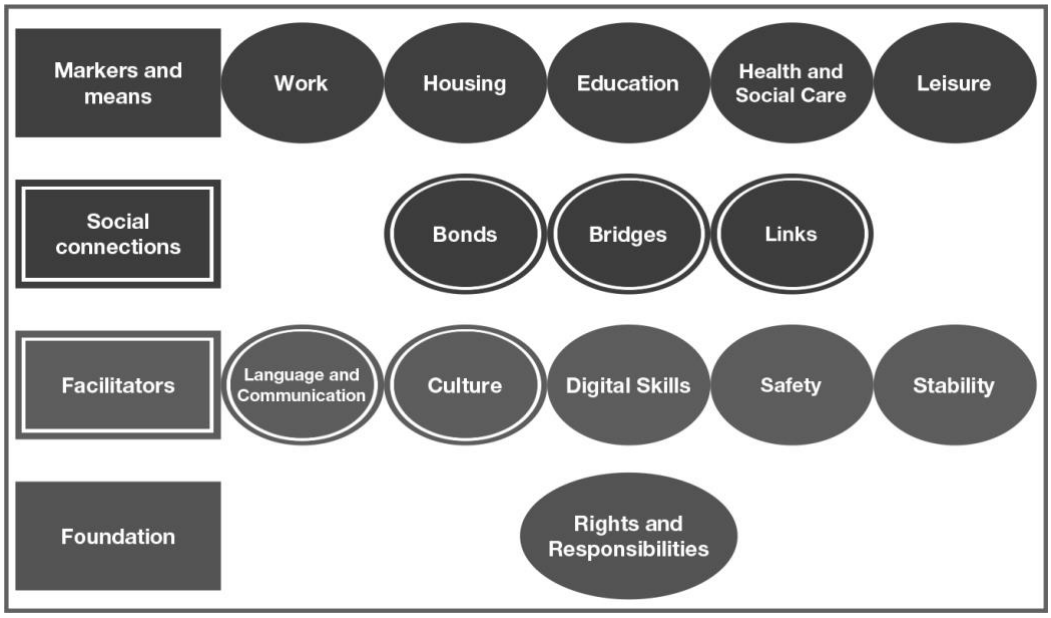
Recent policy developments further highlight the complexities of refugee integration in the UK. The termination of the Refugee Employability Programme, which was initially designed to assist refugees in learning English and securing employment presents the shifting priorities within government initiatives (Kendix 2024). Additionally, Glasgow City Council has expressed concerns that the asylum system is placing increasing pressure on the city's services and potentially harming social cohesion; The council highlights that recent changes in asylum claim processing have led to a significant increase in homeless refugees (Brooks 2025). Overall, the UK's refugee integration policies continue to be shaped by shifting political landscapes, economic concerns and public perceptions. As the UK's post-Brexit political climate further complicates these dynamics (Kilkey and Ryan 2021), the challenge remains to develop an inclusive and cohesive approach to refugee integration that addresses the legal and social dimensions of integration.

UK Government Integration Frameworks and Policies

From the perspective of the UK government, practical measures must be taken to integrate refugees into British society. Therefore, I refer to three recent governmental documents as they are the latest documents published by the government to discuss the topic of integration in England: (1) the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper (HM Government 2018); (2) the Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework (Ndofor-Tah, et al. 2019); and (3) the Integrated Communities Action Plan (HM Government 2019). The Home Office has published a framework that includes five integration indicators for refugees (Ndofor-Tah, et al. 2019). Before discussing the proposed framework, it is vital to introduce the meaning of the integration referenced in this framework. Integration reflects the vision of the government "for building integrated communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities"(HM Government 2019:5).

The Integration Framework, as outlined by Ndofor-Tah et al. (2019:15) and shown in Figure (1), comprises four key headings: "Markers and Means, Social Connections, Facilitators, and Foundation." Each heading includes various domains that assert integration is multidimensional and involves a range of factors, such as education and work (Markers and Means). Importantly, integration is also multidirectional, requiring the involvement of refugees, the host society, and the British government (Ndofor-Tah, et al. 2019).

Figure (1): Indicators of the integration framework



Source: Ndofor-Tah, et al. (2019:15) – *(Permission to reproduce granted by the Open Government Licence -To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3.)*

For this thesis, I specifically focus on the headings of Social Connections and Facilitators because they directly relate to the social integration of refugees through non-formal education within refugee community organisations. It is important to note that the education domain in the Markers and Means heading pertains to formal education, which is not the focus of this study.

(1) Social Connections Heading: This heading relates to SIA as the main theoretical framework of the study, which I discuss in Chapter 2. It can be subdivided into three domains as follows: Social Bonds domain refers to a shared sense of identity, the Social Bridges domain involves connecting individuals from diverse backgrounds, and the Social Links domain focuses on connecting individuals with local and governmental services, helping them integrate into their new society (Ndofor-Tah, et al. 2019).

(2) Facilitators Heading: This heading covers the Language, Communication, and Cultural domains. Both are essential to enhance social connections, directly enhancing the preceding heading of Social Connections. The data presented in (Chapters 5 to 7) reflect on these two headings and demonstrate how social connections and facilitation through language and culture contribute to the social integration of refugees.

Furthermore, the Integrated Communities Action Plan governmental report (2019:4) reflects on the importance of the Social Connections heading, asserting that "real integration does not just happen in action plans; it happens in our communities, neighbour to neighbour and day-to-day". This journey of investigating refugee non-formal education in community organisations also contributes to the UK government's vision of of integration (HM Government 2019):

> It is our commitment to building a fairer society where everyone can progress. It's a reflection of our belief that there is strength in diversity. No community should feel excluded, and everyone should understand and embrace the benefits and opportunities of a diverse society (4).

In the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper (2018:9), former Prime Minister Theresa May introduced the report by stating, "It's no surprise to me that 85% of people report belonging strongly to Britain, or that 81% agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together". However, he acknowledges that isolated communities began to form, which could result in increased division and misunderstanding in British society. Subsequently, the Integrated Communities Action Plan discusses places and communities where the government promises support to empower people and their local communities (HM Government 2019). This section highlights the importance of being heard as an active community member.

> We will ensure that community voices are heard and valued and produce change so that no community is left behind and that we strengthen work to enable people to recognise and value the common themes that bind places and people together, promote opportunity and celebrate the great neighbourhoods we live and work in (HM Government 2019:4).

Having a voice and being heard by the community are also vital elements of the existence of creative writing groups for refugees (Goodson 2017; Stickley, et al. 2019). While the Integration Action Plan and available statistics appear promising, this thesis is driven by

the belief that it is essential to understand what lies behind these numbers by inviting refugees to share their narratives and perspectives. Research suggests that adult refugees beyond school age may face limited, tailored support beyond English as second-language classes. Phillimore (2012) discusses the challenges in implementing effective integration programmes in the UK and argues that many adult refugees encounter barriers in accessing educational support. Furthermore, Strang and Ager (2010) highlight that for integration that involves more than just language acquisition, broader frameworks are required to address social connections, mental health, and community inclusion. Similarly, Morrice (2013) explores the educational journeys of adult refugees and reveals that the constraints in formal education and training pathways often restrict opportunities for meaningful engagement and personal development. Such insights highlight the day-to-day experiences of individuals such as Mary, a single mother without family or friends, or Maurice, who suffer from a severe back injury. For them, learning English is just one part of a more complex integration process. By focusing on personal stories, this study highlights areas of adult refugee support that could benefit from additional resources, ultimately helping to address the needs of adult refugees as they rebuild their lives in their host societies.

The next section examines the obstacles that adult refugees encounter when trying to access education in their host countries.

1.3.2. Challenges in Accessing Education Experienced by Refugees

The UK Refugee Resettlement Policy Guidance indicates that resettled individuals above 18 have the right to access schools, further and higher education through home fees and maintenance loans, and attend English as a second-language classes (Home Office 2021). According to this guidance (2021):

> The Home Office provides funding to supplement mainstream provision to enable adults resettled through the UKRS and Community Sponsorship schemes to access language tuition and integrate into the UK society. All adults arriving through the UKRS and Community Sponsorship Scheme anywhere in the UK should receive at least eight hours of English language tuition a week during their first year (13).

On the other hand, beyond compulsory school age, immigration status affects access to education (Refugee Education UK a). For example, asylum seekers must pay international fees or obtain scholarship to attend higher education. A further challenge for

asylum seekers was raised in July 2023 when the Home Office announced that asylum claims would be immediately rejected for anyone accessing the UK illegally, whether by crossing the British channel in boats or other means (Home Office 2024b). Although the intention was to encourage safe and legal routes, the decision has caused chaos and confusion for asylum seekers and even hesitance and fear for immigration lawyers to handle cases that go against this law (Morgan and Willmington 2023). To address this issue, the Refugee Council (2023) published a report that includes forty organisations that support asylum seekers to investigate the impact of the Illegal Migration Act introduced in 2023; they concluded that this act would not stop illegal migration but rather encourage more dangerous routes and make those already seeking asylum in the UK reluctant to contact any governmental organisations in fear of detention, including educational institutions. In 2024, the UK introduced new legal developments regarding refugees and asylum seekers, primarily through the Border Security, Asylum, and Immigration Bill, as announced in King Charles's Speech in July. This bill replaces the Illegal Migration Act 2023, which has been heavily criticised for its high costs. The new legislation is expected to overhaul the asylum system and strengthen border security (GOV.UK 2024).

As a result of law changes and delays in asylum applications, asylum seekers are restricted from accessing education until their asylum claim is approved, which takes at least six months (Refugee Education UK b).As a result, non-formal education, such as English as a second-language classes offered by charities in the UK with volunteer tutors, can be the only place for asylum seekers to obtain education (Bouttell 2023). This is the case for all participants in this thesis who attended English classes in a church, where their volunteer tutor decided to establish Our Stories Creative Writing group, which is discussed further in Chapter 4.

English as a second-language classes provide language learning as a fundamental part of refugee integration and a crucial aspect of the UK government's integration policies because these classes facilitate refugee social life and employment, making it a key facilitator of social integration (Morrice, et al. 2021). Although the government provides English as a second-language classes in both formal and non-formal educational settings, some challenges hinder refugees from joining such classes, such as distance, family responsibilities, lack of awareness of the existence of the classes, and fear of falling behind when they have low English proficiency (Morrice, et al. 2021).

Additionally, funding for English as a second-language classes has faced continuous reductions in England, with a drop of "almost 60% between 2008/9 and 2017/18", which has led to long waiting lists and additional charges to attend (Refugee Action 2019). The Refugee Action Report (2019) includes a study on 128 refugees in

England, which concludes that two-thirds of the participants did not have enough English language classes because of the dramatic cut-off in funding. Refugees, particularly women and older adults, often face challenges in learning English due to the lack of motivation and purpose; this issue is compounded when they are surrounded by groups of refugees who speak their native language, leading to a sense of satisfaction that diminishes the urgency to acquire English proficiency (Chiswick and Miller 2001). Furthermore, refugees can resist learning English because of their traumatic experiences and an inner desire to refuse means of settlement in the hope of returning home one day (Iversen, Sveaass and Morken 2014)

In addition, adult refugees often encounter challenges in attending second-language classes because of their varying educational backgrounds. While some refugees have advanced education and professional expertise, others have little access to formal education in their home countries. Refugees frequently struggle to have their qualifications and work experience acknowledged in the host country (Morrice, Shan and Sprung 2018). Moreover, finding information about educational opportunities can be daunting for refugees who may face financial, transportation, and childcare barriers (Morrice, Shan and Sprung 2018; Maldonado 2017). Finally, the psychological barriers faced by refugees, notably social stigma and feelings of invisibility, can significantly impede their ability to engage in educational opportunities. Maldonado (2017) argues that in the case of refugees, insecurity and past traumatic experiences can hinder them from considering formal education.

Refugees frequently face social stigma related to their refugee status, which can result in their exclusion from social networks, community events, and essential resources (Haslam et al., 2018). In the context of education, stigma can make refugees reluctant to enrol in courses, participate in classes, or seek help because of fear of discrimination or misunderstanding by peers and educators. Furthermore, the stigma associated with being a refugee can negatively impact their confidence and self-worth, hindering their ability to express their educational needs or engage fully in academic settings. The literature surrounding the stigma of refugee identity is further discussed in Chapter 3 and the results chapters.

In addition to stigma, feeling invisible or overlooked is another significant psychological barrier. This sensation arises when refugees believe that their experiences, skills and aspirations are ignored or undervalued by their host societies. This can lead to isolation from the host society and disconnection from their previous accomplishments in their homeland. Morrice et al., (2018:131) state that refugees realise that their former identities and expertise are devalued; hence, they "develop a strategy to show an

assimilated public face in some contexts, whilst presenting themselves in different ways in communities where they felt their previous experiences were recognised and seen as adding value to the work environment". Although this strategy can help fit in with the host society, it can also be psychologically harmful to refugees (Morrice, Shan and Sprung 2018). When refugees feel invisible or stigmatised, their motivation to engage in education can diminish, which may limit their ability to fully benefit from educational opportunities and integrate into the host society through education.

By addressing these challenges and psychological barriers, this thesis argues that non-formal education presented in creative writing workshops, as part of art projects for refugees, can address the challenges of accessing formal education and provide an educational alternative for adult refugees. Community-based adult refugee education can help create an inclusive environment that encourages the academic involvement and social integration of refugees, which I discuss in the next section.

1.3.3. Adult Education in Refugee Communities

The education of adult refugees in the UK represents a critical intersection of immigration policy, education, and social integration. Refugee community organisations, as the primary data generation place for this thesis, are formed by people who belong to communities with a significant number of refugees per capita and aim to provide services and activities for refugees (Williams 2018). Individuals from the host society, the refugee community, or a collaborative effort of both can initiate group formation. Yasunaga (2014:7) asserts that non-formal education is "institutionalised, intentional and planned […] and it is an addition, alternative or complement to formal education". Dryden-Peterson (2016:198) refer to refugee community organisations as a “humanitarian approach” to refugee education. Unlike the developmental approach to education that occurs in formal educational institutions, the humanitarian approach takes place outside the formal national education system and traditional classrooms. It is mainly designed for refugees to give them access to education. Hence, refugee community organisations can play a significant role in the social integration of refugees because they are specifically tailored to their needs (Williams 2018).

Furthermore, the UNHCR (2013) reported that access to education is an essential route to help refugees build a future, speak for themselves, protect themselves from abuse and become part of British society. Aligned with this, Amara et al. (2005) emphasise the importance of collaborative efforts, noting that education, whether formal or informal, cannot be viewed in isolation. They stressed the need for

cooperation between private, public, and voluntary organisations to support the inclusion of refugees in the UK (Amara, et al. 2005). Maldonado (2017) also asserts that non-formal education offers a flexible solution to refugee education, enhancing vocational and social skills and enabling refugees to reach wider communities.

To further explore the current landscape of adult refugee education in communities, the following section discusses the inadequacy of supporting adult education in refugee communities. This discussion is essential for understanding the need for art projects that refugees can participate in.

1.3.3.1. Insufficient Support for Adult Education in Refugee Communities

Bouttell (2023) in his article on the integration policy for refugees and asylum seekers highlights that while government documents emphasise adult education for individuals above 18, particularly language learning, they often neglect non-formal education, which plays an essential role in refugees' broader integration. He notes that the focus tends to be on English as a second-language classes, but these documents overlook the wider aspects of lifelong learning that refugees need for their integration into their host societies. Bouttell (2023) calls for the development of a clear policy specifically focused on adult education for refugees and asylum seekers. This highlights the importance of incorporating informal learning and identifying gaps in current research on adult education and migration. This inadequate support may also reflect a wider decline in adult education across the UK. James and Boeren (2019:1) note that "opportunities to access and participate in adult lifelong learning is in significant decline, and neoliberal policies, both in Britain and globally".

Similarly, Forster, Petrie and Crowther (2018) conducted a study in northeast England to examine the negligence of community adult education in favour of employability skills training. This highlights how policy shifts have increasingly prioritised training programmes aimed at immediate economic outcomes, such as preparing individuals for low-paid, precarious jobs, rather than supporting forms of adult education that address communities' personal and collective needs. This study argues that this focus on employability has marginalised community-based adult education, which is crucial for personal growth, social integration and addressing social inequalities (Forster, Petrie and Crowther 2018). Nonetheless, James and Boeren (2019) assert that adult education activities in Britain and worldwide can significantly improve individuals' social and economic status, particularly those who did not have earlier access to education. Furthermore, non-formal education for adults can offer numerous health-

related benefits and employment opportunities, highlighting the importance of prioritising lifelong learning in government policies in England and the education system (Clancy 2020). Despite its significance, adult non-formal education in England remains undervalued (Clancy 2020).

The following section briefly introduces art projects for refugees as a route for non-formal adult education in refugee communities and the primary context for this thesis.

1.3.4. Art Projects for Refugees in England

Despite the decline in adult education infrastructure in the UK, local communities remain committed to helping adult refugees integrate socially. Over a hundred creative art projects across the UK combine drama and creative writing groups to encourage social integration, bridge cultural divides, and build cohesive communities (Stickley, et al. 2019). To clarify the term 'creativity', this study refers to the definition of Arts Council England's (2021:2) as follows: "the process through which people apply their knowledge, skill, and intuition to imagine, conceive, express, or make something that was not there before". This definition is part of Let's Create, a ten-year strategy (2020-2030) developed by Arts Council England to encourage the creativity of individuals and support organisations in promoting creative practices with the aim of enriching the cultural and creative landscape of the country (Art Council England 2021).

This promising support for community organisations highlights the importance of studies promoting refugees' experiences in creative writing groups, an often-overlooked art form. Stickley et al. (2019) note a lack of research on the outcomes of creative writing groups for refugees compared with other performative creative approaches, such as drama and music. A discussion of creative writing groups in England is given in the literature review in Chapter 3.

1.3.4.1. The effect of COVID-19 on Art Projects for Refugees

I initiated this research project at the same time as the COVID-19 escalation. Data generation occurred shortly after national restrictions were lifted, and social life returned to normal in February 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns have enhanced the challenges that refugees face. Hence, it is important to briefly highlight this phase in the life of refugees participating in art groups as part of this introduction to the study context. COVID-19 refers to the "infectious Coronavirus disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2

virus"(WHO 2024). This period was critical for the population in general and for refugees in particular, as it imposed National lockdowns on society. These lockdowns varied in length and restrictions, with limited access to services and contact with people (GOV.UK 2020). Feen-Calligan et al. (2023) conducted a study on the role of visual art therapy for youth refugees in response to the need for intervention to help refugees face the stress of COVID-19 restrictions. Despite challenges with technology and providing art supplies, the virtual space allowed refugees to continue their visual art sessions, offering them a sense of stability through continuity and maintaining a connection to their host country (Feen-Calligan, et al. 2023). Usiskin and Lloyd (2020) also discuss art intervention during the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that providing an online platform for refugees to maintain social connections can enhance their well-being during times of isolation. Other studies have also discussed the role of storytelling during the post-pandemic period, such as (Beauregard, Papazian-Zohrabian and Rousseau 2017). Because this thesis took place post-pandemic, my study shed light on creative writing intervention for refugees during and after the pandemic in the analysis chapters as part of the support that refugees receive in creative writing groups. Although this thesis does not focus on the pandemic's effects, the narrative of the participants brought about a discussion of their experiences with the writing group during the pandemic.

1.4. Theoretical Approach

The theoretical framework for this thesis draws upon two theories: The Social Identity Approach (SIA) to Health and Well-being (Haslam, et al. 2018) and The Writer Identity Theory (Ivanič 1998). Both theories provide a critical lens through which the impacts of creative writing groups on refugees can be examined, offering insights into how these groups may facilitate social integration and empowerment. The SIA approach to Health and Well-being suggests that the social groups to which an individual belongs can either enhance or adversely affect their well-being. These are referred to as the Social Cure (Jetten, Haslam and Alexander 2012) and the Social Curse (Kellezi and Stephen D. 2012). In educational settings, such dynamics of these social identity processes can either enhance or undermine the engagement of refugees with their learning environment. Non-formal education is vital for enhancing the well-being of refugees by reducing trauma, improving mental health, and supporting their social and economic integration (Subaşi 2021). Exploring the social cure and social curse perspectives within creative writing groups, as a form of non-formal education, deepens our understanding of these dynamics,

which are essential for creating a supportive educational environment and improving the well-being of refugees. The theoretical approach is detailed in Chapter 2.

1.5. Aims

This thesis investigates the role of creative writing groups in the social integration of refugees through the lens of social cure. It explores how participation in these groups impacts refugees' sense of meaning, experiences of support within their writing communities, and the ability of creative writing sessions to empower refugees in resisting stigma. analysing refugees' perspectives and creative writing samples, this study seeks to understand the study aims to understand the potential of such groups to improve social integration and contribute to social change.

This study adopts the narrative inquiry approach as the chosen qualitative data generation method, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. I generated data from a creative writing group in the West Midlands of England over a four-month period. The thesis includes 21 in-depth narrative interviews with 11 members and 33 creative writing samples.

The overarching aim is divided into three distinct yet interconnected aspects, enabling a more structured and focused exploration of the research questions. Each of these aims is linked to the research question outlined in Chapter 3.

Study Aim 1: Understanding refugee perspectives through creative writing.
This study explores the insights that refugees' perspectives and creative writing samples provide into their sense of meaning and self-worth. By analysing data related to this aim, this part of the study presents how refugees articulate their experiences, social identities, fears and aspirations, thereby contributing to understanding the significance of attending creative writing groups in their social integration.

Study Aim 2: To examine the role of in-group community support in refugee writing experiences.
The second aim is to investigate refugees' perceptions of support in their writing communities. This study identifies the significance of refugees' perceived support for creative writing groups. This exploration will assess the impact of in-group support on the writer identity of refugees, their social integration, and the overall role of the writing community in enhancing their well-being.

Study Aim 3: Empowering refugees through creative writing to face stigma and facilitate social change.

The final aim is to identify how creative writing groups can empower refugees to resist stigma and work collaboratively to generate social change. This section discusses the role of creative writing as a collective tool for overcoming stigma and advocate for refugee rights. Through this, the research intends to highlight the capacity of creative writing to develop a sense of agency among refugees, enabling them to contribute to social change through their narratives.

I designed each aim to build upon the findings of others to gain an understanding of the impact of creative writing on refugees, their writing communities, and British society, which I present in the three results (Chapters 5-7).

1.6. The Significance of the Study

I have written this thesis during a period marked by the devastating occurrence of multiple wars around the world that have resulted in civilian casualties, displacement, and forced migration of individuals seeking safety in foreign countries. These conflicts have erupted globally, beginning with the war in Syria and extending to Yemen, Ukraine, and Sudan, and persisting with the ongoing, profoundly tragic war in Gaza, Palestine, and Lebanon, as this thesis concludes. Moreover, in the summer of 2024, the UK experienced significant anti-immigration riots that spread throughout the country. These events can profoundly affect the social integration of refugees and create an environment of hostility and fear, which threatens the social cohesion of British society. These events are linked to social stigma, a process in which certain social groups are devalued, making them vulnerable to stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination (Goffman 1963). All these tragic events make this research project on the social integration of refugees timely, significant, and highly relevant.

The social integration of refugees into British society significantly depends, among others, on the role of both formal and non-formal education. As highlighted in this study's context, the education of adult refugees in the UK presents a multifaceted challenge that requires coordinated efforts from government entities, educational institutions and community organisations. Non-formal education, particularly through refugee community organisations, plays a crucial role as these organisations often serve as accessible spaces for refugees to engage in meaningful learning experiences outside traditional educational settings that may not be available for adult refugees. The government report (2019) on integration emphasises that understanding the complexities

of integration is an ongoing process, thereby presenting a research opportunity to which this thesis contributes.

While specific challenges remain, the continuous development and support of diverse educational programmes for refugees, including non-formal education in community contexts, are essential for their successful integration and the overall enrichment of British society. As the UK continues to respond to the global migration phenomenon, the role of education in empowering refugees and building inclusive communities has never been more critical. Moreover, investing in education for refugees can yield significant returns, as it enables refugees to contribute their skills and talents, thus enriching the cultural fabric of the UK society.

1.7. Researcher Positioning

When initiating my research project in 2019, I hoped that the issue of refugees would soon become a relic of the past, with those displaced having either resettled or safely returned to their homelands. Unfortunately, contrary to my aspirations, the refugee population has only expanded. According to statistics from the UK, nearly 75,600 asylum applications were submitted to the UK in the year ending 2024 (Home Office 2024a). While this is a decrease compared to the 2022 figure of 81,130 applications, it still represents a high number, reflecting a significant increase from pre-2019 levels (Home Office 2023).

My interest in exploring writing about refugees in the UK stems from three reasons. First, I have a longstanding interest in the role of education and narratives in post-conflict situations as my parents survived the 1967 war in Palestine and fled to neighbouring countries. In the case of Palestinian refugees, education has always been highly valued as their only way to adapt, self-support, and survive (Alzaroo and Hunt 2003). In addition, Palestinians have a solid commitment to narrating their history. These narratives can rebuild their sense of home and enable future generations to experience a connection to Palestine, which they believe is essential for the country's ongoing struggle against occupation. As an offspring of refugees, my only bond to my homeland has been the stories my late father orally narrated. Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Ihmoud (2014:387) asked, as they explored Palestinian writings in exile, "Can a father pass his longing to his daughter? Can I be nostalgic for a time and place I never knew?" I can relate to their answer: "I have shared my father's longing for his homeland all my life, perhaps because my longing for Palestine has also been, in part, a longing for my father." Somehow, being here now, I feel closer to him." I began writing a novel titled A Home Never Sensed to

acknowledge my father's migration journey. Writing this novel involved interviewing Palestinian refugees in my family. Overwhelmed by the data I have gathered and my passion for creative writing, I applied for an MA in Writing at the University of Warwick to organise my ideas and develop my writing skills.

Second, my interest in refugee writing led me to choose the Writing for Human Rights and Injustice module during my master's studies, which involved interviews with refugees and learning about the ethical and political sensitivities that constrain narratives. I also attended the Writing for Schools module, where I developed methods for introducing creative writing in teaching. Following my MA, I implemented creative writing techniques for adults in English as second-language classrooms at universities in Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom. My students' aspiring results motivated me to expand my research to cover underprivileged people and build it on educational theories.

Third, the UK has a growing number of refugees in dire need of educators' collaboration, as previously mentioned. Several authors and organisations have designed programmes dedicated to creative writing for young and adult refugees; however, many refugees face different issues in creative writing groups that are rarely addressed, including writing in a second-language, finding their voice, and receiving support, which made me keen to explore these issues in my PhD thesis.

As a bilingual researcher, I have an advantage in understanding the experiences of refugee writers from a personal perspective. A recommendation by Chaplin (2019:253) in her doctoral thesis is that "Research done by multilingual researchers who were themselves able to move between languages alongside participants would be of value". She also recommended studying the complex challenges of creative writing for non-native speakers who have experienced trauma, which can be applied to refugees.

1.8. Thesis outline

This thesis contains eight chapters, each addressing the key components of the research. I organised the chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 provides a general introduction to the study. This chapter begins with an overview, followed by the context of the study, which explores the background, including non-formal education for refugees and adult refugee education in England. The chapter then discusses the significance of the study, including its aims and theoretical approach. The chapter also includes a section on researcher positioning and concludes with an outline of the thesis structure.

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical foundation of the study. This chapter begins with an overview of the SIA to Health and Well-being. This chapter also discusses the Writer Identity Theory. Then, it integrates these theories and concludes with a summary.

Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature. This study explores creative writing groups for refugees, including second-language creative writing. This chapter investigates the dynamics of inter-group relations with the host society and in-group relations within creative writing groups. This literature review identifies gaps in the literature and introduces research questions.

Chapter 4 is the methodology chapter which discusses the research paradigm, emphasising the narrative inquiry approach. This chapter outlines data generation methods and discusses the analysis process, ethical considerations, and the researcher's role.

Chapter 5 is the first results chapter that presents the first theme developed from the analysis. The 'Seeking Meaning' theme explores how refugees develop their sense of meaning through their membership in creative writing groups. Each results chapter concludes with an overview of the main findings presented and a discussion of their contributions to theory and practice.

Chapter 6 is the second results chapter, presents the second theme, 'Finding Support'. In this chapter, refugees discuss the issue of stigma, their communities, and their writing.

Chapter 7 is the last results chapter presents the third theme, 'Gaining Agency'. This section focuses on refugee agency gained through their membership in creative writing groups and outreach to British society.

Chapter 8 is the final chapter which presents an overall discussion of the three themes, the study's limitations, and the study's contribution to the refugee education field.

Chapter 2: The Social Identity Approach to Health and The Writer Identity Theory: A Theoretical Framework

I don't think our voices are that loud.
But we just have to keep shouting and screaming,
and hopefully,
It will get through
-Paul

2.1. Overview

This chapter discusses the foundational theories underpinning this study. This interdisciplinary study draws on two theories from two disciplines: the Social Identity Approach (SIA) to Health and Well-being from Social Psychology and the Writer Identity Theory from Written Language and Literacy. These theories provide a lens through which I can examine the role of creative writing groups as a socially contextualised practice in the social integration of refugees.

This chapter introduces the SIA to Health and Well-being, focusing on the Social Cure and Social Curse perspectives. The chapter then presents the Writer Identity Theory. In the final section, this chapter proposes that the SIA to Health and Well-being and the Writer Identity Theory can be meaningfully related to each other within the context of the role of creative writing groups for refugees in their social integration. The SIA to Health and Well-being provides a framework for understanding how group membership and social identity affect well-being. The Writer Identity Theory offers insights into how creative expression and the development of a writer's identity contribute to a positive sense of self.

Integrating theoretical approaches is essential for developing a framework to understand how refugees navigate social identities in community settings. Furthermore, this theoretical framework can help analyse how refugees see themselves and others through their group membership and how social identities are maintained or emerge within the context of creative writing groups. This integrated approach offers a comprehensive framework to inform and guide this thesis's subsequent data analyses and discussions.

2.2. The Social Identity Approach (SIA)

The SIA is composed of two theories: The Social Identity Theory, "the psychology of inter-group relations", and the Self-Categorisation Theory, "the psychology of group behaviour" (Haslam, et al. 2018:18-21). These two theories share many fundamental elements; thus, they are frequently discussed together as the Social Identity Approach (Sindic and Condor 2014). The first theory, the Social Identity Theory (SIT), was developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979), in which they explore how a person's sense of self is shaped by membership in social groups, influencing behaviour, attitudes, and inter-group relations. SIT provides a framework for understanding group behaviours and how self-esteem can be gained from belonging to a group (Tajfel and Turner 1979). The theory argues that individuals' concept of themselves is derived from belonging to social groups, as human beings exist in a dynamic interaction between their individuality and their membership in social groups in a sense that individuals identify and start seeing and interacting with the world through their social identities (Turner and Reynolds 2010).

Social identity is defined as the person's awareness of belonging to specific social groups and the emotional value that they attach to being a member of these groups (Abrams and Hogg 1988). This emotional significance is particularly relevant when considering refugee groups and the formation of a shared social identity, which I explore further in this thesis. Byrne (2016) explains that in light of SIT, an individual can hold multiple social identities, but the context or a social group a person identifies with determines which social identity to express. Byrne (2016) argues that in studies on refugee identity, identity can be seen as a social construct. Identity as a social construct refers to the idea that social interactions and relationships shape our sense of self and how others perceive us; hence, it is fluid and changes with time, and it is affected by various experiences, social norms, and interactions. In the context of refugees, their identities evolve as they navigate different social contexts influenced by their own choices and external forces. This perspective highlights the dynamic and changing nature of refugee social identity (Byrne 2016).

The Self-Categorisation Theory builds on the Social Identity Theory to explain how individuals categorise themselves and others into groups to shape their social identity (Turner, et al. 1994, Hogg and Turner 1987). The theory concerns the cognitive processes of identifying with groups by detailing how individuals categorise themselves and others to form a social identity that aligns with group norms and values (Turner and Reynolds 2003). The theory suggests that self-categorisation is context-dependent, where an individual's identity becomes more salient based on the social environment and specific

cues in a given situation (Turner, et al. 1994). Identity salience refers to the degree to which a particular group member identifies with a group. When a social identity becomes salient, people tend to view both themselves and others through the lens of group affiliations rather than as distinct individuals (Haslam, et al. 2018). This salience further influences behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions, leading individuals to align their actions with the norms and values associated with salient group membership (Haslam, et al. 2018). For example, when a refugee's social identity becomes salient, it may significantly shape their interactions and self-perceptions, impacting social integration and well-being (Byrne 2016). I discuss identity salience further in section 2.2.2.

These two theories offer a perspective on the dynamic interactions between an individual's self-concept and group membership. The SIA applies to a wide range of social contexts and disciplines, such as Inter-group Conflict (Simon 2020), Prejudice (Branscombe et al., 1999), Education (Kelly 2009), Sports and Fan Behaviour (Thomas, et al. 2017), Politics (Huddy 2001), and Online and Social Media Interactions (Helal and Ozuem 2021). This thesis focuses on the SIA to Health and Well-being.

2.2.1. The Social Identity Approach (SIA) to Health and Well-being

The focus on health and well-being is an essential improvement in the application of the SIA, which has primarily focused on how social identities are deeply involved in inter-group dynamics. However, the health and well-being approach extends the application of SIA to psychological adaptation and resilience (Jetten, et al. 2017). In addition, well-being refers to being in a state of "higher life satisfaction and less psychological distress" (Haslam,et al. 2018:18). Therefore, the SIA to Health and Well-being represents a significant shift from traditional individual-centric perspectives on health and well-being to a more holistic understanding that focuses on the impact of social identities derived from group memberships (Haslam, et al. 2018). This approach has been extensively applied in research concerning patients in hospitals with chronic illnesses or mental health issues (Brandling and House 2009, Sabat and Harré 1992) and is being developed in studies concerning the well-being of communities in general (Bowe, et al. 2020) and disadvantaged communities in particular (Ballentyne, et al. 2021, Kellezi, et al. 2019, Alfadhli and Drury 2018).

The SIA provides a valuable framework for understanding how inter-group and in-group dynamics affect the health and well-being of individuals within disadvantaged communities. Jetten et al. (2017:790) assert that the SIA can profoundly impact well-

being by demonstrating that "social status, inequality, poverty and disadvantage are powerful predictors of health and well-being". As empirical research in this area continues to grow, the benefits of applying the SIA to health and well-being to address the challenges facing refugee communities have become increasingly evident. This stems from the need to continue integrating social and psychological dimensions to enhance the health and well-being of refugees, who face several challenges during and after migration, as detailed in Chapter 1.

Central to this approach are the perspectives of social cure and social curse as processes related to health and well-being, which I will illustrate in the next section about social groups' relations to health and well-being. Subsequently, I present the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC), focusing on the dynamics of identity formation during critical life changes. Lastly, I discuss social prescribing, which involves engaging in community activities and social connections to improve the well-being of group members. Collectively, these elements provide an understanding of the SIA to Health and Well-being.

2.2.2. Social Groups' Relation to Health and Well-being

This section focuses on the need for social groups of individuals. In the SIA, Turner and Reynolds (2003:137) define a social group as "a body of real people that acts in the world; it is a social system. The members interact, behave, and have relationships with each other. They share an identity, have goals, are interdependent, and have social structures. A group has social and psychological reality". Jetten et al. (2017) explain that the start of social groups in an individual's life starts from its first root in childhood, where raising healthy children results from communal effort.

Furthermore, at every stage of life, individuals are deeply integrated with and shaped by their surrounding communities and groups in significant and lasting ways, directly linking their health to the dynamics of social group life (Jetten, et al. 2017). Aligned with this, Dunbar (2014) argues that social groups are essential to human lives because no human exists in isolation, and groups play a crucial role in their development of meaning and purpose in life. Arising from this perspective, communities hold direct responsibility for the well-being of their members since an individual's well-being is primarily influenced by the communities and groups to which they belong (Haslam, et al. 2018). Jetten et al. (2017:792) introduced key hypotheses associated with the SIA to Health and Well-being. The first hypothesis is the social identity hypothesis, which entails that "because it is the basis for meaningful group life, it is central to both good and

ill health". This hypothesis argues that this significance lies in the psychological benefits of belonging to social groups, including providing social ties with in-group members, working on a collective purpose that enhances the sense of meaning, and developing a shared social identity that provides a sense of agency and support (Jetten, et al. 2017). Each of these psychological benefits is further elaborated in Chapter 3.

Nonetheless, identity salience, as discussed in section 2.2.1, must be considered because not all social groups contribute to an individual's well-being. Only those with which individuals strongly identify or those imposed on them by external forces tend to have a significant impact. For example, labelling a refugee by the host society can result in negative stereotypes and stigma, such as being perceived as dependent or viewed as an outsider due to their refugee status. Byrne (2016:2) found that despite the civil war and ethnic divisions in their home country, a strong "national identity" emerged among Liberian refugees in Ghana. The study identified three key factors contributing to this heightened national identity: the shared trauma experienced during and after migration, collective refugee identity and shared perceptions of inter-group relations with the host society. These factors collectively enhanced the salience of their national identity (Byrne 2016). Nonetheless, identifying with disadvantaged social groups can lead members to adopt identity management strategies to mitigate the impact of a stigmatised identity (Dobai and Hopkins 2022). This chapter further discusses identity management strategies.

The relationship between belonging to a social group and its effects on health and well-being is not guaranteed. Rather, it depends on identification with the group at a high level (Turner and Reynolds 2003). Social groups to which an individual belongs can either enhance their well-being or adversely affect it; these are referred to as the Social Cure (Jetten, Haslam and Alexander 2012) and the Social Curse (Kellezi and Stephen D. 2012).

2.2.2.1. Social Cure

The Social Cure perspective highlights the many ways groups can positively impact health and increase resilience. A key strategy to enhance these curative effects is through social support. Social support is fundamental because it affects group members' sense of belonging, self-esteem, control, meaning, purpose, and resilience. The SIA to Health and Well-being has revealed that supportive group memberships can significantly enhance an individual's resilience and well-being through shared identity and mutual support (Jetten, Haslam and Alexander 2012). Wakefield et al. (2019:6) argue that the

social cure perspective looks at the "transformative nature of the support group members give each other" and how it helps them deal with life challenges. Relatedly, Wakefield et al. (2020) longitudinal study on the effect of social groups on the feelings and behaviours of patients with chronic illnesses suggests that when participants of a group strongly identify with their social group, it positively impacts their health and well-being, aligning with the perspective of social cure. This positive impact stems from the psychological resources provided by social groups, including social connections, which in turn reduce loneliness and stress and enhance the sense of meaning and resilience (Haslam, et al. 2005).

In the context of social groups, Kellezi et al. (2019) further investigate the social cure perspective in the context of immigration detention in the UK, where detainees struggle with the loss of social networks and control over their lives. This study shows that in times of distress, social groups can provide support, positive behaviours and trust. Similarly, Jetten et al. (2017) add that the fundamental idea behind the social cure perspective is that individuals and their actions are closely linked to their social groups. Consequently, these social groups and their social identities formed within them can significantly affect individuals' health and well-being through the provision of self-esteem, a sense of belonging, meaning, and agency (Jetten, et al. 2017).

Although this thesis primarily focuses on the social cure aspect to investigate the positive role that creative writing groups can play in the lives of refugees, it is important not to ignore the potential negative experiences that can arise within these settings. Researchers such as Kellezi, (2019) highlights the presence of the social curse alongside the social cure to reflect the complexities of group dynamics. While the emphasis in this thesis remains on the benefits of creative writing groups, acknowledging their negative dimensions allows for a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of their impact. Hence, the analysis of data in this thesis considers both perspectives to ensure that the challenges faced by some participants are also addressed within the broader context of social integration.

2.2.2.2 Social Curse

Complementing the social cure perspective, the social curse perspective within the SIA to Health and Well-being highlights the detrimental impact of social identities on an individual's mental and physical health (Kellezi, et al. 2019). This perspective suggests that when individuals are stigmatised or ascribed a devalued social identity can lead to adverse health outcomes, such as stress, decreased self-esteem and a lower sense of

agency (Kellezi, et al. 2019). Although this thesis is concerned with refugees as disadvantaged social groups, social curses also happen in groups of positive social identities when group processes lead to negative effects. For instance, football fans who strongly identify with well-established teams often experience negative impacts on their well-being and self-esteem when the team loses a match or fails to meet their expectations (Branscombe and Wann 1994).

Furthermore, belonging to disadvantaged (or even advantaged) social groups can become a social curse if they hinder members from accessing critical resources for enhancing health and well-being, such as having agency over their lives and finding support (Haslam, et al. 2024). Jetten et al. (2017) affirm that social groups lacking crucial resources to enhance psychological well-being or having a disadvantaged status may harm members' well-being. Nonetheless, Haslam et al. argue that (2018:19) when people's social identities are threatened or undermined by events such as loss or failure, group members are likely to feel motivated to rebuild a positive sense of identity, which is known as "the identity restoration hypothesis".

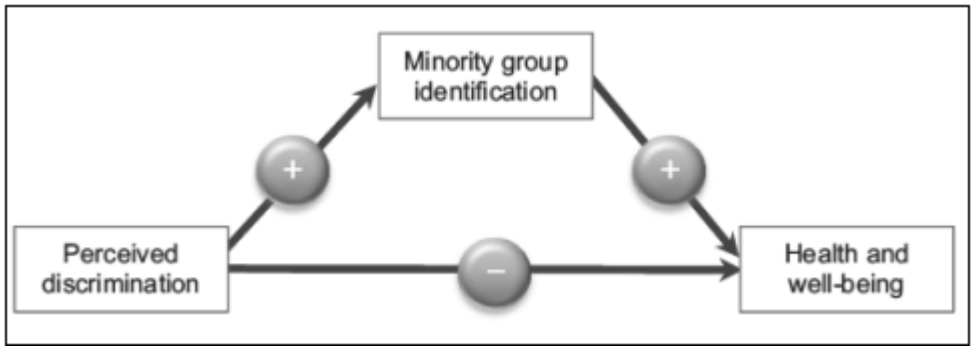
Another aspect that makes belonging to social groups a curse is the loss of social identities; for instance, refugees can lose some features of their identities and access to valued resources due to migration (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003). Regardless, one of the strategies to deal with identity loss and belonging to a disadvantaged group is social mobility, where group members choose individual mobility to escape the negative situation and move to other groups; however, this also depends on the permeability of group boundaries (Haslam, et al. 2018). For example, some refugees actively avoid attending events related to refugees to distance themselves from being identified as refugees in the host society. Jetten et al. (2017) explain that obtaining a positive social identity and higher self-esteem is more difficult for disadvantaged groups than high-status groups. For instance, individuals from marginalised communities may struggle to feel pride or self-worth because of societal stigma or poverty. In contrast, members of higher-status groups, such as those with wealth or access to social power, derive positivity and confidence from their privileged positions, making it less difficult for them to maintain a positive social identity.

Exploring the interplay between the social cure and the social curse perspectives is crucial for understanding the group dynamics of refugees' creative writing groups. It also plays a significant role in analysing data collected from refugees in creative writing groups (Chapters 5-7). The interplay between social cure and curse can occur simultaneously or be transformed with the passing of time and experience or change of circumstances; what was identified as social cure might become curse. For example,

although joining a socially stigmatised group (e.g. detainee identity) is a source of support, mutual understanding and shared identities (Kellezi, et al. 2019), it can also carry the negative effects of stigma. Ballentyne (2021) further explains that in refugee social groups, the balance between social cure and curse is fragile; what might give agency and support to refugees in one setting can restrict and hinder them in another. For example, once refugees are aware of stigmatisation, they become more concerned about it, encapsulating their experiences with the host society through the lens of stigma. Stigma and its impact on refugees' identity are further discussed in Chapter 3.

Furthermore, this interplay between social cure and social cure in stigmatised groups leads me to introduce the Rejection-Identification Model Figure (2), which was initially designed by (Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey 1999) and adapted by (Haslam, et al. 2018). This model suggests that in the case of disadvantaged social groups who face stigma, threat, or discrimination from a more dominant group, their in-group identification increases as a strategy for resilience and maintaining well-being (Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey 1999). The Rejection-Identification Model is crucial for understanding how individuals in minority or marginalised groups might cope with discrimination by reinforcing their group identity, which can have both positive and negative effects on their psychological well-being. This model resonates with another hypothesis related to SIA to Health and Well-being: H4: the identity restoration hypothesis, which indicates that: "People will be motivated to restore positive identity when this is compromised by events that threaten or undermine their social identities, e.g., group failure, stigma, low status, or loss of group membership" (Haslam, et al. 2018:19). This model further demonstrates that shared group membership provides a foundation for individuals to support each other, enabling them to manage their circumstances and initiate improvements (Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey 1999). This model emphasises that SIA to Health and Well-being can help understand the dynamic of inter-group relations in disadvantaged groups and how they transform negative situations into positive ones.

Figure (2): The Rejection-Identification Model



Source: Haslam, et al. (2018:72) adapted from Branscombe et al.(1999)-

(Reproduced with permission of The Licensor through PLSclear)

This version of the model simplifies the original model (Branscombe et al. 1999) by focusing on Perceived Discrimination, Minority Group Identification, and their direct impact on Health and Well-being. The original model's notion of hostility towards the dominant group is omitted, shifting the focus to the role of minority group identification to bridge the relationship between discrimination and well-being. The original model is more complex, addressing both positive and negative pathways (minority group identification and hostility) from perceived prejudice towards psychological well-being. The adapted model focuses on the protective role of minority group identification, presenting it as a positive pathway that mitigates the harmful effects of perceived discrimination on health and well-being.

Another essential element to discuss from the social cure and curse perspectives is identity change and its effect on health and well-being in times of significant transition. I next introduce the Social Identity Model of Identity Change to understand what happens in transition and the loss of existing identities and how maintaining existing identities or obtaining new ones can provide a path for a social cure.

2.2.3. Social Identity Model of Identity Change

The Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC) is particularly relevant when group members face transition. SIMIC presents a framework for understanding how shifts in social identity can influence social change, group dynamics, and individual behaviours that affect health and well-being (Haslam, et al. 2018). SIMIC provides a model that describes the positive effect of maintaining existing social identities in times of change, such as during illness or migration, on the well-being of individuals by giving them a sense of continuation of social identity (Haslam, et al. 2018). According to Haslam et al.

(2018:54), this model consists of two main elements, "the social identity gain pathway and the social identity continuity pathway," referring to the benefit of maintaining existing social identities and gaining new social identities when belonging to new social groups. However, Haslam et al. (2018) noted that SIMIC might not be practical for low-status or disadvantaged groups because access to external sources is limited. Nonetheless, SIMIC has been applied in the context of refugees and post-migration in some recent studies (Ballentyne, et al. 2021, Panagiotopoulos, Giovanetti and Pavlopoulos 2022, Panagiotopoulos and Pavlopoulos 2023, Alfadhlil, et al. 2019), which showed positive findings as well as the interplay between cure and curse (Kellezi et al., 2019) that are consistent with the SIMIC model.

Although this model is not applied to details in my thesis, it provides insight and explanation to social identity change, loss, and gain when analysing data in the context of refugee creative writing groups and identity changes. SIMIC is also relevant to my thesis as it explains the social curse following loss (the impact of the loss of key identities due to migration), social cure due to gain (the value of creating connections to creative writing groups), and social curse due to stigma (the lack of integration and belonging in the host society). Furthermore, considering social identity changes after a significant life transition, such as migration, is essential when studying refugees' adjustment to their host society (Panagiotopoulos, Giovanetti and Pavlopoulos 2022).

2.2.4. Social Prescribing

As the context of my thesis focuses on Refugee Community Organisations, as outlined in Chapter 1, this section explores social prescribing, a key aspect of the Social Identity Approach (SIA). Social Prescribing applies the perspective of the social cure to community groups and everyday life (Wakefield, et al. 2020). Social prescribing is an approach that recognises the social determinants of health. The SIA can help understand how social prescribing works. This refers to the practice of directing patients to community-based, non-medical services and activities to help meet their social, emotional, or practical needs (Wakefield, et al. 2020). The aim is to improve their overall health and well-being by connecting individuals with resources that can help them deal with psychological issues like loneliness, anxiety, and mild depression (Haslam, et al. 2024). In an attempt to provide an international conceptual and operational definition for social prescribing, Muhl et al. (2023) conducted a three-round survey study in twenty-six countries. The conceptual definition most relevant to my research study entails that Social Prescribing is "a holistic, person-centred, and community-based approach to health and

well-being that bridges the gap between clinical and non-clinical supports and services" (Muhl, et al. 2023:8). In addition to community healthcare settings, this practice is examined in social work research because of its potential to reduce healthcare costs and reliance on clinical solutions for health problems stemming from social and environmental factors (Bild and Pachana 2022). Activities within the community may include community groups, volunteer activities, art groups, cooking classes, and physical activities. These activities are designed to support the social integration of participants by providing a space for social connections (Muhl, et al. 2023).

Haslam et al. (2024) explain that social prescribing often occurs in groups and is influenced by group dynamics. Looking at social prescribing in art group settings in particular, which aligns with my research context, Redmond et al. (2019) conducted a longitudinal study on the benefits of creative art for patients as a form of social prescribing. The study's findings reported a positive response from the participants, highlighting the importance of social connections as part of a group and doing something productive (Redmond, et al. 2019). Consistent with this, Mughal et al. (2022) demonstrate a positive link between improved health and well-being and the time spent participating in art activities. Stickley and Hui (2012a) published a two-part narrative inquiry study on social prescribing in a community-based art group delivered by City Arts Nottingham to people with access to mental health services. In the first part that investigates the experience of participants, Stickley and Hui (2012a) conclude that if community-based groups of art are carefully designed, they can provide participants with a sense of meaning, pride, and a blend of therapeutic and social benefits, which can all lead to a better future. In coordination with this, Stickley and Hui (2012b) examined the reviews of patients who were referred to the art group. The respondents believed that community-based programmes helped those participating improve their skills, provide a voice to express themselves and build a supportive social network.

In refugee contexts, Kellezi, Bowe, and Wakefield (2020) explore social prescribing and migration in refugee contexts through a co-production roundtable study. Their findings indicate that for social prescribing initiatives must address migrants' psychological and social needs. A subsequent article (Kellezi, et al. 2021) from the same study asserted that social prescribing activities should be flexible and attentive to the specific needs of migrants to facilitate their development and integration into society. Kellezi et al.(2021:4) add that "the central premise of social prescribing is that individuals' well-being would improve if we could tackle the key social predictors of ill-health, such as loneliness, alienation, and isolation." Although art groups for refugees, as

a form of social prescribing, may not meet all the challenging post-migration needs of refugees, they can still play a significant role in enhancing the health and well-being of refugees by providing psychological and social support. Kellezi et al. (2021) note that, social prescribing initiatives may not directly address all the complex challenges migrants face. However, they can improve their quality of life after migration by offering valuable support. However, it is crucial to recognise that the group status of individuals often shapes the effectiveness of social prescribing initiatives. For refugees who may experience stigmatisation and marginalisation, the success of social prescribing is deeply affected by the broader social context in which they exist. Lastly, although many studies have reported positive outcomes of social prescribing in community groups, there is a notable lack of research on social prescribing within art groups that involve refugees. This thesis contributes to this gap and adds valuable knowledge to the field.

Next, I present the Writer Identity Theory as the second theory that informs the theoretical framework of this study.

2.3. Discourses of Writing and The Writer's Identity Theory

The Writer Identity Theory explains how writers derive a sense of self and identity through their writing (Ivanič 1994). The Writer Identity Theory was developed by the British linguist Roz Ivanič (1994), emerging from her observation that the sense of self is constructed as part of a social environment and is studied within the discourse of speaking or writing. Ivanič defines discourse as "beliefs about writing, beliefs about learning to write, ways of talking about writing, and the sorts of approaches to teaching and assessment" (Ivanič 2004:224). I will first introduce Ivanič's Discourse of Writing Framework as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the various discourses of writing related to this thesis and lays the foundation for the discussion of Writer Identity Theory. By first establishing this framework, the subsequent exploration of how social contexts shape a writer’s identity becomes more evident and grounded in existing discourse.

2.3.1. Discourse of Writing

Ivanič introduces a six-dimensional framework describing the different discourses of writing that can be studied as separate entities or as a holistic view. Ivanič (2004) argues that looking at the framework as a whole unit can help practitioners, including teachers, workshop leaders, and researchers, become more appreciative of writing that reflects the

experience and voice of people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This appreciation results from an understanding of how beliefs, approaches, and types of writing differ from one discourse to another. As shown in Figure (3), The discourse of the writing framework includes skills discourse, creative discourse, process discourse, genre discourse, social practice discourse, and sociopolitical discourse.

Figure (3): Discourses of writing and learning to write

Discourses	*Layer in the comprehsive view of language*	*Beliefs about writing*	*Beliefs about learning to write*
1. A SKILLS DISCOURSE	THE WRITTEN TEXT	Writing consists of applying knowledge of sound–symbol relationships and syntactic patterns to construct a text.	Learning to write involves learning sound–symbol relationships and syntactic patterns.
2. A CREATIVITY DISCOURSE	THE MENTAL PROCESSES OF WRITING	Writing is the product of the author's creativity.	You learn to write by writing on topics which interest you.
3. A PROCESS DISCOURSE		Writing consists of composing processes in the writer's mind, and their practical realization.	Learning to write includes learning both the mental processes and the practical processes involved in composing a text.
4. A GENRE DISCOURSE	THE WRITING EVENT	Writing is a set of text-types, shaped by social context.	Learning to write involves learning the characteristics of different types of writing which serve specific purposes in specific contexts.
5. A SOCIAL PRACTICES DISCOURSE		Writing is purpose-driven communication in a social context.	You learn to write by writing in real-life contexts, with real purposes for writing.
6. A SOCIOPOLITICAL DISCOURSE	THE SOCIOCULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF WRITING	Writing is a sociopolitically constructed practice, has consequences for identity, and is open to contestation and change.	Learning to write includes understanding why different types of writing are the way they are, and taking a position among alternatives.

Source: Ivanič (2004:227) - *(Permission to reproduce granted by Taylor & Francis)*

In this thesis, I focus on the creativity discourse and the social practices discourses as they apply to the writing in creative writing groups for refugees. Ivanič (2004), explains that the creativity discourse frames writing primarily as an expression of the author's creative abilities. The emphasis here is on writing content and style rather than linguistic structure. From this perspective, the process of creating meaning is paramount, and writing is appreciated as an artistic expression that captivates or entertains the reader without necessarily serving a social purpose (Ivanič 2004). This discourse supports the idea that individuals learn to write by actively practising it, and the effectiveness of a piece is measured by its imagination and the emotions it communicates. This approach, also called creative self-expression, values the writer's voice, experience, and perspectives; hence, it benefits writers from marginalised backgrounds (Ivanič 2004).

Complementing that, the social practices discourses of writing emphasise the significance of the context of writing and the social interactions surrounding the writing event, unlike other discourses that focus primarily on the writing process or linguistic features. In this discourse, learning to write can happen implicitly through participation in socially situated literacy events rather than through direct instruction (Ivanič 2004). The discourse suggests that people learn to write by engaging in meaningful, real-life writing activities that are meaningful to them, often within communities of practice. The effectiveness of writing in this discourse is reflected in achieving social goals such as advocating for a change in society (Ivanič 2004). For example, community members may write letters or petitions to local authorities to improve their living conditions, and through this process, they can learn writing skills while pursuing a meaningful objective. Additionally, this discourse recognises the importance of the social context of writing and the presence of a support network, time, space, and tools to establish the writing event. Ivanič (2004) suggests that focusing on the social practices surrounding a writing event also highlights the importance of the broader sociocultural context. This perspective considers the social meanings of writing, the values associated with writing, and the power dynamics involved. Combining the social aspects and power relations in this discourse can lead scholars to view writing as a powerful art form (Ivanič 2004). This discourse overlaps slightly with sociopolitical discourse on the aspect of power that disadvantaged social groups can write about generating social change. This discourse on writing can affect writers' identity, which led me to introduce the Writer Identity Theory.

Ivanic's Writer Identity Theory and her Discourses of Writing Framework are intertwined. The framework supports the theory by offering an understanding of the different discourses of writing and how each discourse influences beliefs about writing, learning to write, and the writer's identity. Understanding the discourses of writing related to this thesis will help explore the complex, dynamic, and socially situated nature of writer identity.

2.3.2. The Writer's Identity Theory

The Writer Identity Theory was initially developed in an academic writing context; however, it has since been applied in various genres of writing and contexts, such as creative writing (Zhao 2011, Hanauer 2010), academic writing (Bird 2013), and ESL classes (Starfield 2009). These applications of the theory illustrate its flexibility in adapting to the context of creative writing groups of refugees. The writer's identity has also been explored in some studies within the community of practice framework. Wenger

(1999) introduced the concept of Communities of Practice, which refers to groups of individuals who share interests, professions, or passions. These groups gather to learn, exchange knowledge, and enhance their skills in a particular field. Communities of Practice have been applied in various studies, including academics (Dymoke and Spiro 2017) and second language authors who have particular learning skills (Zhao 2011). However, creative writing groups for refugees are a means to facilitate a free space for expression where creative writing can take place. There are no specific courses to complete in creative writing groups, previous experience required, or certification. Hence, the Writer Identity Theory can provide a more suitable theory compared to Communities of Practice for investigating the role of creative writing groups in the well-being and social integration of refugees.

To detail the elements of the Writer Identity Theory, Ivanič (1998) introduces three types of identity that emerge when a person writes including: the Autobiographical Self, the Discoursal Self, and Self as an Author. Ivanič (1998) believes that a writer's identity is dynamic and multifaceted, influenced by both personal experiences and the broader social context. It changes from one context to another. While different elements of identity may be visible in various texts, no single aspect fully captures the complexity of a writer's identity. A writer's autobiographical self continuously evolves. Depending on changes in their history and the varying needs of different writing contexts, a writer may present a different discoursal self in each text. In addition, a writer may appear more authoritative in certain texts than others (Ivanič 1998). Next, I present each element of the writer's identity theory. Introducing the elements of the Writer Identity Theory is crucial for understanding how individuals construct and express their identities through writing. By examining the Autobiographical Self, the Discoursal Self, and the Self as an Author, it becomes clear that the writing process involves a dynamic interaction between personal experience, social roles, and self-perception.

(1) **The Autobiographical Self** refers to an individual's history, memories, and life events that lead them to write specific texts. This refers to the aspect of identity that individuals carry into any writing activity, which is influenced by their past social experiences and personal history, reflecting their sense of origin and background. The autobiographical self also encompasses the events in their lives and how they interpret these experiences to themselves, which can provide insight into the influence of life experiences and history on writing (Ivanič 1998). Applying this, Zhao (2011) investigates the identities of second-language creative writers in a social context with a focus on Ivanič's autobiographical identity of writers. Zhao's (2011) study refers to the writing identity in second-language creative writers as emergent identities that are influenced by

the autobiographical identity of the writer. Zhao (2011:31) explains that the writer's identity is not directly shaped by the memories and history of an individual but rather by their interpretation and perception of their past, which the study refers to as "self-identity". Aligned with the Social Identity Model of Identity Change, the autobiographical self is an existing identity up to the moment of writing. In contrast, the discoursal self and the authorial self are emergent identities that emerge during the act of writing (Zhao 2011, Clark and Ivanič 1997), which I will reflect on further in the integration of theories section. To illustrate the concept of autobiographical identity, Park (2013) applied the Writer Identity Theory in a study focused on exploring her autobiographical self. She discovered that understanding this aspect of her identity helped her recognise how her social identities, such as being an immigrant, a student, and a TESOL teacher, shaped her writing. Park describes how her experiences as an immigrant to the U.S. and later as a student of diaspora studies influenced her writing, often leading her to unconsciously emphasise social and political aspects in her work (Park 2013). She concludes that awareness of the autobiographical self is an empowering experience for writers because it gives an understanding of the world and how identities related to gender and social class affected her language use and teaching practice with her students (Park 2013). Subsequently, Park discussed linking this autobiographic self to the discoursal self she presents in her writing.

(2) **The Discoursal Self** refers to how a writer presents their autobiographical self at the moment of writing (Ivanič 1998). A writer's discoursal self refers to the "impression" they convey through their written text and is influenced by "values, beliefs, and power relations in the social context in which they were written" (Ivanič 1998:25). This is done intentionally or unconsciously in conjunction with writing. The discoursal self is closely connected to the writer's voice, reflecting how writers wish to present themselves in a particular way in their writing (Ivanič 1998). This expression of voice through writing in a socially situated writing workshop plays a role in supporting and shaping the social identities of writers as it allows them a space to reflect on different topics and share and respond to another writers' writing (Cappello 2006). Park (2013) also argues that when writers are aware of their discoursal selves and how their writing can reflect their thoughts and beliefs, they begin to develop the authority of their written text, leading to the third aspect of the writer's identity Self as Author.

(3) **Self as Author** refers to how writers view and present themselves as authors (Ivanič 1998). This aspect of writer identity is linked to the discoursal self and autobiographical self as writers take ownership of their history, values and beliefs presented in writing.

Writers differ in the extent to which they establish authority in a text and from one text to another (Ivanič 1998). This aspect of the writer's identity is significant because claiming authority in a text can enhance the writer's sense of agency and power through writing (Elbow 1995). Mirroring this, Seban and Tavşanlı (2015) explain that writing workshops that are socially situated in the community view the writer as the centre of the activity, thus giving them space to claim ownership of their writing and share it with others as their own. To give an example of the element of the self as an author in context, Lammers and Marsh (2018) conducted a longitudinal single case study to trace the development of the writer identity of one participant, Laura, who has been a passionate writer since childhood. She expressed her authorial writer identity, saying, "sometimes I consider myself a writer more than I consider myself a child because I think over the years I've spent like more time writing than I had like playing outside" (Lammers and Marsh 2018:99-100). Arising from Laura's encounter, the authorship of written texts during writing workshops can significantly develop a positive social identity (Cappello 2006).

(4) In addition to the three elements of the writer identity, Ivanič (1998) added **possibilities of self-hood** to the Writer Identity Theory to reflect the social identity aspect of the writer identity. The first three elements focus on writers. At the same time "possibilities of self-hood are available to writers in the social context of writing: social identities in the sense that they do not just belong to particular individuals" (Ivanič 1998:25). This aspect of writer identity focuses on how a person's identity as a writer is influenced by the social and cultural context to which they belong. Relating to the autobiographical self, Ivanič (1998) asserts that a writer's sense of self, or autobiographical self, is formed within the boundaries set by these social and cultural environments, as different people feel more or less connected to particular identities based on their group memberships and social context. As for the Discoursal Self, Ivanič (1998) argues that writers do not create their discoursal self from an unlimited range of possibilities. Rather, they are influenced by their social and cultural context, which provides specific opportunities and limitations that influence how they express themselves. These are also affected by the particular writing occasion, the context, and the purpose of the writing (Ivanič 1998). Similarly, The Self as Author is also socially constructed, affecting whether and how writers establish their presence as authors. Lastly, Ivanič (1998) highlights that the possibilities of the self-hood element indicate that bringing about social change and challenging the existing power structure in society through writing is not usually effective when conducted alone. It is more effective when

individuals align themselves with less privileged or powerful social groups. In this context, writing as part of a social group contributes to change.

Overall, the Writer Identity Theory considers how personal, social, and cultural contexts influence a writer's self-conception, including the roles, voice, and authority they present in their writing, which contribute to their sense of self (Ivanič 1998). This theory is particularly relevant in exploring the role of creative writing groups in allowing refugees to express their experiences, articulate their identities and potentially reshape their social identities in the context of their new social environment after migration. This section discusses the elements of the writer's identity theory, including support, power, meaning-making, social groups, and existing and emergent identities. This suggests that The Writer Identity Theory looks at similar processes (support, meaning and agency) of the SIA to Health and Well-being from different perspectives, which I discuss in the integration of theories section.

2.4. Integrating the Social Identity Approach and The Writer Identity Theory

As stated earlier, this thesis incorporates two theoretical approaches: the SIA to Health and Well-being, comprising the Social Identity Theory and The Self-Categorisation Theory, and Writer Identity Theory. Using multiple theoretical frameworks is beneficial because they allow for a more comprehensive analysis of my research topic and collectively contribute to answering my research questions. These theories are integrated to explore how participation in creative writing groups supports social integration and refugees' well-being by explaining the role of creative writing in the individual and collective well-being of refugees. As introduced in this chapter, The SIA to Health and Well-being provides a framework for understanding how group membership and social identity affect well-being. The Writer Identity Theory offers insights into how creative expression and the development of a writer's identity contribute to a positive sense of self. The writer's identity in this thesis is viewed as a shared social identity among refugees as in-group members in creative writing groups.

According to Haslam et al. (2018), social identity is a determining factor in the life of social groups in the sense that the processes following identification with a group lead to positive well-being. On the other hand, the negative influence of group memberships and identities can undermine and even harm members' well-being (Haslam et al., 2018). From this perspective, developing a writer's identity through participation

in creative writing groups can contribute to enhanced identification and resources, which can improve well-being, as suggested by the SIA to Health and Well-being. By identifying as part of a writing community, refugees experience improved self-esteem, a sense of belonging, and reduced feelings of isolation, all of which benefit their health (Stickley et al. 2019).

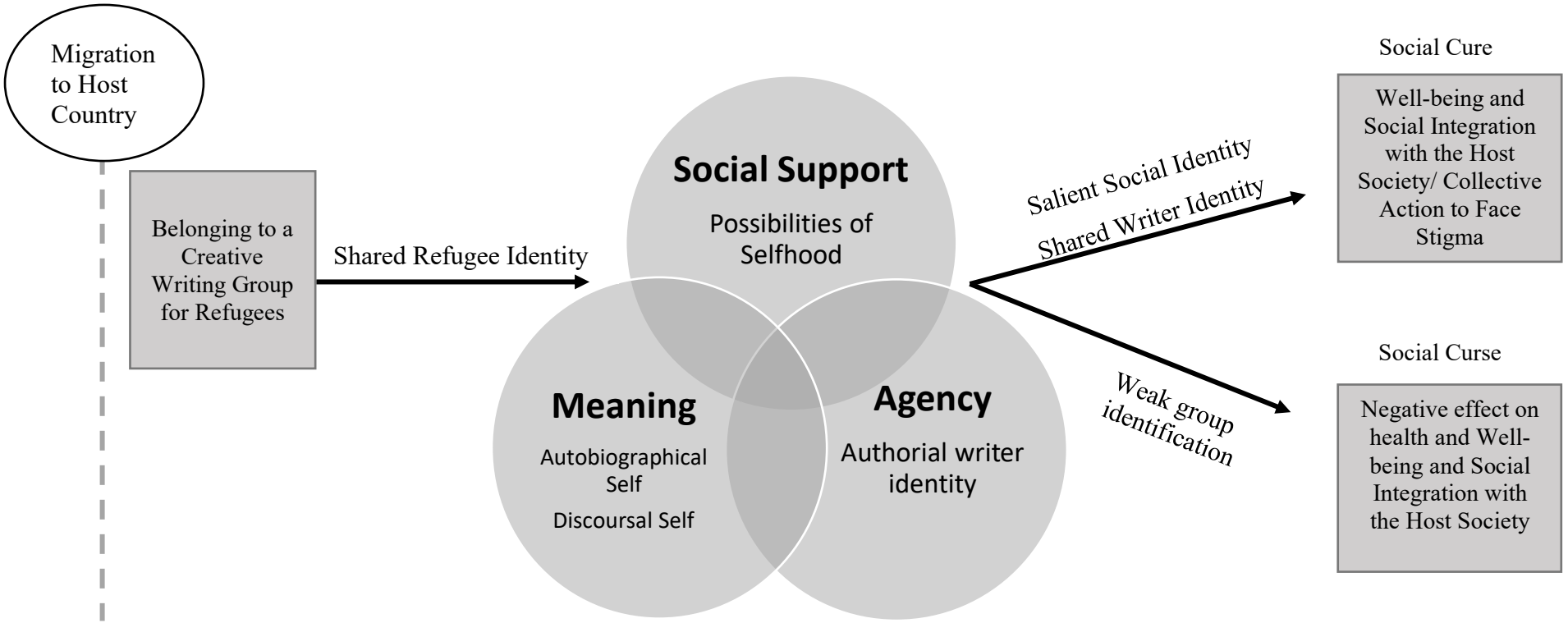
The SIA to Health and Well-being and the Writer Identity Theory can complement each other by providing different lenses through which to examine how creative writing contributes to the social integration of refugees. Through writing, refugees negotiate their social identities and express and reconstruct them in a way that integrates their past experiences in their home country with their present circumstances in the host society. This thesis proposes that the SIA to Health and Well-being and the Writer Identity Theory can relate to each other in meaningful ways within the context of creative writing groups to support refugees' social integration in three ways:

To practically establish the link between the elements of the Writer Identity Theory and the SIA to Health and Well-being, I first introduce the hypothesis associated with the SIA. According to Jetten et al. (2017), the SIA to Health and Well-being indicates that social identities derived from group memberships can positively affect an individual's well-being and provide meaning, support, and agency. The social cure perspective is built on fifteen hypotheses, four of which provide the lens for this research project: the meaning hypothesis, the support hypothesis, the agency hypothesis, and the creativity hypothesis (Haslam,et al. 2018). These hypotheses are also considered "psychological resources that mediate the link between social identity and well-being" (Du, Livingstone and Adlam 2024:3).

I first present Figure (4) to show how this thesis proposes that each hypothesis relates to the four elements of the writer identity theory. I explain and justify each hypothesis and its link to the elements of the writer identity theory. I developed this figure based on the discussion in Chapter 1 on the social integration of refugees in host societies and the study's aim. The figure explores the writer's identity as a shared social identity among refugees as in-group members in creative writing groups and their inter-relations with the host society. It presents the process of social integration and well-being of refugees through their participation in creative writing groups, with a focus on the SIA to Health and Well-being and the Writer Identity Theory. This theoretical framework illustrates the potential identity processes and outcomes that may arise from participation in a creative writing group for refugees, including potential positive outcomes (social

cure) and possible challenges (social curse), which are explored further in the findings' chapters.

Figure (4): Theoretical framework connecting the Social Identity Approach to Health and Well-being and the Writer Identity Theory



Source: (Author's own work), Adapted from Haslam, et al. (2018), and Ivanič (1998)

The starting point represents refugee migration to a new country. Through participation in a creative writing group, refugees can develop a salient social identity associated with developing a shared social identity as refugees. According to Haslam et al. (2018), when social identity becomes salient, people tend to view themselves and others primarily through the lens of group affiliations rather than as unique individuals. Each of the three intersecting circles represents one of the key hypotheses from the social cure perspective and elements of Writer Identity Theory. The overlaps between circles suggest fluidity and interconnection of *Meaning, Support, and agency*. Where the circles for *Meaning* and *Support* overlap, this reflects that both theories propose that meaning is co-constructed in social groups. In the Writer's Identity Theory, meaning is shaped by the writer's autobiographical narrative in a supportive environment. The overlap between *Support* and A*gency* may indicate that support in a social context can empower refugees and contribute to the development of the authorial writer's identity. Lastly, where *Agency* and *Meaning* overlap, it opens up the possibility of exploring the relationship between agency and meaning construction in the writing process.

As refugees strengthen their writer identity and social agency, they are empowered to collectively face social stigma. The shared writer identity and refugee identity helped the participants cope with and challenge negative perceptions within the host society. However, when group bonds are weak or identities remain fragmented, the experience may result in a Social Curse, hindering well-being and integration.

(1) Top Circle: Social Support and Possibilities of Self-hoof

The top circle of Figure (4) proposes examining the support provided and received within refugees' creative writing groups through the support hypothesis as part of the social cure perspective, alongside exploring one of the elements of the Writer Identity Theory: possibilities of selfhood within the social practices and discourses. As discussed earlier, these theories examine similar processes (support, meaning and agency) from different perspectives. This integration provides a multidimensional understanding of refugees' perspectives on support within creative writing groups.

To illustrate the link between the support hypothesis and the possibilities of selfhood, I first introduce each concept. The support hypothesis states that "when, and to the extent that, people define themselves in terms of shared social identity, they will (a) expect to give each other support,

(b) give each other support, and (c) construe the support they receive more positively" (Haslam, et al. 2018:30). In light of this hypothesis, when individuals who face disadvantaged circumstances post-migration, such as trauma or discrimination, identify themselves with a social group, they consider the support they receive as more meaningful and appropriate (Kellezi, et al. 2019). Wakefield et al. (2019) also assert that although giving meaning to the hardship refugees face is essential, finding support within a community and sharing experiences are also necessary. Haslam, Reicher, and Levine (2012) explain that in light of the Self-Categorisation Theory as part of the SIA, social support is most effective in groups where people have a positive social identity and identify themselves as one group “We” instead of “I.”

The possibilities of selfhood within the social practices and discourses of the Writer Identity Theory emphasise the role of social groups and support networks in writing specifically for disadvantaged groups instruction (Ivanič 2004). This element focuses on the importance of the support network and the social context surrounding the writing event. Ivanič (1998) further argues that writers are influenced by their social and cultural context, which provides specific opportunities and limitations that influence how they express themselves. This highlights the link between social support and its influence on the writer’s identity. This element also links writing to the social identities that exist in the writing event, particularly when writing is in the social practices’ discourses discussed earlier, which emphasise the role of social groups and support networks in writing specifically for disadvantaged groups (Ivanič 2004).

Hence, the writer's identity in this thesis is viewed as a shared social identity among refugees as in-group members in creative writing groups. The shared social identity is one of the most applicable aspects of the SIA to Health and Well-being to study social identities in creative writing groups for refugees. A shared social identity can lead different people to become "fellow in-group members who are part of the self" (Turner 1985 cited in Haslam, et al. 2018:27). Aligning with the thesis focus on refugees, Alfadhli and Drury (2016) applied the Social Identity Theory is applied to explain how a shared social identity is developed among refugees and how this shared identity plays a role in empowering and supporting them by fostering a sense of belonging within social groups. Alfadhli and Durary (2018) further illustrate that a shared social identity among refugees is not limited to their status as refugees, it also includes activities provided to support refugees, such as teaching and art-based activities where refugees can find a shared identity to claim. Alongside the refugee identity as a shared social identity, one of the primary shared social

identities among refugees presented in creative writing groups is the writer's identity. In particular, Ivanič's (1998) possibilities of self-hood as the fourth element of the writer identity is about writing in a social context where social identities are shared among writers.

Shared social identities can form a foundation for refugee support (Alfadhli and Drury 2018). This support results from having a shared fate and struggle based on shared values (Alfadhli and Drury 2018). The writer's and refugee identities as shared social identities can form a support base and a platform to describe the interplay between the social cure and the social curse perspectives in in-group relations. In addition, the Social Identity Model of Identity Change introduced earlier, implies maintaining existing social identities and gaining new ones (Haslam, et al. 2018). The shared social identity of refugees has been applied in some studies including (Ballentyne, et al. 2021, Panagiotopoulos, Giovanetti and Pavlopoulos 2022, Panagiotopoulos and Pavlopoulos 2023, Alfadhlil, et al. 2019). In the Writer Identity Theory, some elements are maintained, and some are gained. For example, the autobiographical self is an existing identity up to the moment of writing, while the discoursal self and the authorial self are emergent identities during the act of writing (Zhao 2011, Clark and Ivanič 1997).

To clarify the role of the writer's identity as a shared social identity in providing support for refugees, I refer to Haslam, Reicher and Levine's (2012) understanding of social support concerning shared social identity. Social support refers to actions where individuals or groups offer resources to others; these sources can include material support, emotional support and informational support (Haslam, Reicher and Levine 2012). Although social support helps individuals or groups feel valued, its effectiveness is not guaranteed. It depends on the motives and goals of the person giving the support and how the recipient interprets the support. Haslam, Reicher, and Levine (2012:180) explain that this is influenced by the relationship between the provider and recipient and the social context in which they exist. They further argue that "social support is always an aspect of a relationship between two or more parties and that its meaning – for both provider and recipient – will always depend on the nature of this relationship". Based on this understanding of social support, in-group members' relations are essential for the provision of adequate social support. From this perspective, the Writer Identity Theory can provide the basis for emotional support and well-being for refugees as members of a creative writing group, as detailed in Chapter 3.

(2) Left Circle: Meaning, Autobiographical Self and Discoursal Self

The left circle of Figure (4) proposes examining the sense of meaning refugees develop within their creative writing groups through the lens of the meaning hypothesis, as part of the social cure perspective, alongside the autobiographical self and the discoursal self as they are both concerned with individual history and memories and their presentation in the discourse of writing. This integration of theories aims to shed light on refugees' perspectives on seeking meaning as members of creative writing groups.

According to Haslam et al. (2018:29), the meaning hypothesis indicated that: "when, and to the extent that, people define themselves in terms of shared social identity, that identity will focus their energies and imbue them with a sense of meaning, purpose, and worth." In light of the Social Identity Theory as part of SIA, the meaning aspect is derived from the social self. SIA, in its origin, is a theory of self and is related to self-esteem; the social self is affected by the multiple social identities an individual can have (Brewer 1991). On the other hand, the Writer Identity Theory, as mentioned earlier, highlights that the sense of the self is socially constructed through speaking or writing (Ivanič 1994). Due to the tendency for shared group memberships to become part of the self, they have an impact on the well-being of individuals; hence, belonging to a group is empowering for members since it gives them a sense of purpose, self-worth, and meaning in life (Jetten, et al. 2017). Furthermore, engaging in creative writing activities can help individuals create a sense of meaning and regain their social identities during challenging and life-changing experiences (Ryan, Bannister and Anas 2009). Within these groups, creative writing becomes more than just an activity; it becomes a tool that allows individuals to reclaim their sense of self, gain positive social identities, and find meaning in difficult circumstances (Puvimanasinghe, et al. 2015). Resonating that, Ivanič (1998) asserts that the discoursal self of the writer's identity mainly refers to the effect of social interaction and relations on how an individual presents themselves in their writing.

In reflecting on this, Hanauer (2014) emphasises that writing for non-native speakers is a process of discovering oneself, especially in times of change and uncertainty. Hanauer (2014) further emphasises that in times of uncertainty and change of culture and language, creative writing in general and poetry in specific is a tool of self-discovery and self-expression by finding beauty in linking the past with the present. This echoes Hogg's (2009) study on the role of social identities

in reducing uncertainty. Hogg (2009) argues that self-uncertainty drives individuals to identify with groups that provide clarity and stability. This need for identification stems from the need to belong to groups and minimise the occurrence of uncertainty to develop a defined social identity consistent with the norms and values of the groups. Similarly, Hogg (2000) emphasises the role of self-categorisation when dealing with uncertainty. Moreover, he argues that individuals who face self-doubt engage in self-categorisation processes that align their identities with social groups. This categorisation helps individuals understand their position in the world and gain validation from fellow group members. By identifying with a shared group identity rather than focusing on individual differences, this process can reduce uncertainty and enhance individuals' self-esteem (Hogg 2000).

In addition to the role of social groups in uncertainty reduction, groups form the basis for collective continuity. Maoulida et al. (2023) define perceived collective continuity as the perception that a group or community will endure over time by maintaining its values and traditions. This refers to the concept that a group's past, present, and future can give members a sense of stability and belonging to something larger than themselves. This concept is often linked to the Social Identity Theory, in which the group's continuity contributes to individual members' sense of identity and well-being (Maoulida, et al. 2023). Sani et al. (2007) perceived collective continuity is essential, especially for disadvantaged groups that face discrimination. Sani et al. (2007:1131) argue that "to reinforce our identity and to live in a meaningful world, we need to perceive the groups to which we belong as having continuity across time". In the context of refugees, collective continuity helps members navigate changes. For example, for groups facing marginalisation or displacement, like refugees, maintaining collective continuity is crucial for social integration and mental health, as it reinforces their identity and resilience in a new environment (Smeekes, et al. 2017). Uncertainty reduction and perceived collective continuity can demonstrate the significance of creative writing groups for refugees to enhance their sense of meaning and well-being.

(3) Right Circle: Agency and Authorial Writer Identity

Lastly, the right circle of Figure (4) proposes investigating the sense of agency in refugees' creative writing groups alongside the authorial self. The Self as an Author, as one of the elements of the Writer Identity Theory, indicates that writing can provide individuals with control and a sense of agency as they start to contribute and share their experiences (Ivanič 1998). Elbow (1995) also explains that the authorial writer identity is an essential aspect of the Writer Identity Theory because it gives power and agency to writers.

Regarding agency, according to Haslam et al. (2018:31), the agency hypothesis states that "when, and to the extent that, people define themselves in terms of shared social identity, they will develop a sense of efficacy, agency, and power". Relevant to the sense of gaining agency, group members who face negative stereotypes and stigma can work together to cope with and face the challenges of belonging to low-status groups (Haslam, et al. 2018). The SIA identifies three main strategies members of disadvantaged groups use to deal with such situations: social mobility, social creativity, and social competition (Haslam, et al. 2018). In line with the nature of creative writing groups, social creativity is more applicable to discussions as they reframe challenges by re-creating different meanings. The creativity hypothesis indicates that: "when circumstances threaten, undermine, or preclude positive social identity if people perceive group boundaries to be impermeable but group relations to be secure, they are likely to respond to the threat to positive identity through strategies of social creativity" (Haslam, et al. 2018:20). Social creativity includes five main strategies: "change values in the comparison, change comparison dimension, change comparison group, compare to new reference-point and re-categorisation" (Bezouw, Toorn and Becker 2021:411). For example, in re-categorisation, a refugee can say that they, we are refugees, but we are more educated than some people in this country.

In addition, when members of a stigmatised group become aware of their exclusion from the majority group, they may absorb these negative perceptions, which can negatively affect their self-esteem (Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey 1999). This aligns with the looking-glass theory of self, which proposes that individuals' self-image is shaped by how they believe others perceive them (Cooley, 1956 cited in Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey 1999). The individuals' self-images is also consistent with the efficacy-based approach to self-esteem. A sense of control and autonomy is crucial for sustaining high self-esteem, whereas rejection by the dominant group undermines this feeling of agency (Hewitt 2002).

In summary, the integration of the SIA into Health and Well-being and the Writer Identity Theory offers a theoretical lens to examine how group membership and social identity influence well-being. While the SIA focuses on the impact of identifying with a group on the well-being of refugees, the Writer Identity Theory highlights the role of developing a writer's identity in enhancing a positive sense of self and the well-being of refugees. In this thesis, the writer's identity is considered a shared social identity among refugees within creative writing groups to explore the connection between social support, meaning and agency in these social settings.

2.5. Integration of the Social Identity Approach and The Writer Identity Theory in Exiting Literature Combining both theories

Although there is limited direct research explicitly linking the SIA and the Writer Identity Theory, some studies have explored the intersections of social identity and writing, such as Bird (2013) and Ivanič (2004), which can be seen as connecting these two frameworks. Other studies have discussed social identity and creative writing, including Duret and Pies (2023), Dobson and Stephenson (2017), Ryan, Bannister, and Anas (2009), Lim (2010), and Zhao (2011), but did not integrate both theories. I first present the three studies that combined both theories to understand the context in which this framework has been applied in the literature. Then, I present Lim's (2010) and Zhao's (2011) works as examples of studies that discuss the Social Identity Theory and the writer identity.

Bird (2013) explores the impact of an academic writing course titled Writing about Writing on students' writer identity. The academic writing course is based on the concepts of the Social Identity Theory and the elements of the writer's identity. Bird demonstrates that successful identification with a community and awareness of the writer's identity would help participants have ownership of their ideas and develop their sense of self. For example, Bird discusses how one student struggling with the idea of contributing original thoughts gradually began to view academic writing as an opportunity to join scholarly conversations, significantly increasing her confidence and engagement in writing. This example illustrates how the course can help students move beyond superficial writing practices to a deeper engagement with their writing. This course

aligns with Ivanič's framework that views writing as the performance of identity within a community (Bird 2013).

Zhao's (2011) investigates the identities of second-language creative writers in a social context, focusing on Ivanič's (1998) concept of autobiographical identity. The study, which involved fifteen advanced English as a second language speakers, reveal that understanding the writer's identity as an emergent identity enhances the role of creative writing as a tool for self-improvement and empowerment. For example, one participant demonstrated how his identity as a professional and a writer intertwined during the creative process. His planning and decision-making in writing reflect his identity as someone working in the professional community of English language teaching. Another participant, who was part of a local creative writing group, illustrated how her self-perception and social roles influenced her editing strategies as she kept negotiating her discoursal self and how she presented herself in writing. Zhao (2011) argues that second-language creative writing is a social process in which writers continuously engage with their communities and life histories while writing their texts. This makes it impossible to thoroughly analyse their writing in isolation from the social and cultural contexts in which they are written.

Lim (2010) explores the complexities of social identities in the creative writing classroom. Lim challenges traditional teaching methods and emphasises the importance of nurturing students' talent by recognising the collective identities of students shaped by gender, race, and ethnicity. Lim (2010) argues that these multiple social identities can significantly influence the creative writing process. For instance, Lim recounts her experience of being rejected for a creative writing teaching position because of her accent in English, regardless of her qualifications and literary accomplishments. This example illustrates that social identities, specifically racial and linguistic identities, can hinder teaching and learning to write. Lim (2010) demonstrates that more attention should be given to students from diverse backgrounds and carrying multiple identities, as these identities affect their linguistic choices and creative expression. This study indicates that students' social identities are central to creative writing classrooms.

Based on the discussions of these studies, the Social Identity Approach and the Writer Identity Theory, when combined, can highlight the connection between identity formation and writing practices within social contexts. Whether through academic courses, second-language creative writing, or creative writing classrooms, these studies illustrate that writing is a social

process influenced by an individual's social identities and affiliations with social groups. By connecting the two frameworks, it is evident that writing can serve as a tool for navigating complex social identities and self-expression, where the writer's sense of self evolves through engagement with others and the broader sociocultural environment. This demonstrates the value of examining refugee creative writing groups through this integrated lens. Despite the evidence above, this framework combining the two theories: SIA to Health and Well-being and the Writer Identity Theory, is applied for the first time in the context of creative writing groups of refugees in this thesis.

2.6. Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the foundational frameworks that inform this thesis: the SIA to Health and Well-being and the Writer Identity Theory. By integrating these two theories, I have established an interdisciplinary framework to explore the role of creative writing groups in promoting social integration and refugee well-being in the UK. The SIA to Health and Well-being provides a lens to explore how group memberships and social identity influence individual well-being. The Writer Identity Theory in this thesis highlights how creative expression and developing a shared writer's identity among refugees as in-group members in creative writing groups contribute to a positive sense of self, which enhances refugees' well-being. This chapter has highlighted how these theories intersect in three critical areas within refugee creative writing groups. This framework guides the data analysis in (Chapters 5-7).

In the next chapter, I will present a comprehensive literature review that contextualises this study within the existing literature on creative writing groups for refugees. Chapter 3 explores the dynamics of group relations, both within creative writing groups and in the host society. This will identify the research gap that this thesis seeks to fill and present the research questions that will guide the remainder of this thesis.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

I don't think our voices are that loud.
But we just have to keep shouting and screaming,
and hopefully,
It will get through
-Paul

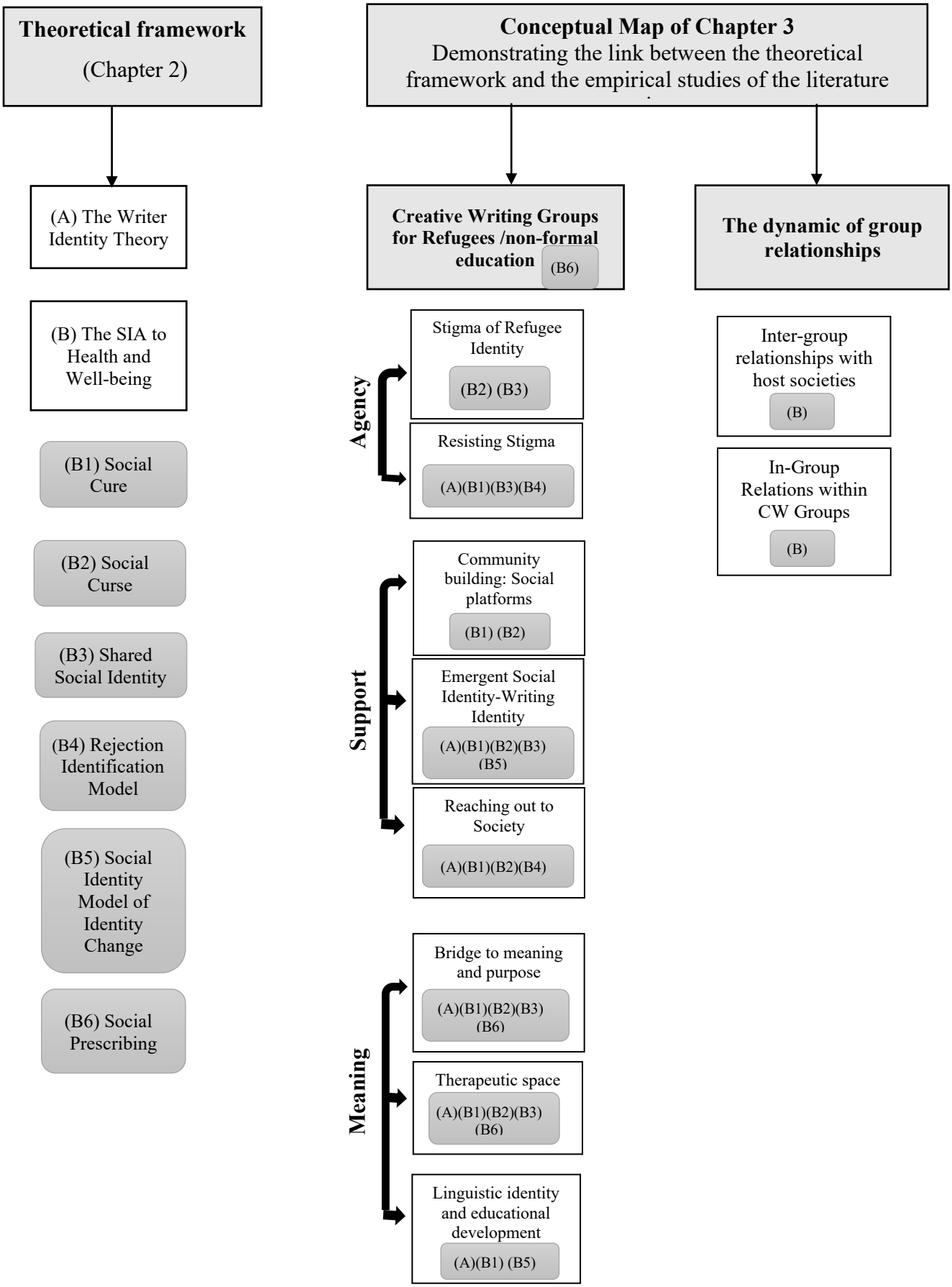
3.1 Overview

This chapter provides an overview of empirical research on refugees' creative writing groups, exploring group dynamics within the UK and other host countries. Building on the theoretical foundations of Chapter 2, this study examines the key ideas and scholarly debates that shape this research, with the aim of understanding the social integration of refugees. This chapter identifies three gaps in the literature, specifically, how refugees are perceived in terms of meaning, support, and agency, and presents the research questions guiding the data analysis. Given the interdisciplinary nature of this project, the studies incorporate several fields such as education, social psychology, second-language acquisition, and refugee studies. This synthesis highlights the contribution of this study to these interconnected areas of knowledge.

This chapter begins by introducing the context of second-language creative writing groups for refugees in non-formal educational settings. This section then explores group dynamics and examines the impact of these writing groups, particularly in addressing societal stigma and the challenges surrounding refugee identity. Finally, the chapter discusses how creative writing groups contribute to community building and promote self-reflection and insight, offering participants a means of reclaiming their narratives and identities.

To establish the link between the theoretical framework in Chapter 2 and this literature review chapter, I introduce Figure (5). The Writer Identity Theory is represented in letter (A) and the SIA to Health and Well-being is represented in letter (B) and its components are labelled as (B1) to (B6). Each box in the literature review is labelled with an element of the theoretical framework. For example, Stigma of Refugee Identity is labelled with (B2) and (B3), which shows that this section of literature relates to Social Curse and Shared Social Identity of the theoretical framework.

Figure (5): Summary of literature review and connection to theoretical framework (Author's own work)



3.2 Creative Writing Groups for Refugees

The global refugee crisis has prompted community collaboration to enhance non-formal educational opportunities for adult refugees. As introduced in Chapter 1, this thesis focuses on creative writing groups established by refugee community organisations in England. Refugee community organisations adopt various methods to facilitate the integration of refugees into the host society. Among these methods, creative writing groups have emerged as a sanctuary for aiding refugees in expressing the challenges they face, talking about the traumas they might have experienced, and building new connections (Goodson 2017).

Refugee community organisations employ various strategies to support the social integration of refugees into the host society. A wide range of scholarly articles discuss community-based art interventions in general, such as Gross et al. (2021), and various forms of art intervention for refugees, including drawing, including Metzl and Treviño (2022), visual arts, theatre, drama, music, poetry, film, and dance, such as Moreira and Jakobi (2021). These interventions play a significant role in refugee well-being and social integration. Before focusing on creative writing groups, it is essential to briefly discuss the broader context and outcomes of art-based interventions for refugees.

Art project interventions have been recognised for their capacity to enhance the health and well-being of refugees. These projects provide transformative services that can significantly improve the well-being of individuals, social groups, and the community (Gross, et al. 2021). Transformative services refer to those that lead to substantial positive changes in participants' lives, promoting overall health and social integration (Osrom et.al 2016 cited in Gross, et al. 2021). In addition, providing refugees with a platform to express their experiences and narratives through art is a recurring theme in literature (Metzl and Treviño 2022). Creative activities, including drawing, allow participants to articulate their emotions and stories, which can be therapeutic and empowering (Metzl and Treviño 2022). Therapy through art activities empowers refugees by helping them communicate their beautiful memories and challenging experiences. These projects also facilitate inter-group interactions, encourage dialog and exchange, and lead to greater empathy and understanding between community members (Moreira and Jakobi 2021).

A gap identified in the literature on art groups for refugees is the need for research that includes refugees' voices rather than relying on perspectives from therapists or group leaders (Moreira and Jakobi 2021; Metzl and Treviño 2022). Including the voices of refugees and asylum seekers is essential for understanding and improving art-based social inclusion

efforts. The representation of refugee voices aligns with a suggestion for more studies with direct insights from refugees to better understand the impact and effectiveness of these interventions (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Greatrick 2017).

This understanding of the significance of art interventions for refugees sets the context for a more focused examination of creative writing groups, which share many benefits while offering unique expression, support and empowerment opportunities. Creative writing groups have emerged as a crucial support system, providing refugees with a safe space to articulate their challenges, process and express their traumas and develop new social connections (Goodson 2017). These groups serve as therapeutic outlets and platforms for empowerment and community building to help refugees navigate their new environments with greater resilience and confidence (Bundesen, et al. 2020). Additionally, creative writing groups aim to give refugees a voice, allowing them to narrate their experiences and explore their social identities within a supportive environment (Stickley, et al. 2019).

This thesis focuses on creative writing groups for refugees in England, involving refugees and asylum seekers who use English as their second language for communication. Therefore, it is essential to define second-language creative writing in this context. Chapter 1 defines creativity, as defined by the Council of Art England (2021), as applying knowledge and skills to create something new. Second-language creative writing can be understood as the use of a second language in innovative and figurative ways to express oneself beyond conventional or literal meaning (Eda Hancı-Azizoğlu 2018). Throughout this thesis, I use the term *creative writing* instead of *second-language creative writing* for consistency. However, I refer to second-language creative writing when I refer to scholars who have used it.

After discussing creative writing groups for refugees, exploring the dynamics of group relations in creative writing is essential.

3.3 Dynamics of Group Relations

The role of creative writing groups in the social integration of refugees was first discussed in the theoretical framework of Chapter 2. This chapter reviews studies on the dynamics of group relations. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for exploring how creative writing groups contribute to refugee social integration and address existing research gaps. In the context of this thesis, the dynamics of group relations refer to the interactions of creative writing groups both externally and internally within the group.

3.3.1. Inter-group Relations with the Host Society

Inter-group relations refer to the relationship between asylum seekers and the citizens of a country (Bye 2020). This describes the interaction between a dominant and minority group within a society (Lutterbach and Beelmann 2020). Studies discussing inter-group relations have focused on two aspects: the positive outcomes of contact and the adverse outcomes of conflict. Lutterbach and Beelmann (2020) assert that inter-group contact reduces stigma, prejudice, and stereotyping. The encounter between refugee minoritised groups and the host society as a majority group can lead to mutual understanding, shared perspectives and successful social integration (Lutterbach and Beelmann 2020). However, research indicates that refugees and asylum seekers in Europe and the United States are often viewed negatively, with many perceiving them as potential threats to the social and economic stability of these societies (Bye 2020). Refugees are seen as individuals with low competence who depend on the resources of the host country and threaten stability, which generates feelings of rejection of refugees (Bye 2020; Koc and Anderson 2018). This, in turn, can result in inter-group anxiety, which refers to feeling unease when communicating with the majority group (Koc and Anderson 2018). Aligning with this, Betts et al. (2023) argue that in the context of refugees, social integration means that refugees and citizens of the host community get well together; however, achieving this can be challenging due to the existence of stigma and discrimination against refugees. Lutterbach and Beelmann (2020) summarised negative and positive contact by explaining that negative/harmful inter-group contact makes individuals focus on differences, while positive contact makes individuals more focused on similarities. Focusing on similarities initiates social bonds between minority and majority groups. The social bond is a heading in the integration framework discussed in Chapter 1 (Ndofor-Tah, et al. 2019).

Inter-group relations are also explored extensively through the lens of social identity (Oakes 2003; Jetten, et al. 2017). Inter-group relations between minority and majority groups are complex and influenced by group size, status, and power (Haslam, et al. 2018). Minority group members often experience an increased threat to their positive social identity because of their lower status, which can lead to social curse processes (Kellezi, et al. 2019). Comprehending these dynamics is essential for creating strategies that lessen inter-group conflict and encourage social interaction and integration among refugees. Furthermore, inter-group relations with the host society highlight the refugees' challenges and potential for social change.

One key focus in this chapter is on inter-group relations between refugees and the broader host community, focusing mainly on refugee labels and stigma. Stigma can hinder refugees' ability to integrate fully into society and contribute to the broader challenges they face. By addressing stigma, particularly through collective narratives shared in creative writing groups, refugees have the opportunity to challenge stereotypes, advocate for their rights and enhance their social integration within British society. Engaging with the community through their stories allows refugees to reshape their social identity beyond the stigma associated with the refugee label. Lutterbach and Beelmann (2020) highlight that the focus of studies on inter-group relations is on the majority group's perspective. Hence, studies are needed to examine inter-group relations from the minority group's perspective. This gap mirrors a previous one that highlighted the need for more representation of the refugee perspective in the literature. Furthermore, the role of creative writing groups in enhancing inter-group relations between refugees and the host community is still underexplored. This thesis addresses this gap, with a particular focus on the aspect of agency, which is further discussed in this chapter.

3.3.2. In-group Relations within Creative Writing Groups

Groups form the basic structure of human lives and serve as the medium of interaction, from small family units to large groups based on nationality and religion (Brewer 2019). In-group relations refer to the interactions and social dynamics within a specific group of individuals who share a common identity and sense of identification. These relations often include mutual support, cooperation, and solidarity among group members, but they can also involve conflicts, competition, and power struggles. In contrast, inter-group relations or interactions with those outside the group are often marked by distrust, competition, or conflict (Brewer 2019).

The theoretical framework in Chapter 2 introduced social groups and their relation to health and well-being, emphasising that the positive effects of social groups depend on members' identification with the group (Turner and Reynolds 2003). In creative writing groups, in-group relations build upon the Rejection-Identification Model (Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey 1999) presented in Chapter 2, suggesting that in disadvantaged groups, a shared social identity can foster increased group identification and resilience (Haslam, et al. 2018). Additionally, the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC) discussed in Chapter 2 is relevant in this context as it focuses on maintaining existing social identities

and gaining new ones (Haslam, et al. 2018). SIMIC is related to this study as it helps explain how creative writing groups can help refugees maintain their original identities while developing new ones within their host community. This process of identity maintenance and adaptation supports a sense of continuity and belonging, which are essential for resilience and well-being as individuals navigate the challenges of integration (Haslam, et al. 2018).

Hogg (2016) explains that social identities are derived from the social groups that individuals identify with and affect their self-concept. People strive to ensure that their groups have a positive status as compared to out-groups. While social groups with a higher status ensure that their status is maintained and improved, groups with a disadvantaged status have to deal with stigma and discrimination to reach a favourable status in society (Hogg 2016). This resonates with the Rejection-Identification Model presented in Chapter 2, which highlights the crucial role of social identity in finding positive opportunities among negative experiences (Haslam, et al. 2018; Schmitt and Branscombe 2002). The literature review in this chapter will reveal that art groups enhance the positive status of refugee groups. This is because belonging to minority groups can shield against social injustice, such as stigma and discrimination, by providing support and resources for managing and combating these challenges (Haslam, et al. 2018).

A key focus in in-group relations in this chapter is on the writer's identity as a shared social identity among group members. Understanding the writer's identity as a shared social identity can enhance the sense of belonging and community among group members, which is essential for their creative and emotional well-being. In addition, in-group relationship reveals the interplay between social cure and social curse in creative writing groups. As presented in Chapter 2, the concept of a social cure refers to the beneficial effects of group membership on health and well-being. In contrast, the social curse highlights the potential negative consequences of group dynamics. By examining these in-group dynamics in creative writing groups, this chapter explains how shared social identities can have positive and negative outcomes. This study explores the delicate balance between a supportive group environment that can enhance creativity and resilience and the potential for conflict and stress that can affect a group's identification and individual well-being. This will demonstrate the complex nature of in-group relations and the importance of providing a supportive space in creative writing groups for refugees.

After introducing inter-group and in-group relations, the next section explores the significance of creative writing groups for refugees. This study examines the outcomes of intragroup and in-group relations through the lens of the social cure and curse perspectives.

3.4. The Significance of Creative Writing Groups for Refugees

This section explores the essential role of creative writing groups in the social integration of refugees in three areas informed by the theoretical framework. The first area, namely, the societal stigma of refugee identity and resistance to stigma, addresses how these groups enable refugees to counter negative societal labels and reclaim agency through collaborative writing. The second area, community building in creative writing groups, focuses on these groups as social platforms that promote shared identity and support refugees in connecting and engaging with the host society. Lastly, self-reflection and insight in creative writing groups examine the therapeutic benefits of creative writing, its potential for self-reflection, meaning-making, and its role as a space for linguistic identity and educational development. These areas demonstrate the significance of creative writing groups in empowering refugees to navigate their experiences and contribute to social change. They also build a foundation to address research gaps and research questions.

3.4.1. Societal Stigma in Refugee Identity

This section examines the stigma attached to refugee identity and how creative writing groups offer a means of resistance. The Refugee label and societal stigma section explores the way the refugee label reinforces marginalisation and shapes inter-group dynamics. Resisting stigma through creativity groups consider how creative writing enables refugees to deal with stigma, despite limited research on the collaborative mechanisms and social creativity strategies. This section lays the foundation and builds towards addressing the gap in understanding how creative writing groups empower refugees to challenge stigma and engage in the host society through shared narratives. This gap ultimately builds towards Research Question 3, which examines how creative writing sessions empower refugees to collaboratively resist stigma and foster social change through their narratives.

3.4.1.1. Refugee Labels and Societal Stigma

The refugee label is not merely a legal designation but a deeply ingrained societal construct that carries a significant stigma. Vigil and Baillie Abidi (2018:54) define the refugee label as "a socially constructed label with complex legal, ethical and political connotations" evolving after the Second World War, in an attempt to categorise the non-native population and enforce legal and geographical boundaries. This label negatively affects inter-group relations

as it distinguishes *us* from *them*, creating a gap between refugees and their host societies (Zetter 2007; Brewer 2019). Zatter (2007) asserts that once a refugee label is given to an individual, it categorises people into groups that need to fight for their rights, freedom, and legal status. Regardless of whether the government grants the legal status of an asylum seeker, these societal labels reinforce societal perceptions and lead to stigmatisation.

At the core of the discourse surrounding the refugee label is the inherent fear and anxiety of the host society from newcomers to the host country (Zetter 2007). Refugees recognise this anxiety and develop the need to speak up to fight stigma (Zetter 2007). This highlights the significance of discussing inter-group relations in the social integration of refugees. Furthermore, refugee identity evokes a complex interplay between acceptance and rejection. Some refugees resist embracing the refugee identity because of the assumptions of vulnerability (Zetter 1991). This resistance to adopting the term *refugee* is also highlighted by a call from refugees to avoid using the term *refugee*, as indicated in (Vigil and Baillie Abidi 2018).

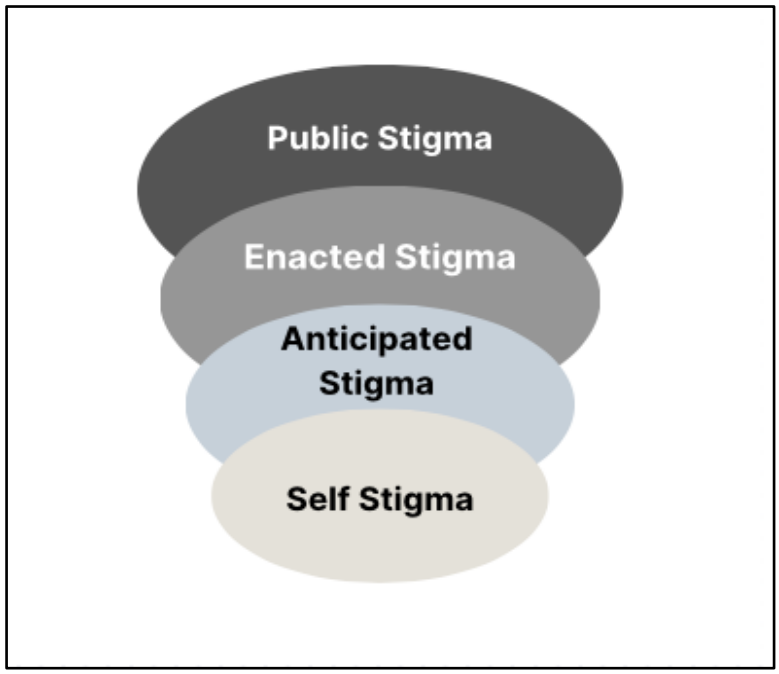
Conversely, other refugees find a positive connection with the refugee identity as it can provide them with opportunities for education and financial support, forming ties with their past and recognising their difficult migration journey (Vigil and Baillie Abidi 2018). This resembles the situation in detention centres, where social support can be a source of constraints and lack of independence. This interplay between social cure and curse for immigrants in detention centres is explored in Kellezi et al. (2019), who show that once individuals identify themselves with other detainees, they receive the benefit of social support but struggle to belong to an identity labelled with stigma. Despite these different perspectives, refugee identity presents a contradiction in that refugees must display vulnerability to gain protection, yet they are often celebrated for their resilience. This duality shows the complex and often contradictory nature of being labelled and identified as a refugee (Zetter 1991). This label of refugee leads to the stigmatisation of minority groups.

The term stigma originates from Greek, where it was used to describe bodily marks that were intentionally inflicted, such as cuts or burns, to shame an individual for being a traitor, thief, or slave; hence, the concept of stigma in literature provides a framework for understanding the social rejection faced by individuals possessing specific characteristics deemed undesirable by society (Goffman 1963). In the context of social groups, societal stigma refers to the characteristics of group members, including social or physical, that society considers inferior (Goffman 1963). Goffman's definitions of stigma highlight the negative impact such labels have on an individual's identity, leading to their exclusion from non-stigmatised social groups or even societies.

Adeeko and Treanor (2022) explain that from an inter-group relation perspective, refugee identity as a stigmatised social identity reflects power relations in society. Toyoki and Brown (2014) conducted a study on managing the stigmatised identities of prisoners. They concluded that stigmatised individuals are not socially accepted by society and that stigma is linked to power dynamics as it often reflects and reinforces existing power structures. This study adds that stigmatised identities are not merely labels but outcomes of practices that seek to discipline behaviour and maintain social order. For instance, prisoners' identities are constructed and controlled in the penal system through continuous assessment and correction. These practices preserve the inmates' stigmatised status and ensure compliance with institutional norms, reinforcing the power dynamics inherent in the prison system (Toyoki and Brown 2014).

Thus, stigma reflects the social structure of a society and the social relations between different groups, making stigma a social phenomenon (Nichols 2020; Goffman 1963). Notably, stigma has a reverse impact on the social integration of refugees; however, not all refugees face stigma in the same way (Fino 2024). Fino (2024:1) mentions four types of societal stigma faced by refugees, starting with "stigmatising attitudes towards them (public stigma), stigmatisation in everyday encounters (enacted stigma), they may also anticipate discrimination from others (anticipated stigma) in the absence of direct contact, and further, internalise these unfavourable beliefs about themselves (self-stigma)". Dobai and Hopkins (2020) assert that minoritised group members face stigma in the form of jokes, offensive labels, or descriptions that undermine their perspectives, emotions, and lived experiences. This resembles the stigma refugees face. Based on Fino's four types of stigma, I developed a hierarchy of relations between the four types of stigma against refugees, as presented in Figure (6). This Figure provides a better understanding of the stigmatisation of refugees as it suggests that when refugees resist public stigma through their narrative, other layers of stigma can diminish.

Figure (6): Hierarchy of refugee stigma



Source: Adapted from Fino (2024)

By organising societal stigma into a hierarchical structure, this figure reflects the progression and interaction of stigma types as proposed by Fino (2024), public stigma, enacted stigma, anticipated stigma and self-stigma. This hierarchy helps clarify how the various forms of stigma impact refugees, often sequentially or cumulatively, and underscores the potential for change when one level is addressed—particularly public stigma, which influences other forms. Incorporating this hierarchy aligns with the social cure perspective by emphasising the importance of social contexts that enhance meaning, support, and agency, as discussed in Chapter 2. For example, when refugees challenge public stigma through shared narratives, they weaken other layers of stigma and increase resilience and social empowerment.

Furthermore, Corrigan (2017) argues that refugees should be supported with tools to empower them in society instead of charity, as being a passive receiver of charity can reflect refugees' vulnerability and encourage societal stigma. Hence, Corrigan's encounter shows that supporting refugees to have agency and a source of income can reduce the public and enact stigma. Nickerson et al. (2020) assert that the challenges refugee experience and societal stigma can result in negative beliefs about the self, known as self-stigma. Providing a platform for groups with stigmatised identities to form social connections and share their experiences can reduce self-stigma (Nickerson, et al. 2020). Aligned with this, Bauer, Boemelburg and Walton (2021) conducted an experiment to challenge the stigmatised identity of refugees and reframe it as solid and resilient. The study concluded that when reframing refugee identity as a source of power and strength, refugees showed more

confidence in their ability to succeed, study, and get employed (Bauer, Boemelburg and Walton 2021). Although reframing the refugee identity cannot change the situation of refugees, it gives them a sense of meaning and appreciation of their struggle, which can diminish their self-stigma. Fino (2024) explains that the self-esteem of refugees is affected by all four forms of stigma, which in turn impedes their social integration. This highlights the significance of finding meaning to help refugees resist stigma.

3.4.1.2. Resisting Stigma through Creativity Groups

After addressing the refugee label and societal stigma, many refugees have challenged the stigma associated with refugee identity and strive to maintain positive social identities (Bauer, Boemelburg and Walton 2021). In line with the social identity approach, belonging to stigmatised social groups can be a source of "burden, ostracism, and distress, serving as social curses" (Kellezi, et al. 2019:2). Despite facing significant challenges that hinder refugees' integration into their new environments as a result of stigma, some refugees resist stigmatised identity by adopting an active role to refute the negative labels (Adeeko and Treanor 2022; Rubesin 2016). This resistance demonstrates the importance of understanding stigma as a dynamic social phenomenon. This highlights the potential for refugees to reshape their stigmatised identities by sharing their narratives. Refugees can use creative writing groups as spaces to express their stories, experiences, and viewpoints, which can strengthen their sense of empowerment and agency.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the main strategies that enhance a positive sense of self when belonging to a disadvantaged group include social mobility, social creativity, and social competition (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Haslam (2004) mentions that social creativity and competition are strategies used within a social change belief system to improve or uphold the status of one's in-group members, especially when group boundaries are seen as impermeable and the movement between groups is limited.

This thesis focuses on social creativity strategies for facing stigma. Social creativity is a coping mechanism encompassing strategies to reshape one's identity and improve social standing without altering the situation (Bezouw, Toorn and Becker 2021). This approach becomes particularly significant when altering the group's social status proves challenging, or group boundaries are non-changeable, leading members to prefer these strategies over social competition (Haslam, et al. 2018). Nonetheless, some forms of resistance in creative writing groups can be classified as social competition. Social competition mainly arises

when group relations are insecure and groups' collective resilience is in the form of rejecting the status quo of the group, such as involvement in political action to promote their rights (Haslam, et al. 2018).

Addressing stigma requires a comprehensive understanding of its social roots and an effort to change the perceptions that have caused these negative labels to exist. In response to stigma, social groups with stigmatised identities tend to adopt stigma management strategies (Toyoki and Brown 2014). Refugees employ a variety of strategies to manage the stigma associated with their identity. These strategies are often discursive, involving the use of language and narrative to reshape how they are perceived by themselves and others. These strategies are referred to as "discursive identity work" (Toyoki and Brown 2014:30). In exploring social creativity, Bezouw, Toorn, and Becker (2021:411) identify five main strategies: "change values in the comparison, change comparison dimension, change comparison group, compare to new reference point, and re-categorisation". Refugees employ these social creativity strategies in response to the stigma that threatens their social identity. Furthermore, they develop the need for group identification and together, they create a desire to address the injustice they might face from the out-group (Kellezi, et al. 2019). By doing so, refugees strive to construct a more positive self-image and challenge the societal and institutional narratives and practices that seek to define them solely by their stigmatised status. This engagement serves as a form of resistance and resilience against negative stereotypes.

Additionally, social groups with stigma or discrimination take either the concealment pathway, in which groups tend to ignore this discrimination, or the identification pathway, which addresses the group's motivation to form collective action to face the discrimination (Molero et al. 2011 cited in Haslam, et al. 2018). From the social cure perspective, this collective action arising from strengthened group identification can enhance individuals' well-being (Haslam, et al. 2018). In creative writing groups, this collective action occurs by writing together and presenting the participants' writing to the outgroup. Fino (2024) states that many refugees seek to enhance a positive social identity by using strategies to resist stigma and balance their vulnerability as refugees and their power to resist and move forward. In agreement with this, Nichols (2020) studied identity stigma associated with belonging to disadvantaged populations through a three-year ethnographic study. He shows that people often develop strategies to manage identity stigma, which can last for generations. Using narrative and storytelling is one of the main coping strategies associated with identity-based stigma, in which members of disadvantaged communities can create new

realities, explore their imagination and view their stories from their perspective (Nichols 2020).

Consistent with this, Vigil and Baillie Abidi (2018:56) highlights the importance of narrative for refugees, as one participant in the study noted, "As refugees and asylum seekers, we carry our self-respect and the multiple causes that brought us to where we are today; hence, we seek a platform to show our worth as human beings". Rubesin (2016) assert that responding to stigma can improve the well-being of refugees and transform their grief and frustration into positive social actions. She added that regaining their voice and agency through sharing their narrative can lead to "posttraumatic growth" and change refugees from "silenced immigrant groups" to active members of society (Rubesin 2016:6). Although stigma indicates power relations, a few studies have focused on the power in facing stigma, such as Toyoki and Brown (2014), and how creative writing groups empower refugees to resist stigma, which I acknowledge in this thesis.

Furthermore, although the three studies just mentioned (Rubesin 2016; Vigil and Baillie Abidi 2018; Nichols 2020) acknowledge the importance of giving voice to refugees, they did not specify a platform for refugees to get together and express their voice, narrate their stories, and reach out to society. Similarly, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Greatrick (2017) reflect on a creative writing workshop at the University College London. They emphasised that creative writing workshop activities can challenge mainstream perceptions of the refugee community and highlight self-expression and community building beyond conventional narratives imposed on refugees. However, this study did not incorporate the voices of refugees into the data generation. This shows the recognition in literature of the importance of bringing forward a narrative of refugees. Still, there is a lack of studies that focus on creative writing groups in which refugees narrate their stories and challenge the stigma of refugees by reaching out with their stories. Additionally, there is a gap in the literature regarding the inclusion of creative writing samples from refugees in studies about creative writing groups, such as Chaplin (2019), who only included data extracts from the interviews.

Despite recognition of creative writing's role in challenging stigma, specific insights into how refugees within these groups collaboratively navigate and resist stigma remain limited. Furthermore, the empowerment gained from publicly sharing narratives and its impact on both social perceptions and the development of refugees' writer identities are under-researched. This thesis aims to address these gaps by collecting data from a specific creative writing group and presenting creative writing samples of its members in its dataset.

3.4.2. Community Building in Creative Writing Groups

This section examines the community-building role of creative writing groups for refugees. It focuses on the potential of these groups to provide social support through shared identity and identification with the group. This section builds a foundation for the second research gap, which explores how refugees perceive and experience social support in their writing communities. The following three areas, creative writing groups as a social platform, the role of shared social identity in supporting refugees and reaching out to the host society, provide context for understanding social support. The focus is on community organisations and non-formal educational initiatives to support refugees. This section explores the community aspect of creative writing groups and their impact on refugee integration and resilience.

3.4.2.1. Creative Writing Groups as a Social Platform

This section focuses on studies that address creative writing groups, particularly poetry and story writing. It presents a range of scholarly papers discussing creative writing groups as a social platform. Social connection is one of the main aspects contributing to the social integration of refugees based on the Home Office indicators of integration framework introduced in Chapter 1 (Ndofor-Tah, et al. 2019). Creative writing groups as part of refugee community organisations are classified within non-formal educational settings. These refer to workshops or short courses for different age groups and do not qualify members for formal qualification (Yasunaga 2014). Second-language creative writing in non-formal educational settings is discussed by Zhao (2015), who argues that second-language creative writing is a social process that cannot be studied in isolation from the society and the community in which writers compose their texts. Furthermore, Norton (2000) asserts that when studying identity in second-language use, the social aspect and interaction with the community should be considered. Hence, this section presents creative writing groups as social platforms for refugees and examines the role of these groups in promoting social connections and support between refugees and host communities.

To begin with, creative groups provide essential support for refugees by providing a platform for social connections and safe spaces for self-expression. Social groups where creative activities take place help refugees form social connections, create a safe space for self-expression, and allow individuals to form social identities in the new society (Rousseau, et al. 2004). O'Neill (2018) focuses on using participatory arts and participatory action

research to explore walking and storytelling, well-being, and community engagement among ten women seeking asylum in England. She notes that by employing artistic approaches to listen to the stories of refugees and the details of their everyday experiences, researchers can gain deeper insights into larger societal structures and group dynamics. This focus on refugee stories can help them find meaning in their experiences and develop a desire to engage in social activities. Combining walking in a group with storytelling resulted in an enhanced sense of belonging among group members and feeling part of the wider society, as this group dynamic enhanced their sense of safety and support strengthens the importance of creatively empowering refugees with storytelling tools, as stories help refugees present themselves to society, especially in times of uncertainty.

Similarly, creative expression, such as poetry, offers an effective refugee coping mechanism that support social integration and emotional well-being. Hosseini and Punzi's (2023) study focus on unaccompanied young men and women who migrated from Afghanistan to Sweden to understand their experience of social integration through poetry. Many refugees have turned to creative outlets such as poetry to cope with the challenges of migration and resettlement and enhance their well-being and social integration in society (Hosseini and Punzi 2023). Hosseini and Punzi (2023) emphasise the importance of having a meeting place where members discuss their creative work, socialise and exchange language and culture. Stickley and Hui (2012) also agree that having a safe space to write is essential for participants.

Building on this, creative writing groups enhance the integration, well-being, and sense of community among refugees. Further investigation by Stickley et al. (2019) discusses the outcomes of creative writing groups for refugees and asylum seekers in three UK cities, exploring the impact on their education, well-being and social life. The study followed a mixed-methods approach, including diaries from group leaders, surveys, and participant interviews. Results showed that the creative writing programme contributed to the integration and sense of belonging among refugees and asylum seekers and overall well-being. By sharing stories and participating in group activities, the refugees developed stronger connections and built a community in a safe place. Participants reported increased confidence, hope and high satisfaction levels and valued the social connections they had made through the workshops (Stickley, et al. 2019). The study suggests that if managed well, creative writing groups can be a powerful tool for helping refugees and asylum seekers come to terms with their experiences and improve their future coping mechanisms (Stickley, et al. 2019).

While acknowledging the argument of Hosseini and Punzi (2023) and O'Neill (2018) in the role of creative writing in the social integration of refugees, Stickley et al. (2019) study raised doubts that it is a challenge to assess whether refugees and asylum seekers with serious trauma benefit from attending creative writing groups as they might require tailored assessment after speaking or writing about their emotions and traumatising experiences. Kellezi et al. (2021) raise the same concern in social prescribing for migrants, emphasising that some vulnerable migrants with complex needs require careful risk management and should only be referred to community groups equipped with the necessary skills and structures to support trauma sensitivity and appropriate signposting. Hence, one of the significant aspects to discuss when supporting refugees is the case of trauma, which is mentioned in the therapeutic space section in this chapter.

3.4.2.2. Shared Social Identity in Supporting Refugees in Creative Writing Groups

In the context of creative writing groups, explaining that the writer's identity is shared among members is essential, as discussed in Chapter 2. Alfadhlil et al. (2019) explain that in difficult situations, refugees tend to create shared social identities to support each other and identify with one another. Their study was based on the Social Identity Model of Collective Resilience, which entails that a "sense of common fate can create an emergent shared identity which can operate as a base for psychosocial support, and hence a possible source of efficacy" (Alfadhlil, et al. 2019:2). The study concludes that shared social identity enhances collective efficacy, enabling refugees to feel more capable of achieving goals and overcoming challenges. Additionally, shared social identity enhances the support including emotional support and daily support in life chores that positively impact refugees' general health and well-being. Complementing the positive support resulting from having a shared social identity, it is vital to highlight the negative side of belonging to refugee groups, which stems from the societal stigma attached to refugees. Hence, Alfadhlil et al. (2019) emphasise that part of supporting refugees comes from understanding how they react to stigma, which helps understand the relationship between social identity and the well-being of refugees.

Similarly, shared social identities among refugee entail benefits and challenges that provide a way to understand the integration experiences of refugees. Ballentyne et al. (2021) explore the benefits and challenges of shared social identities among refugees using SIMIC as a framework. It highlights that shared social identities can act as a social cure by providing psychological benefits such as a sense of belonging, meaning, and support, which can help

refugees face stress and adversity. SIMIC explains how maintaining multiple social identities can aid refugees in navigating post-migration life by providing a sense of continuity and coherence. However, the study also argues that this shared identity can be a social curse that leads to feeling distressed and marginalised. The study notes that imposed stigmatised identities like the refugee identity can limit individuals' ability to adapt and integrate successfully into the host society (Ballentyne, et al. 2021). Aligning with Ballentyne et al. (2021), Panagiotopoulos and Pavlopoulos's (2023) study also adapted SIMIC to discuss existing, continuous, and gained social identities after migration.

While the refugee identity as a shared social identity is imposed on refugees, embracing the writer's identity can be challenging for refugees in creative writing groups. Ouellette (2008) explains that successfully embracing the writer's identity can be complex for writers with low or disadvantaged social status, especially the self-as-author element, in which writers establish agency and authorship of their writing. Ivanič (1998) also notes that writers can struggle with taking authorship of their writing while feeling inferior or losing control and agency in other aspects of life. Nonetheless, Yang (2020:1) asserts that writing in a second-language, whether through story writing or any form of creative writing, can help individuals gradually achieve agentive writer identities, which is defined as "forming a new habit of writing, gaining confidence as a writer, and taking life writing as a craft" (Yang 2020:1). Mirroring this definition, Ouellette (2008:268) mentions that identity in writing is complex but can be viewed as "U-shaped learning curve" to understand the development of a writer's identity and the stages a person goes through in writing. The development of a writer's identity is simplified in three stages adapted from Ivanič's three aspects of the writer's identity: autobiographical self, discoursal self, and the self as an author, which I presented in Chapter 2. Ouellette (2008) mentions that the three aspects are present during writing: the autobiographical self relates to how a person's past experiences and memories shape their writing, while the discoursal self involves the deliberate effort to convey these memories through the writing process, and self as author refers to establishing authorship of the written text.

Additionally, the writer's identity is influenced by group dynamics, social relations, culture, and language, and it evolves and changes with time and experience. This resonates with Ivanič's (1994) perspective that the writer's identity is influenced by social and cultural aspects, along with the social groups an individual identifies with. Furthermore, Dymoke and Spiro (2017) examine the construction of writing identity in authors who actively publish poetry and are also authors who are published in academia in the field of Education. This study refers to writer identity in creative writing as poetic identity. Hanauer (2014:62)

defines the poetic identity as the "participant's subject position on autobiographical events and experiences expressed through the focusing potential of literary language resulting from a specific physical and discursive context of writing." Dymoke and Spiro's (2017) study investigates the identity of writing in two different genres, poetry and academia, and focuses on the writer's identification with the writing process. The study shows that individuals differ in their identification with the writer's identity; some participants identified strongly with the writer's identity and considered writing their goal, while others consider it an activity and a way to distance themselves from the world (Dymoke and Spiro 2017).

These identification differences also exist in creative writing groups, influencing how each member identifies with their writing process and embraces the writer identity. Aligning with Zhao's (2011) and Ivanič's (1994) encounter, Dymoke and Spiro's (2017) link the development of the writer's identity to the social aspect in that writing identity cannot be seen as definite; instead, it is a work in progress that changes upon an individual's background, beliefs, and social life. This indicates that investment in creative writing groups for refugees can enhance their sense of confidence and agency. Understanding the writer's identity as a shared social identity can enhance the sense of belonging and team building among group members, which are essential for their well-being.

3.4.2.3. Reaching Out to the Society

The speaking aspect is an essential element to discuss in creative writing groups for refugees as a form of resisting stigma and the interplay between social cure and social curse. This is presented in sharing creative writing with the audience, starting from reading out their writing to group members and editing together to sharing with the broader audience in the host society. Dymoke and Spiro (2017) investigate the creation of an authentic voice in writing and how it is closely linked to writer identity. The broader community's expectations shape the voice of the writer, and they affect the construction of the writer's identity and the choice of language features. As a result of gaining an authentic voice in writing, reading out their writing and having people listen can imbue a sense of pride and ownership of the text and increase the confidence of writers (Rubesin 2016). Similarly, Goodson (2017:3) indicates that sharing creative writing for refugees is an "affirmation of belonging"; in a time when they might be lost between leaving one country and living in another, writing and reading their words out loud can give them a sense of belonging and owning their own words.

Although sharing writing with the audience can be a social cure for some refugees, it can also challenge others. Dymoke and Spiro (2017) state that for vulnerable writers,

audience approval of their writing is essential for developing their writer identity. Additionally, Fernsten (2008) argues that struggling with a negative writer identity for a second-language speaker can be a result of fear of writing, fear of being seen as inferior, or differences in language and culture. This fear of writing can make refugees in creative writing workshops reluctant to read out loud their work and feel pressured to perform (Goodson 2017). Regardless, Goodson (2017) encourages workshop leaders and members of creative writing groups to respect the shyness or fear of sharing and give space for refugees to write without pressure to avoid the negative effects on participants. Chaplin (2019) explores refugees feeling towards sharing their writing. Her study raised a concern that although second-language refugee writers in creative writing groups view writing as a channel to share their narrative with the broader audience, they might face a form of injustice in which the audience rejects hearing the narrative of certain social groups. This rejection can result from power dynamics in society and can simply refer to the rejection of hearing a different accent (Chaplin 2019). Her study calls for multilingual researchers from refugee backgrounds to conduct similar research with refugees in creative writing groups to engage on a deeper level with participants to understand their perception of support. My thesis can be a response to this call, as clarified in the researcher positioning section in Chapter 1.

Overall, this section explored the potential of creative writing groups to build a community and provide support through shared social identity, mutual connections, and engagement with the host society. Nonetheless, while creative writing groups offer a space for refugees to build relationships and navigate new social identities, a significant gap remains in understanding refugees' perspectives on support within these groups. Additionally, further research is needed to address the complexities involved when refugees share their narratives with the wider public. These gaps provide the basis for examining Research Question 2, which investigates how refugees perceive and experience social support in their writing communities. The following section discusses the benefits of creative writing groups, including their roles in self-reflection and meaning-making, and continues to address the need for more insights into refugees' perspectives in these aspects.

3.4.3. Self-Reflection and Insight in Creative Writing Groups

This section explores the role of creative writing groups in providing a space for refugees to gain insight into their life experiences by exploring the potential of creative writing groups to be a safe space for emotional well-being and a space for language and educational

development. By examining the therapeutic and educational aspects, this section investigates the role of creative writing groups in giving meaning and purpose to refugee life. Brandling and House (2009) argue that when individuals are faced with difficult circumstances, their desire to find meaning in life and become active members of society becomes stronger. They give an example from Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist and holocaust survivor who says that having meaning and a reason to live can help individuals endure difficulties, while the absence of meaning can cause distress and other psychological problems (Brandling and House 2009). While studies in this section recognise the value of creative writing in helping refugees narrate their experiences, a gap remains in understanding how refugees perceive and derive meaning from their participation in these groups. This section addresses this gap by examining creative writing groups as therapeutic spaces, bridges to finding purpose, and platforms for negotiating linguistic identities and enhancing educational development.

3.4.3.1. Creative Writing Groups as Therapeutic Space

Therapeutic aspects are essential to the well-being of refugees. It also relates to the social cure perspective, which indicates that belonging and identifying with social groups can enhance well-being (Jetten, Haslam and Alexander 2012), as discussed in Chapter 2. For example, creative writing groups serve as a safe space where individuals can articulate their thoughts and emotions through words, which can be particularly beneficial for those processing complex personal experiences (Rubesin 2016). Stuart (1998) argues that writing or narrating stories is more about self-presentation and inviting others to share and communicate, which can help individuals gain a sense of self. In line with my research focus, I explore studies on the following therapeutic aspects of creative writing groups: empowerment, self-expression, and meaning-making. I also briefly reflect on trauma studies.

Creative interventions through storytelling and creative writing empower refugee communities to challenge stereotypes and build mutual understanding, as shown in O'Neill's (2004) study. O'Neill's (2004) ethnographic study presents the lived experiences of refugees in Nottingham and London and concludes that refugee communities can challenge negative stereotypes through the empowerment gained from creative interventions. Contrary to Stickley et al. (2019) concerns about the benefits of writing for refugees with traumatic experiences, O'Neill's (2004) sociocultural study indicates that sharing and narrating stories can help refugees deal with their pain and find meaning and mutual understanding.

> By re-telling, re-writing, re-constructing, and re-imagining the loss, displacement, and experiences of exile faced by the people

> involved, and presenting their stories or testimonies through art forms processes of re-generation and re-construction emerge, and act as a spur to community development (O'Neill 2004:6).

This shared storytelling strengthens social bonds and reflects the connection between social identity and writer identity, as writing together about hardship unites refugees as a one community. This encounter also reflects on the interrelation between social identity and the writer's identity within the context of creative writing groups as O'Neill's quote indicates that writing together about hardship strengthens their social connection and unites them as one community. Furthermore, a study by Vitale et al. (2017) aims to assess the benefits of creative writing groups to refugees who felt they had lost control over the events of their lives due to traumatic experiences and how far these groups could promote well-being and social integration. The findings of this study take the middle position in which some participants benefit from writing about their past experiences. In contrast, others preferred to write about their current life and leave the past behind (Vitale, et al. 2017). Regardless, all participants reported their interest in continuing to attend sessions with the group and the positive impact on their confidence and self-esteem (Vitale, et al. 2017). This finding reflects the theoretical aspects of the social cure and social curse perspectives presented in Chapter 2. Kellezi and Shah (2023) also discuss talking about trauma after war and finding a community of people who listen and validate their suffering. When people who suffer a common fate come together, they can support each other and act despite injustice (Kellezi and Shah 2023). Furthermore, Hosseini (2023) asserts that creative writing groups offer therapeutic benefits, empowering refugees to express difficult emotions, handle loneliness, and gain recognition for their experiences.

Another therapeutic aspect of creative writing groups is introduced in Livingstone (2023:1), where he highlights the importance of "inter-group felt understanding", defined as "the belief that outgroup members understand and accept the perspectives of in-group members in inter-group relations". Creative writing groups give voice to refugees by encouraging them to write about their experiences and reach out to the community. Livingstone (2023) asserts that in post-conflict situations, having a voice in which minority groups can express their concerns and needs is essential for their well-being. Furthermore, the felt understanding concept can link social identity with the well-being of individuals by providing them with meaning in life, social support and agency, which aligns with the social cure perspective (Du, Livingstone and Adlam 2024). Mirroring this, Drury (2018) discusses having a common fate as a significant factor in developing a shared social identity. The study demonstrates that the shared experience of danger or threat creates a sense of unity

among individuals who may not have previously seen themselves as part of the same group. This emergent shared social identity motivates individuals to provide social support, cooperate, and engage in solidarity (Drury 2018).

As I discussed agency and social support earlier, I now reflect on the sense of meaning as one of the social cure hypotheses and psychological resources that bridge social identity and well-being presented in Chapter 2. Overall, creative writing in a social context acts as a powerful therapeutic tool, helping individuals heal, grow, and regain confidence in their voices and stories, which play a significant role in their social integration.

3.4.3.2. Creative Writing Groups as a Bridge to Finding Meaning and Purpose

An extract from a poem by Grace Nicols (1993), who moved from Guyana to the UK, expresses how refugees can find meaning through writing and linking their roots to the present moment:

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
from the root of the old one
a new one has sprung
(cited in Spiro 2014:28)

In reflecting on this, Perry (2008) notes in his study of Sudanese refugees that sharing stories is a powerful way for individuals to position themselves within their families, communities, and the larger world. Through the act of narration, refugees can redefine their place in society and connect with others in meaningful ways. In addition, creative writing groups can create links between the past and the present, helping refugees reconcile their old social identities with their new environments. Dieterich-Hartwell and Koch (2017) discuss how remembering parts of one's old self and developments in a new environment can bridge the gap between home and host countries. Integrating memories with the present is crucial for refugees who face the challenges of adapting to a new culture while holding on to memories of their homeland.

Most importantly, the sense of meaning and purpose derived from creative writing is closely linked to a group's collective goals as a single team. When group members engage in creative writing together, they express their individual experiences and contribute to a collective narrative that fosters a shared sense of direction and purpose (Denborough 2008). Writing together either individually as a group on one topic or collaboratively writing one story or poem together is referred to as the Dulwich Centre Foundation originally put

together a collective narrative. Collective narrative practices in response to trauma and hardship experienced by individuals or groups of communities. Dendborough (2012:3) states that "collective narrative practice seeks to respond to groups and communities who have experienced significant social suffering in contexts in which therapy may not be culturally resonant." In another study about collective narratives for children, Dendborough (2008) shows that collective narratives can provide insight into the problems children face, help them express their needs, and strengthen society's contribution towards those children. Similarly, representing the collective narrative of refugees and asylum seekers can bring their personal and collective experiences to British society and enhance their sense of meaning and purpose.

Finally, creative writing groups as multicultural groups can allow refugees to reflect on their existing religious or cultural identities, which play a role in meaning-making and adjusting to the new environment. To illustrate, religion within the context of social identity can enhance positive connections to group members; however, contradicting group views on religion or other core values can lead to social disconnection, isolation, and identity struggles (Haslam, et al. 2018; Bobowik, Basabe and Páez 2014). In difficult times, individuals often form what McAdams (1993:11) describes as a "heroic narrative of the self" to bring meaning to their lives and struggles. Creative writing, in this sense, becomes a medium through which individuals can craft narratives, find meaning and purpose in their challenges, and transform their experiences into sources of strength and identity.

Nonetheless, in the review of the literature in this section, there was no direct input from refugees on their perception of finding meaning through their participation in creative art groups. For example, articles that directly discussed writing for refugees, such as Perry (2008), Miled (2020), and Stickley et al. (2019), did not address the meaning aspect in their interview questions. In addition, Perry (2008) only presented participants' creative writing samples in the dataset, which is an integral part of understanding refugees' perception of meaning in creative writing groups.

3.4.3.3. Creative Writing Groups as a Place to Negotiate Linguist Identity and Enhance Educational Development

Creative writing groups provide a space for refugees to experience the use of the English language in their stories and provide support in joining educational institutions, whether formal or non-formal, and seeking employment avenues. This setting enhances linguistic integration in a supportive and multicultural environment. Goodson (2017) emphasises that

several languages in the writing workshop provide a source of linguistic development because being in a space where different languages exist can enhance intercultural tolerance and appreciation of linguistic differences. A sense of appreciation and pride is important for refugees to feel at home and integrate into society.

Nonetheless, language remains one of the main challenges many refugees face daily, and this is particularly true within second-language creative writing groups. In his practical guide on conducting creative writing workshops for refugees and asylum seekers for the Writing East Midlands project, Goodson (2017) states that although the social and educational background of refugees varies from being illiterate, only school-educated to highly educated, there is no clear indication of how they perform in second-language creative writing workshops. This challenge involves gaining the confidence to express themselves and finding a voice in a language that may feel unfamiliar or distant to them (Disney 2014). Additionally, Andrews (2010) argues that a challenge refugees face when learning a new language is the formation of new identities in a new environment. Linguistic identity arises from the understanding that language is related to who we are and includes "those cultural and linguistic elements from our social or cultural groups." (Andrews 2010:95). Linguistic identity is socially constructed through social interactions, and each language can create a new notion of identity (Ortega, et al. 2015). The relationship between language and social identity is discussed in Jaspal (2009), who asserts that language can form individuals' social identity and allows individuals to be part of a group or show distinctiveness from a group. In a study on the use of language in refugee communities and social identity, McNamara (1987:215) argues that the Social Identity Theory can provide a platform for analysing language attitudes formed in inter-group settings as social identity is "dynamic, interactive and context-dependent". Resembling that, Norton (2000) discusses the use of a second-language for refugee women in Canada and highlights the importance of studying the linguistic identity of those women as the first step in their integration into society.

Furthermore, the linguistic identity of second-language writers can be influenced by multiple factors that go beyond their English competency to their personal and social life, such as "contact with other languages at home and in social settings; residency in more than one country; affiliations with different economic classes" (Cox, et al. 2010: xv). Although outside factors can passively shape linguistic identities, writers are key players in this process. To illustrate this point, Telekey (2001) notes that writers who use a language other than English within their communities feel anxious when asked to write creatively in English. Being aware of this sensitivity can help writers find ways to feel more at ease when using a

second-language. Weedon (1997) believes that language can enhance writers' sense of self and confidence in their participation in society.

Hence, researching identity in second-language creative writing is under-researched in non-formal educational settings where the chance of having a group of multi-background participants increases. According to Cox et al. (2010: xvi), identity in second-language writing is an "extensively theorised but still elusive concept, especially in settings where cultural and linguistic experiences mix". Consistent with this, Lim (2009) discusses social identity and creative writing pedagogy in which she argues that researchers should pay more attention to people who come from various backgrounds and cultures who carry multiple identities and make different linguistic choices. As linguist identity forms an integral part of second-language creative writing, my thesis contributes to this gap by analysing how refugees gain agency and meaning through writing in a second-language and through a discussion of their creative writing sample and reflection on their language use.

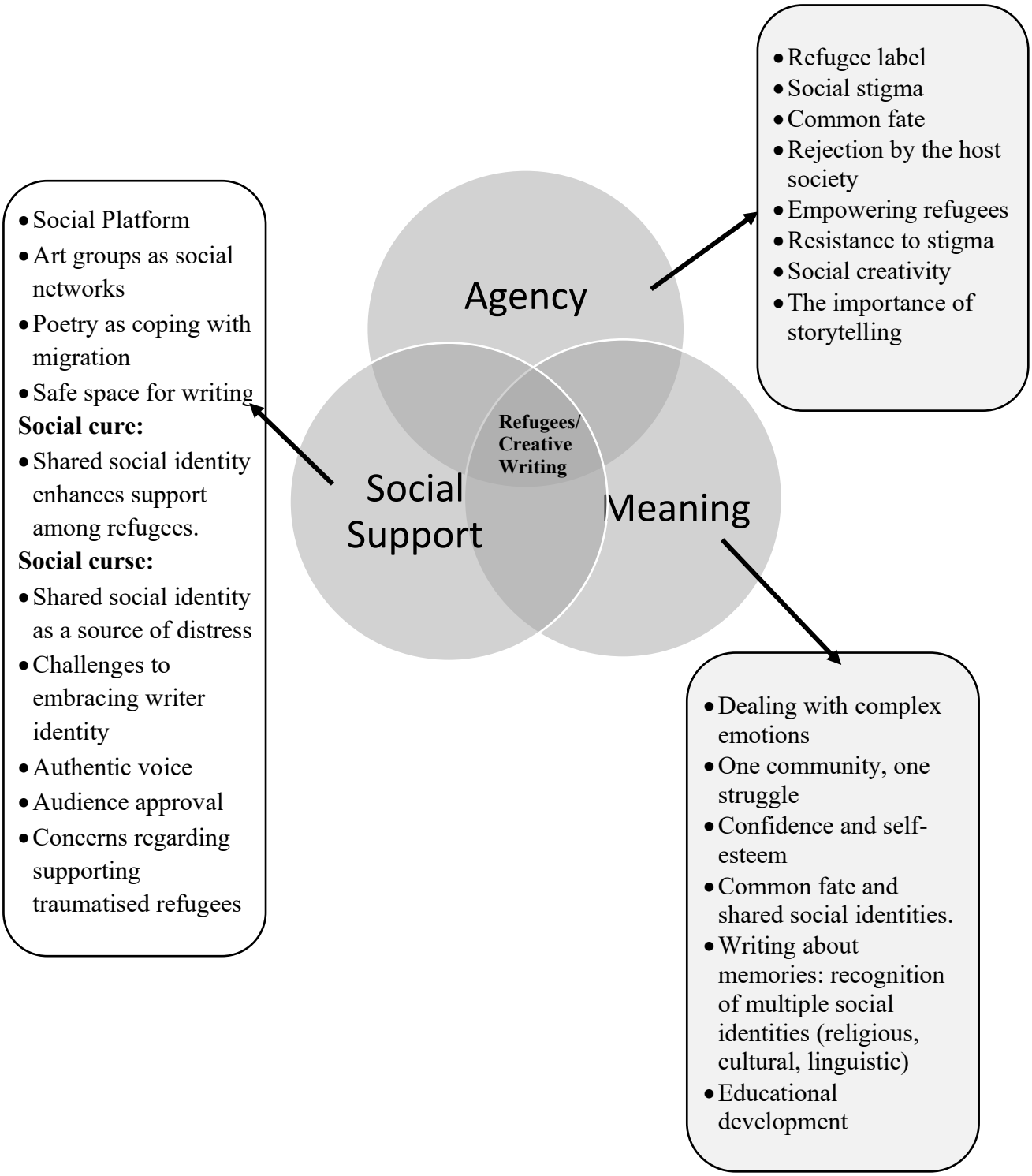
In addition to language development, art groups can enhance educational development by providing a supportive and inclusive environment and different skills that can benefit future employment or education. Whelan et al., (2023) initiated a creative arts-based programme titled Room 17 Goes Large, which demonstrates a significant positive impact on students from refugee backgrounds in helping them smoothly transition to higher education. This programme followed a strength-based approach that focused on refugee students as key players in their future by recognising their unique talents and experiences. This enabled the participants to express their values, needs, and aspirations through artistic mediums such as music, dance, and film. By positioning students as active participants and leaders in the creation of their projects, refugees can develop a sense of belonging and purpose, which can motivate them to pursue further education or employment and facilitate their integration into the educational system and broader society (Whelan, et al. 2023). Nonetheless, this study raised an important concern for refugees towards joining higher education institutions, which stems from the lack of information, which can be a call for art-based programmes to consider discussing with refugees.

Aligning with Whelan et al., (2023), Stickley and Hui (2012) argue that education is essential for some refugees and forms their means for successful integration, while for other refugees, education is a means for forming social connections. However, for some refugees, education fulfils both roles, acting as a pathway to integration and a platform for building social ties. Therefore, considering refugees' various needs in art groups can increase their potential to actively enhance social integration. Goodson (2017) adds that art groups can give refugees a purpose, as when people participate in meaningful art activities, it increases

their motivation to have a role in society by working or studying or even volunteering for asylum seekers who are not allowed to study or work. Similarly, Griffiths (2009) demonstrate that creative art groups can increase the sense of agency and confidence, enabling refugees to take control of their future planning. Griffiths's (2009) study of four creative activity groups for therapeutic purposes concludes that these groups can provide participants with manual skills and performative skills; manual skills include writing, drawing, cooking, and so on, while performative skills include critical thinking, decision-making, solving problems, and team working. Overall, the success of a creative writing group can be measured in terms of its impact on individual levels and the host (Stickley, et al. 2019).

The following figure presents the aspect of (meaning, agency, support) in the context of refugees and creative writing, as discussed in the literature review. It outlines broad ideas such as the use of art and poetry for coping, the importance of storytelling, and the challenges of stigma and social identity. However, the topics of *refugees* and *creative writing* are treated separately. Additionally, while social cure and curse are explained in the *Support* aspect, they are not explicitly defined in the *Meaning* and *Agency* aspects. Following the discussion of the dynamics of group relations and the significance of creative writing groups for refugees in resisting stigma, community building, and self-reflection, I will discuss the existing research gaps, focusing on areas that have not been extensively covered in the literature and the research questions arising from these gaps.

Figure (7): Presentation of (meaning, agency and support) in the Literature Review in this chapter. (Author's own work)



3.5. Research Gaps and Research Questions

Overall, I identified a need for studies that include refugees' voices and perspectives instead of only presenting the perception of workshop leaders or therapists working with refugees, such as Moreira and Jakobi (2021) Metzl and Treviño (2022), and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Greatrick (2017). A few studies have presented the voices of refugees in the data set, including Chaplin (2019), Perry (2008), and Miled (2020), but they did not specifically explore refugee perceptions of belonging to creative writing groups. Lutterbach and Beelmann (2020) also called for studies that discuss inter-group relations from a minority perspective. There are currently no studies addressing the role of creative writing groups in inter-group relations from the perspective of refugees. Additionally, there is a gap in the literature regarding the presentation of refugees' creative writing samples. For example, Chaplin's (2019) study on refugee writing only included extracts from interviews. Only a few studies, including Perry (2008), presented samples of participants' creative writing samples in the dataset and addressed the role of oral storytelling practices in shaping literacy practices for refugee youth. This thesis aims to fill these gaps by collecting data from a specific creative writing group for adult refugees and presenting creative writing samples of its members in its dataset, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

To be more specific, based on the literature review in this chapter and the theoretical framework of this thesis, I identified three main areas for research development in the context of creative writing groups for refugees including meaning, support, and agency, which are summarised below. An aligning research question follows each area.

1- Meaning

While studies in the literature review in this chapter acknowledge the significance of creative writing for refugees in narrating their experiences and finding meaning, these studies often lack direct input from refugees themselves on their perception of finding meaning through their participation in creative writing groups. Scholars who directly discussed creative writing for refugees, such as Miled (2020), Perry (2008), and Stickley et al. (2019), did not address the meaning aspect of their interview questions. This gap highlights the need for more direct insights from refugees themselves regarding how they drive meaning in life through their membership in creative writing groups. Hence, the first research question is about understanding the sense of meaning that refugees derive from their writing from their perspective and writing samples.

Research Question 1: What insights do refugees' perspectives and creative writing samples provide regarding their sense of meaning and value of writing?

2-Support

Studies exist on the role of shared social identity in providing support for refugees, such as Alfadhli and Drury (2018) and Ballentyne (2021). Similar to the meaning aspect, research on refugees' perceptions of support in creative writing groups is limited. Studies that discussed support resulting from the act of writing, including Yang (2020), did not specifically discuss creative writing groups for refugees. Chaplin (2019) calls for multilingual researchers from refugee backgrounds to conduct similar research with refugees in creative writing groups to engage more deeply with participants to understand their perceptions.

Therefore, the second research question explores the support aspect of refugees' experiences in creative writing groups.

Research Question 2: How do refugees perceive and experience social support in their writing communities?

3-Agency

Toyoki and Brown (2014) note that although stigma indicates unequal power relations, only a few studies have focused on the power in facing stigma. The literature review in this chapter includes studies that have discussed how creative writing can challenge stigma, such as Chaplin (2019) and Goodson (2017). However, specific mechanisms through which refugees in creative writing groups use writing to collaboratively resist stigma are not well explored. A notable gap exists in the understanding of how refugees employ social creativity strategies within creative writing groups to address and resist stigma. The impact of performing creative works in public, such as reading aloud to audiences, on developing the writer's identity is discussed in Dymoke and Spiro (2017), while empowering refugees in creative writing groups to reach out to society is under-researched. This thesis addresses refugee perceptions in sharing their narratives with society.

Research Question 3: In what ways do creative writing sessions empower refugees to collaboratively resist stigma and work towards generating social change through their narratives?

By identifying these gaps and aligning three research questions, this thesis aims to contribute new insights and expand the understanding of how creative writing groups can play an essential role in refugees' well-being and social integration in the host society.

3.6. Summary

In summary, this literature review explored the role of creative writing groups in refugee social integration and well-being. It has identified significant research gaps, particularly in understanding the perspectives of refugees on driving meaning from their membership in creative writing groups, the support they receive within these groups, and the way they use writing to resist stigma and generate social change. The insights gained from this review lay the foundation for the subsequent chapter, which details the research methodology employed to address these gaps and answer the outlined research questions.

The following chapter introduces the research design, data generation methods, and analytical approach used to investigate the role of creative writing groups in the social integration of refugees.

Chapter 4: Methodology

I was interested to write a story, even small story, and I decided to come and join this group
-Hassan

4.1. Overview

The previous chapters established the theoretical framework and identified gaps in prior research that informs the focus of my research project. This chapter presents the methodology adopted in this thesis, which aims to explore the role of creative writing groups in the social integration of refugees from a social cure perspective. This thesis investigates how engagement in creative writing influences refugees' sense of meaning, perceptions of support within their writing community, and capacity for creative writing sessions to empower refugees to resist stigma and generate social change through their narratives. To achieve this aim, this thesis explores the following three research questions:

1. What insights do refugees' perspectives and creative writing samples provide regarding their sense of meaning and value of writing?
2. How do refugees perceive and experience social support in their writing communities?
3. In what ways do creative writing sessions empower refugees to collaboratively resist stigma and work towards generating social change through their narratives?

This chapter discusses the research paradigm, including the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations that shape the methodological approach. This study adopts the narrative inquiry approach as the chosen qualitative data generation method. The chapter then details the pilot study, followed by sampling and data generation methods. Then, the chapter presents the data analysis strategies and main themes. The chapter also addresses critical ethical considerations, emphasising the importance of reflexivity and the researcher's role and positionality.

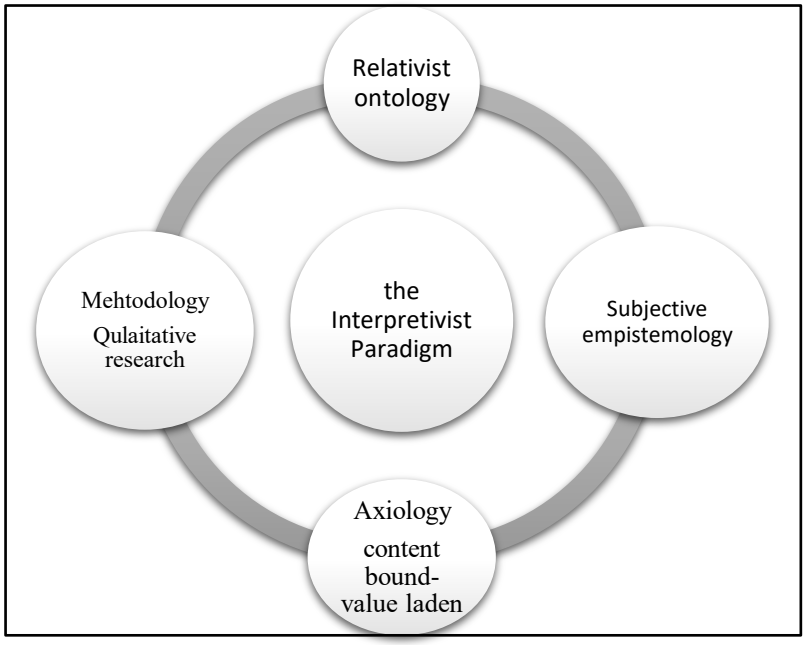
4.2. Research Paradigm

The role of the research paradigm is to guide and organise the thinking process that frames the researcher's positionality (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018). Considering the ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives is significant before embarking on a research journey because they influence the research design (Jaksic, Silic and Silic 2021). Wilson (2001:157) defines a research paradigm as a "set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that goes together to guide your actions" when conducting research. A research paradigm refers to the beliefs that guide our research choices and worldview (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

In this thesis, I adopt the interpretive paradigm because it deals with the experience of individuals in a specific context. According to Phothongsunan (2010), the interpretive paradigm regards the world as constructed by human beings and reality as subjective. Interpretive researcher views reality as emerging from people's experience (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018). Hence, the interpretive paradigm is essential when exploring the perspective of refugees.

As illustrated in Figure (8), my positionality is illustrated in four main sub-categories of the interpretive research paradigm: ontology, which refers to the nature of reality and things; epistemology, which refers to the way we see and can have knowledge of reality; methodology, which refers to the approach and tools to collect data; and axiology, which refers to the beliefs and ethics that guide the choices of the researcher (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Wilson 2001; Hitchcock and Hughes 1995). Viewing a research project from a paradigm perspective represents how the researcher views and understands the world. Each subcategory presented in Figure (8) is described in the following section.

Figure (8): The four pillars of the interpretive research paradigm.



Source: Adapted from Guba and Lincoln(1994) and Wilson (2001)

In the interpretivist paradigm, the representation of data refers to the ability of the researcher to accurately present the experience of individuals in writing, and legitimation refers to the credibility and authority of the researcher to conduct particular research (Fuyane 2021:33). As knowledge would be limited to individuals' perspectives, Phothongsunan (2010) asserts that contradictions can exist to show that reality is multiple. The interpretive paradigm reflects the nature of human behaviour and interactions. Consistent with this, Josselosn (2013) explains that what matters for the interpretivism paradigm is to record the experiences of several individuals.

4.2.1. Ontology

Ontology reflects a researcher's beliefs about the nature of reality (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994:108), ontology addresses the question "what is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about?". An interpretive paradigm implies a relativist ontological position that indicates that reality is multiple, socially constructed, and shaped by human interpretation and knowledge (Phothongsunan 2010). The role of the researcher is to find and interpret meaning from the "subjective experience" of participants rather than finding cause-effect relations (Levers 2013:2). While other ontological perspectives might also support interpretive approaches, the choice of a relativist position is particularly suitable for this research for several reasons. First, this study focuses on the experiences of refugees whose realities are shaped by their

unique social, cultural, and personal contexts. Second, a relativist ontology allows for the recognition and validation of these multiple experiences, thus enabling a better understanding of their experiences (Levers 2013).

4.2.2. Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the question, "What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?" (Guba and Lincoln 1994:108). Interpretivism underpins a subjective epistemological stance in which researchers aim to make a unique sense of the world by accepting multiple realities (Levers 2013). In the subjectivism perspective, Denzin and Lincoln (2005:21) assert that knowledge is seen through individuals' social lives, including their language, race, and ethnicity. Creswell and Poth (2018) add that researchers with a subjective epistemological stance can interpret the world around them differently for certain phenomena. Applying a subjective epistemological approach to my research project gives me the flexibility to explore and understand the diverse perceptions and experiences of refugees. This approach allows me to uncover the perception of my participants and how they construct meaning and build community through creative writing. By embracing multiple perspectives, I can gain deeper insights into how refugees perceive their social identities, relationships, and the broader social structures that impact their lives.

4.2.3. Axiology

Axiology refers to the morals, ethics, and values of conducting research (Wilson 2001). Building on the ontological and epistemological positions discussed, axiology also has a subjective element in which researchers view the research as "context-bound and value-laden"(Fuyane 2021:33). In this research project, recognition of axiology is particularly crucial, given the sensitive nature of the research context involving refugees who are often marginalised. I am aware that the choices I make in this research project are influenced by my values and ethical considerations, which include a commitment to respecting the dignity, autonomy, and well-being of the participants. However, to ensure that the research is conducted with the highest ethical standards, I have developed the project in line with the ethical guidelines provided by the university's ethical committee. This process involved careful consideration of potential risks to participants, strategies to minimise harm, and ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study at any

time. The ethical considerations were thoroughly discussed in the ethics section of this chapter.

4.2.4. Methodology - Qualitative Research

The fourth pillar of the interpretive research paradigm presented in Figure (8) is methodology. Methodology concerns how researchers find the knowledge to answer their research questions and approach their purpose (Guba and Lincoln 1994). An interpretive research paradigm usually follows a qualitative research methodology to approach multiple and sometimes complex realities of human beings (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018). Although qualitative research carries a wide variety of methods and can overlap with quantitative research in finding meaning, I found Hammersley's (2013:12) definition to be the most inclusive:

> A form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasise the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a number of naturally occurring cases in detail and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of approach.

Furthermore, as this research project is concerned with the perspective of refugees, Creswell and Poth (2018:45) argue that qualitative research is most effective when we aim to "empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimise the power relationships that exist between a researcher and the participants in a study". To obtain a thorough understanding of the participants' perspectives on their experience with the creative writing group and listen to their narrations, I follow the Narrative Inquiry Approach as a qualitative data generation method. The following subsection discusses the Narrative Inquiry Approach to establish the framework for this qualitative research.

4.2.4.1. Narrative Inquiry Approach

> "If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I too must come to know my own story" (McAdams 1993:11).

The narrative inquiry approach, as a qualitative research method, gives priority to exploring the life of human beings as the main source of knowledge (Clandinin and Caine 2008).

Clandinin (2006) defines narrative inquiry as the study of experience through storytelling, in which the researcher collects these stories and interprets their meanings. My choice of narrative inquiry as an art-based research approach stems from the importance of providing refugees with a space to narrate their stories. As my research project focuses on participants' perspectives, listening to their narratives to understand their experiences is fundamental. Experience in the context of the narrative approach refers to the events that individuals live and tell through their stories (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). Researchers can gain insight into individuals' personal and social lives by encouraging participants to share these stories.

While traditional narrative inquiry focuses on the collection and interpretation of stories, this research adapts this approach to better address the complex and traumatic experiences of refugees. The adaptation includes integrating principles from the Social Identity Approach (SIA) to Health and Well-being, including the social cure and social curse perspectives in the interview questions, which emphasises adding meaning to participants' lives and aligning with the narrative inquiry's focus on creating meaning through storytelling (Clandinin 2006). Clandinin (2006) shows that narrative inquiry involves the writing of stories and speaking about them. In this process, humans create meaning in their lives. In addition, Gibbs (2012) adds that narrative can show how people comprehend important events in their lives within the context of the surrounding society. Simultaneously, storytelling is a lens through which researchers can understand the meaning individuals want to convey as people tend to organise their understanding of the world in the form of a story (Gibbs 2012). Pellegrino (2017) also agrees that the narrative approach allows researchers to explore individual human experiences and gain insights into their understanding of the world.

Furthermore, in recognition of the collective nature of refugee experiences, this study draws on the notion that narratives do not represent the experiences of a single individual but reflect a collective voice (Bosanquet, et al. 2017). This approach respects the shared experiences of refugees while allowing individual voices to be heard. Gibbs (2012) asserts that narrative can meet individuals' psychological needs in dealing with life events, structure their sense of self, maintain their identity, and respond to social changes and traumatic life events. Abkhezr et al. (2020) also add that narrative inquiry gives voice and agency to individuals with disadvantaged backgrounds, such as refugees and asylum seekers. More importantly, the impact of the narrative inquiry approach can also extend to benefit the readers as Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) argue that using narrative adds life to the data collected from participants in which their voice, feelings, and own words are presented.

Adapting narrative inquiry principles when designing data generation methods for this research project involves three stages: initial interviews, poetic inquiry (creative writing samples), and follow-up interviews. Each of these stages is carefully tailored to collect data and provide participants with a means of structuring their sense of self and maintaining their identity in response to social changes and traumatic life events (Gibbs, 2012). This is particularly important for refugees and asylum seekers who often face identity disruption due to displacement (Abkhezr et al., 2020). The use of creative writing as part of poetic inquiry further adapts traditional narrative inquiry by allowing participants to express their experiences in a more flexible, less conventional narrative form, which can be more accessible and empowering. Through these adaptations, narrative inquiry serves as a method of data generation and a tool for social integration and psychological support for refugees.

4.3. Pilot Study

Pilot studies are an important but often ignored part of qualitative research (Malmqvist 2019). They provide a chance for researchers, especially novice ones, to assess the quality of data generation tools and plan for any challenges (Malmqvist, et al. 2019). Moreover, pilot studies help researchers explore the participants' point of view of the interview questions and process and time in advance of conducting the actual study (Majid, et al. 2017). Therefore, before data generation, I conducted a pilot study.

The pilot study involved interviewing a refugee in a creative writing group in England and collecting their writing samples. Towards the end of the first year of my PhD, I presented a paper at the Universities of Sanctuary's annual conference. The organiser helped me get in touch with Farhana (a pseudonym), a member of a creative writing group in Cheshire. Farhana is a refugee who has been a volunteer in this group for the last 3 years. The group comprises women, mostly refugees, who meet weekly in a central library. In each session, the group leader or a visiting author conducts different writing activities. Group members perform their writing on stage and at poetry conferences. They also publish their writing on the library website.

Farhana is an example of a refugee who managed to overcome the challenges of immigration to find a route in the UK. She is a mother and PhD student at a prestigious university. She began her forty-minute semi-structured narrative interview by narrating her journey as a newcomer to the UK. She discussed the challenges she faced as a refugee, as she described that they ignored her potential and skills and said*, she is from this background, and she is a girl.* The struggle with her stigmatised identity led her to find a group where she

met people who shared similar backgrounds. Farhana found the support she sought within the group and mentioned that the group leader believed in her ability and encouraged her to apply to a university. Farhana emphasised the importance of the community power she found within the group: *"Everyone is empowered. I love this creative writing; we can at least express our voice there."* Following the interview, Farhana shared a poem she had written that reflected on her experience with the writing group.

The girl hidden her words.
Underneath her mind
Layers and layers on top of the words
One day, all words break their silence
Yes, they all will come out with a big roar

That girl suddenly feels something different in her mind.
As like a storm
She failed to control herself.
She takes her pen, and then the pen starts the run,
She just can't stop herself and her pen.
The story starts

This extract from her poem captures the emotions Farhana experienced, which can be understood through the lens of the Social Identity Approach. The feelings of anger and loss of control she expresses might stem from the challenges to her social identity as a refugee, as belonging to a marginalised group can increase emotional distress (Robards, et al. 2020). The act of writing, as described in her poems, became a tool for transforming her emotions into a narrative that reclaimed her sense of agency and self-expression. Farhana's poetry reflects her evolving social identity as a writer and a social group member. The poem illustrates how group writing serves as a means of emotional release and helps affirm the writer's identity. Recognising the profound insights that refugees' creative writing can provide into their lived experiences and identity formation, I decided to include creative writing samples in my data generation. These samples offer a rich perspective that complements the interviews. The samples allow a deeper understanding of the refugees' experiences through writing.

Although my interview with Farhana was enriching, the group was not suitable for data generation. This is because the group is not limited to refugees; it is open to all women who wish to improve their creative writing skills, practice speaking, or simply have a cup of tea, and it is not open to both genders. Furthermore, the group location makes it difficult for me as a researcher to conduct a series of interviews in person.

Overall, the pilot study provided valuable insights into the functioning of creative writing groups in the UK and highlighted key considerations for conducting interviews with refugees. Through this process, I have reflected on several important aspects:

1. Refining Interview Questions: Following the interview, I revised my interview questions to better capture the experiences that Farhana discussed. For example, after she spoke about her involvement in creative writing back home, I added questions like, "Have you joined any creative writing groups in your home country?" and "Did you write creatively before joining this group?" I also moved away from yes/no questions to encourage participants to share more about their experiences. Additionally, I recognised the importance of allowing for pauses between questions and giving participants time to think and respond more fully.

2. Protecting Personal Information: I have become more aware of the need to protect the confidentiality of participants. For example, I ensured that we agreed on a pseudonym prior to recording. I also took steps to make other personal information vaguer, such as age, home country, and place of residency, by recording age as a range to further safeguard participants' privacy.

3. Challenging Preconceptions: This experience also demonstrated the importance of avoiding assumptions about refugees' backgrounds, such as their educational status, language proficiency, family history, or employment. Farhana, for example, is fluent in English and pursuing a doctoral degree, which reminded me to approach each participant with an open mind and without preconceived notions.

4.4 *Our Stories* Creative Writing Group

After thoroughly researching and carefully considering the diverse creative writing groups in England, I chose the *Our Stories* Creative Writing Group (pseudonym) for data generation. I selected this group because it includes a diverse mix of participants from various cultural backgrounds. This diversity provides a rich context that is crucial for exploring how creative writing can support social integration and refugee well-being. The group's focus and dedication to creative writing also directly align with my research focus and enable me to examine how individuals use creative writing in their new social environment. *Our Stories* Creative Writing Group (pseudonym) is a registered charity organisation for asylum seekers and refugees in the United Kingdom. A charity organisation

is defined as an organisation that is established for "charitable purposes and subject to the High Court's charity law jurisdiction" (Charity Commission for England and Wales 2013). The criteria for choosing an organisation for this research project consisted of three factors: the group holds regular creative writing workshops every week, the sessions target adult refugees and asylum seekers and the group based in England.

Our Stories Creative Writing Group was established in 2018 by a British English as a second-language teacher and poet, who had previously worked with newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees in a registered charity in England. During her teaching experience, she observed that while second language teaching was essential, sharing stories and personal narratives played a significant role in forming connections and community among learners. Hence, she began incorporating creative writing, particularly poetry, into her teaching. Over time and by observing the impact of this initiative, she developed a structured project that provided a dedicated space and time for refugees and asylum seekers to share their stories. The project also started with the aim to offer the wider public an opportunity to hear and engage with these narratives.

Our Stories started with the intention to provide a safe space for refugees to share their stories of home, explore their experiences, hope for a better future, and form a community. Since its opening, the group has welcomed a diverse range of participants who were mostly students at the registered charity. The average number of members is 15 to 20 participants attending weekly sessions and a total of forty members since the start. In a conversation with the group leader to introduce me to the group, she mentioned having a total of 14 nationalities in 2021, including members from Latin America, Africa, Europe, Colombia, Sudan, Nigeria, Morocco, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Iran, Pakistan, and Azerbaijan. The group meets twice a week to engage in a variety of writing exercises, including freewriting, poetry, and storytelling, and visits to public institutions, such as schools and libraries. The sessions are designed to be collaborative, with members encouraged to share their writing, write a long poem together, provide feedback, and discuss their experiences. With time, creative writing offered members of the group an accessible medium for participants with varying levels of English proficiency regardless of their linguistic background, which I explore further in the data analysis chapters. Additionally, the group invites visitors from various domains to enrich the experience of members. For example, the group have frequent visits from authors, social workers, and refugee support workers to give members the support they need in various domains.

Six months after the establishment of *Our Stories*, restrictions to the COVID-19 pandemic started in March 2020, and *Our Stories* survived the pandemic by meeting online

using Zoom. Poetry naturally became the focus of the weekly online sessions because it was more manageable to produce a few lines of a poem virtually within the limitations of time and distance. The poetry written during the pandemic was published in an anthology titled Our Flying Wings (pseudonym). Members were ready to meet in person when the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted in January 2022.

The rationale for selecting a single creative writing group for data generation is rooted in my intention to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of its members. By focusing on one group, I allowed more time to explore the social context of the group, including their relationships, interactions, and developments within the group. By concentrating on one group, I was able to build stronger and more trusting relationships with the participants. This is crucial when working with populations with marginalised status for collecting authentic and meaningful data.

4.4.1. Building Rapport

Interviews were held between March and June 2022. Before inviting members to the interview, I attended two sessions of *Our Stories* creative writing groups in January and February 2022, where I introduced myself and the research project, participated in inside conversations, and shared food with them.

The purpose of my visits was to understand the group dynamics and build rapport with the members and the group leader to ease the acceptance of my invitation to interviews. Also, as community identity is essential for the group, I shared with them that both of my parents had to seek refuge outside of their home country, and most of my relatives are refugees who escaped the 1967 war in Palestine. I also shared that English is my second-language, which made them feel at ease making grammatical mistakes during the interviews. I also joined them in writing activities in which we all read our writings, shared tea and biscuits afterwards, and talked about our traditional foods.

According to Abbe and Brandon (2014), building rapport can have a positive impact on the interview process because it encourages participants to trust the researcher and share more information. One way to build rapport in qualitative research is to find a common background between the researcher and the participants because doing so increases the feeling of empathy and understanding (Abbe and Brandon 2014). After visiting the group, I developed an initial perspective of group dynamics, members, and activities. Subsequently, I began to invite members to participate in my research project.

4.4.2. Sampling Approach

Sampling in qualitative research is defined as "the process of choosing part of the population to present the whole" (Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljaie 2017:1). In planning the sampling approach, Gueterman (2015) encourages researchers to start by identifying their sampling approach, sample size, and relevance of the sample; all justified based on the research aim and questions. Because my research project is limited in scope, I followed a purposeful sampling strategy. In this strategy, the researcher "intentionally samples a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination", which involves selection of the participants and selection of the sample size (Creswell and Poth 2018:148). Purposeful sampling is set to ensure that the sample is well-defined, which helps answer the research question and increases the reliability of the data provided.

Furthermore, the selection of participants in the narrative inquiry approach is based on their convenience with the study and having a story to tell (Creswell and Poth 2018). Regarding the inclusion and exclusion strategy, the inclusion criteria for my research participants are limited to refugees and asylum seekers above the age of 18. Because of the marginalised status of the research participants, the study excluded refugees under 18 who are considered children, as stated by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Tobin 2019). I wanted to ensure that all participants were voluntarily taking part in the study with no obligations.

All participants are members of the *Our Stories* group. The group leader suggested the names of members who were available for interviews based on my criteria of inviting members of different levels of English, nationalities, experience in creative writing, and the purpose of joining the group to have a representative sample of participants. I approached the suggested names by contacting them via email or telephone. I introduced my project, sent them a participant information sheet, and answered any questions they might have before consenting to participate. Additionally, volunteering to participate also occurred as a new member approached me asking if she could share her experience, which I accepted.

Regarding sample size, research studies following the interpretive paradigm can be referred to as idiographic, which means that the number of participants is small because the focus is on human experience rather than describing larger sections of the population (Phothongsunan 2010). The exact number of participants for a study is determined based on the resources available upon data generation. Emmel (2013) explains that reflexivity and continuous assessment are required when sampling in qualitative interviews to determine if the sample size is sufficient. Guetterman (2015) related literature on narrative inquiry

approach sampling concludes that there is no specific sample size, as it ranges from one to twenty-four. Furthermore, a large number of participants in a narrative study can hinder a thorough analysis, so a range of five to seven participants would be sufficient (Pellegrino 2017). Hones (1998) also argues that although his narrative study of the life of just one refugee does not represent a large sample of refugees, it has a powerful impact on understanding the experience of individuals within their social contexts.

I invited ten members of *Our Stories* group, five males and five females, who met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate. Each participant was interviewed twice. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, one member volunteered to participate and was interviewed once only because she was an elderly woman who rarely attended the sessions and had no access to email. I conducted 21 in-depth narrative interviews and collected 33 creative writing samples. The narrative interviews are detailed in section 4.5.

Table 1 shows the demographic information of the 11 participants, in which a range of nationalities, languages, and levels of education are presented. The sample in this study comprises a diverse group of participants, each contributing a unique set of backgrounds and experiences that enrich the research. The participants' ages ranged from their 20s to 50s, representing different life stages and perspectives. They come from various regions, including the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, which ensures a wide cultural representation within the group. The length of time these individuals have spent in the UK varies from one year to over 20 years, allowing the study to explore how the duration of residence impacts their integration and adaptation experiences. Additionally, the educational backgrounds of the participants span from illiteracy to university degrees in fields such as engineering and graphic design, which provide insights into how educational backgrounds can influence their engagement with creative writing and social integration.

The linguistic diversity within the sample is significant, with participants speaking languages such as Arabic, Farsi, French, Turkish, Yoruba, and Azerbaijani. This multilingualism is essential for understanding the role of language in self-expression and linguistic identity in creative writing context. Table 1 also shows that the participants have been members of *Our Stories* creative writing group for various periods, ranging from six months to three years. The various membership lengths offer a view of how sustained engagement impacts social integration. This diversity and the sufficient number of participants provide a foundation for understanding refugee perspectives and group dynamics.

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Age	Region of origin	Years in the UK at the time of interview	Educational background	Languages spoken back home	Membership duration in Our Stories	No. of CW samples
Ibrahim-Male	30+	Middle East	3+	BA graphic design	Arabic English	Since start - 3 years	4
Maurice - Male	30+	Africa	3+	Engineering	French English	Since start - 3 years	5
Hassan-Male	30+	Middle East	1-2	BA Engineering	Farsi Turkish English	6 months	2
George-Male	30+	Africa	3+	Electrician	French English	Since start - 3 years	3
Paul-Male	30+	Africa	20+	BA Engineering	English Ndebele Shona	2 years	4
Maha-Female	40+	Africa	3+	Illiterate	Arabic	Since start - 3 years	4
Alice-Female	20+	Asia	3+	Current BA student	Azerbaijani Russian Turkish English	Since start - 3 years	5
Mary-Female	30+	Africa	1-2	High school	Yoruba Spoken English	1 year	1
Peggy-Female	50+	Africa	10+	School level	Yoruba English	Since start - 3 years	4
Makbel-Female	20+	Africa	1-2	School level	English Two national languages	1.5 years	1
MarieAnn-Female	40+	Africa	3+	driving instructor	French	3 years	-----

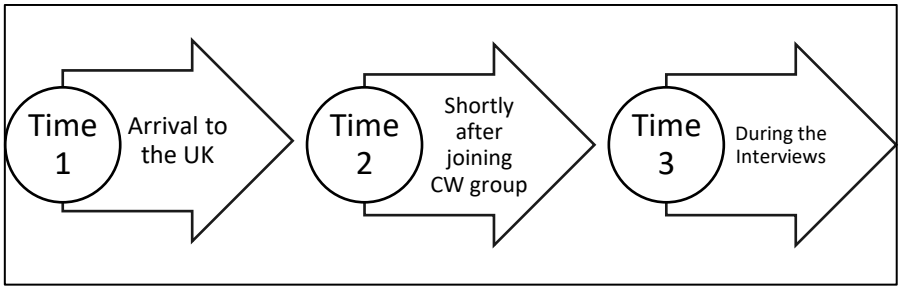
4.5. Data Generation

This section introduces narrative interviews with three stages of data generation: initial interviews, creative writing samples, and follow-up interviews using stimulated recall. Each stage was a month apart: the first set of interviews (March 22), the collection of creative writing samples (April 22), and the second set of interviews (May-June 22).

4.5.1. Narrative Interviews

Narrative data can be obtained via interviews that generate stories, biographies, autobiographies, and oral histories, in addition to observations and documents (Butina 2015). My research project uses narrative interviews and creative writing samples as data generation methods. Narrative interviews encourage participants to tell and narrate "what has happened, put experience into sequence, find possible explanations for it, and play with the chain of events that shapes individual and social life" (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000:2). Building on this, the interview questions I designed were semi-structured. Phothongsunan (2010) explains that semi-structured interviews as a set of prepared questions to guide rather than constrain the conversation. The researcher has the flexibility to add or remove questions based on the flow of the conversation. Narrative interviews encourage the researcher to give the participants a chance to talk and avoid interruptions with questions or explanations as much as possible. Fulton (2022) adds that narrative interviews are useful for developing a full understanding of social issues from multiple perspectives. The two sets of in-depth interviews I conducted for the purpose of this research project along with their creative writing sample helped me to understand the role of a creative writing group in supporting the social identity and writer identity of refugees. Each method of data generation is separately discussed next.

Figure (9): Three-time points for the participants



(Author's own work)

Using these three-time points allows for a detailed understanding of each participant's journey by capturing shifts in their identity and integration experiences over time. By discussing their initial arrival in the UK, shortly after joining the creative writing group, and their reflections during the final interview, I had a deeper view of how participants' sense of self, support received and perceived, and resilience evolve. The study also highlights the role of the creative writing group as a supportive and transformative space within the participants' social integration process. The three time points are implemented in Tip et al. (2020), who explore self-efficacy in resettled refugees by conducting semi-structured interviews at three-time points. Furthermore, Burgess and Ivanič (2010:229) propose that to fully understand "the construction of writer identity we need to take account of the relationship between time and discourses […] how a single act of writing involves the coordination of multiple processes that exist on different timescales". Although the three time points do not have distinctive features because each participant has unique journeys and adjustment experiences, I connected each time point to one of the main themes to understand the effect of membership in creative writing groups on refugees' social integration and their perspective on finding meaning, support and agency. I attempted to form a line of development as participants moved along three-time points. I discuss each time point with evidence from the data in (Chapters 5 to 7).

4.5.1.1. Stage 1: First Interviews

The first set of interviews was conducted face-to-face in two places at the convenience of participants: a meeting room in a church, and a meeting room in a public library. Scheduling interviews was challenging because the members had different commitments and transportation issues. All interviews were recorded using a voice recorder with the participants' consent. The interview questions at this stage started with demographic questions, followed by semi-structured questions reflecting the three research questions on meaning, support, agency, and social creativity. Demographic data provide essential context that helps researchers understand how participants' backgrounds might shape their responses and experiences. According to Ritchie et al. (2003), demographic details enable researchers to situate participants' perspectives within broader social and cultural contexts, allowing for a more thorough analysis of findings.

Although the participants accepted to participate, their refugee status played a role in their willingness to share information. Before I started recording, those who still had their asylum papers with the Home Office asked if my project had any relation to the Home Office

and if this interview would have any effect on the decision. To address these concerns, I reassured them of the confidentiality and independence of my research. I also provided the participants with an information sheet (appendix 3) and answered any questions they had, which I discuss further in this chapter. An ice-breaking conversation about neutral topics, such as the weather and traditional foods, further helped to create a more relaxed atmosphere. Besides, the welcoming approach of the group leader towards my involvement put them at ease knowing that their group leaders welcomed my involvement. During the interviews, I focused on generating a narrative about their journey with *Our Stories* group, which naturally led to sharing parts of their migration journey to the UK as asylum seekers.

This first set of interviews was challenging for the participants as they were hesitant to share with me and doubted their linguistic ability to answer my questions. As they eased into the conversation, some shared heavy memories that brought tears, and at the same time, most of them were excited that they could support my research project. Although no sensitive questions were asked, it was essential to discuss in the participant information sheet (appendix 3) and consent sheet (appendix 4) what they can share and how I deal with any information they provide beforehand, which is discussed in detail in the ethics section. The first interview questions were as follows:

A- Demographic information, migration experience and language level

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? Age, education, occupation, social life.
2. How long have you been in the UK?
3. How many languages do you speak?
4. Where and for how long did you learn English?
5. How do you define yourself as an English language user? (prompt: native speaker, fluent speaker, learner of English. etc.)
6. Have you joined any creative writing groups in your home country?
7. How long have you been a member of this creative writing group?

B-The meaning aspect

8. Did you write creatively before joining the group?
    - If so, what is your experience of creative writing? Have you been published or have you performed any work?
    - If not, then move to Q9.
9. What motivated you to become a member of this group?

10. How do aspects of your life contribute to your writing? (prompts: memories, events)
11. How does being a writer make you feel?
12. Has writing creatively changed you in any way?

C-The agency aspect

13. As a writer, what benefits do you derive from your engagement with the group?
14. How is your voice developing in this group? Are you being heard?
15. Do you feel better able to respond to events around you or things you observe after you have started writing creatively?
16. What has belonging to this group enabled you to achieve that you may not have been able to do otherwise?
17. To what extent do you represent yourself in your writing?

D-The support aspect

18. In what ways are you connected with other members of the group?
19. How does belonging to this group make you feel?
20. Do members support each other in this group? Yes (How)? No (can you think of the reasons why?) prompts: lack of trust, nothing much in common.
21. Tell me about the time of COVID-19, how did you benefit from your membership in the group?
22. Do you feel that this group supports your development as a writer?

Overall, the first set of interviews provided rich insights into the participants' experiences, although the emotional and logistical challenges required careful management to ensure the well-being of both the participants and the researcher.

4.5.1.2. Stage 2: Poetic inquiry: Creative Writing Samples

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) argue that telling a story is a simple activity that does not require a high level of education or language fluency; hence, members of *Our Stories* were introduced to creative writing. Furthermore, participants in narrative interviews take an active part in the production of data by narrating stories that reflect their experiences, and their actual words can be present in the final text (Abkhezr, et al. 2020). Based on the importance of narrative, following the first interviews, I asked the participants to share two

to three samples of their creative writing spread over time to illustrate their progress. While I did not explicitly request a creative writing sample for each of the three key time frames, I encouraged participants to select pieces that reflected different stages of their writing journey with the group. Participants were given the freedom to choose the samples they wanted to share. All samples were written in English, mostly within the group setting, while a few were written at home inspired by group discussions or writing topics. The length of the samples I received varied from several lines to full pages. Although the samples were not dated, during the second interview, I asked participants to reflect on the sequence of their writing. I noted which were written first, second, and later. Discussions about the development from one sample to another occurred in the second interview. This process helped contextualise the samples within their broader experiences and supported the analysis of their narrative development.

The term poetic inquiry refers to an art-based research method and a sub-field of the narrative inquiry approach that aims to authentically present human voice and experience (Prendergast 2009). This term refers to the use of poetry in research and academic writing (Wu 2021). The reason I adapted poetic inquiry in my research is the added value to the data collected, as it offers a space to explore the aesthetic aspects of language use, reflect on participants' personal experience and identity, and give voice and agency to participants by writing poems (Faulkner 2020). The creative writing samples were enriching for the data as they reflected parts of the participants' journey to the UK, their emotional struggles, dreams and hopes, which were not fully reflected with the first set of interview questions. They also established the main pillar of designing the questions for the second set of interviews.

Prendergast (2009:545) further classifies the use of poetic inquiry in empirical studies into three common categories: "researcher-voiced poems" in which the researcher uses field notes and observations to present data in a poetic form; "participant-voiced poems" can be written by the researcher using interview transcripts or directly written by the participants; and lastly "literature-voiced poems" which are poems written as a commentary on literature in the field of study. As my research project is concerned with the perception of *Our Stories* group members, I only included the participant-voiced poems in my data generation, where poetry from the participants is presented in the thesis and specifically in the findings' chapters.

Once I received the samples, I read through each piece and wrote personalised questions to ask in preparation for their second interviews. These samples served as key prompts that encouraged and guided the conversation in the second interview. Samples were later analysed thematically as detailed in the analysis section. Lastly, no transcription was

required for the samples because they were written in English. I only typed all samples in Word documents as they were originally sent as images, handwriting, or PDFs, so they can be all later analysed via NVivo.

4.5.1.3 Stage 3: Second Interviews: Stimulated Recall

To add depth to the narrative inquiry interviews, Kirkpatric and Bryne (2009) conducted a set of two interviews in which participants were given a summary of their first interview to build on the narrative for the second interview. The second interview provided participants with a space to expand on topics discussed in the first interview and to reflect on the creative writing samples. In the second round of interviews, I employed the technique of stimulated recall by asking participants to reflect on their art, whether in the form of painting or writing (Ortju, et al. 2024). During these interviews, I presented participants with their own written pieces and invited them to discuss the context in which the work was created, the emotions they were experiencing at the time, and how the process of writing influenced their sense of meaning, support, and agency. This approach enabled the participants to engage more deeply with their creative work, providing richer and more nuanced insights into the role that writing plays in their lives and their journey as refugees.

Participants were invited for a second interview about a month or two after their first interview, which gave me time to transcribe the interviews, collect writing samples and personalise the interview questions based on the answers provided in the first set. The second set of interviews took place online via Zoom upon participant request. I gave each participant a summary of their first interview followed by questions related to their pieces of writing, reading out their writing within the group and performing in public. It was especially challenging to keep the conversation going for those who had no interest in the act of writing themselves but joined the group for different motives. Hence, more preparation of questions and detailed reading of transcripts was needed. The emphasis for those participants was placed on the social aspect and what motivated them to remain active members of the group.

Although a few interviews were interrupted by participants' children at home or re-scheduled, it brought more warm conversations about running a family in the diaspora and some childhood memories with their families. The second set of interviews also gave some participants a feeling that they had been understood and their level of English was up to the interview level. Maurice mentioned at the start of his second interview that after I summarised what we discussed in the first interview, "*I am very happy because it was exactly what I said last time. This is actually what I said, Yeah. Everything is just right."* At the end

of the second interview, he was very proud of himself, "*I'm feeling really happy because I feel like you understand what I wanted to say. It was a good experience to just have this conversation with you".*

The following is a list of the second interview questions. These questions, as they are semi-structured, were only a guide, and I modified and personalised the questions upon answers given in previous interviews and during the second interview. I amended the questions to encourage participants to narrate and share more information. Overall, the second interview question along with the conversation I had with each participant about their creative writing samples completed the narrative I aimed to obtain from my data generation. Examples of these questions are as follows:

E- <u>The creative intentions and literary elements of the participants' creative writing samples</u>

23. Before we start our conversation, I will summarise what we discussed in the first interview. Let me know if anything has changed since then.
24. Now, let's look at the pieces of writing you have shared:
25. Why did you select these three particular pieces to share with me?
26. Tell me about your choice of topic in these pieces and how you put them together.
27. What aspects of life might have shaped your writing?
28. How are you improving your creative writing style from one piece to another?
29. Tell me how you use literary techniques and forms in these pieces of writing and why you use them.
30. What features of creative writing do you like and what do you do not?
31. What features of creative writing are present in them?
32. In the future, how will you view your writing improving; what do you want to achieve?
33. What can I know about you in your creative writing? What do you want readers to learn about you?

F- <u>Reading out (draft work, work in progress, or completed work) and sharing with the public</u>

34. Do you read out your writing in the group? If so, when and how?
35. How do other group members respond to your writing?
36. What does reading out your writing mean to you? How does it feel?
37. What do you do with your work outside the group- do you share with people you know or social media platforms?

38. Have you considered sharing information in public?

G: Social cure (meaning – agency - support)

39. I will give you three words, and I want you to write on this paper what each one means to you in relation to creative writing.
40. Now look at these pictures (showing a word cloud for each word) and add the sentence you have written.
41. Tell me about the sentences you have written.

4.6. Data Analysis: Reflexive thematic analysis

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), narrative data can be analysed using different methods, provided the researcher maintains the integrity of the participants' stories and voices. Thematic analysis, as one of the data analysis methods for narrative data, is suggested by Riessman (2008) in which the researcher reflects themes on the data collected whether spoken or written. Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) describe thematic analysis as an effective approach for maximising the value of narrative data.

Thematic analysis is a method in which a researcher follows a systematic approach of coding and finding themes to develop patterns of meaning that make sense of the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). Reflective thematic analysis takes this process further by paying more attention to the role of the researcher during data generation and analysis in which critical reflection plays a role in finding patterns of meaning (Clarke and Braun 2021). It is essential to highlight my role as a narrative researcher to reflect on the experience of refugees in creative writing groups, which can add depth to the analysis. This chapter discusses reflexivity in detail.

Given the sensitivity of interviewing refugees, constructing a clear narrative plot was challenging because participants may prefer not to share certain details. Therefore, I chose reflective thematic analysis to make the most of the qualitative data. This approach is also particularly useful for analysing creative writing samples, many of which are in poetic form, as it helps uncover the meanings participants wish to convey. The following section outlines the five steps of this analysis method, as detailed in Clarke and Braun (2021).

1- Data Familiarisation

To engage with the data reflectively, I took detailed notes immediately following each interview. This process was facilitated using Scrivener, a writing software commonly

employed by novelists and academics for its capability to organise complex narratives. Scrivener enabled me to construct a coherent storyline for each participant, ensuring that their experiences were accurately captured and contextualised within the broader scope of the research. Appendix (6) provides an example of taking notes at this stage. I started by providing a summary of the participant's characteristics and demographic information. Based on McAdams (1993) interview protocol for narrative interviews, I highlighted seven features in each interview: life chapters, key events, significant people, future scripts, stresses and problems, personal ideology, and core life themes. Although I did not directly apply those features in the following phases of data analysis, they helped me obtain an overall understanding of the interviews. I also took notes on the narrative participants' attempts to make, and lastly, I wrote about my reflexivity in relation to each interview and how I can connect with the participant as a researcher. For example, in Ibrahim's interview, I noted, "*Ibrahim shares my background in being from the Middle East, we share the linguistic identity confusion that I experienced when first coming to the UK, finding home in creative writing and joining the academic community*". These reflections, along with listening to the audio files, eased the transition to the transcription and coding phase.

Interview Transcriptions

I used Otter.ai, a high-quality paid online software for transcription, as I found it more accurate and time-efficient than manual transcription. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Verbatim transcription refers to accurately producing a word-by-word transcription of the interview and checking every transcript with the audio file (Hill, et al. 2022; Tuckett 2005). It also includes incomplete sentences, repetition, and "all utterances transcribed as spoken" (Clarke and Braun 2013:37). In this case, transcripts are partially edited. I have retained any grammatical errors or repetitions to demonstrate the level of language. I also manually added if there was a laugh, whisper, or wiping eyes to the conversation, as it kept the voice of the participants and added more life and emotions to the text. Interviews with non-native speakers presented challenges in understanding various accents, which led to errors in auto-transcription. To ensure the authenticity of the participants' words, I noted any mispronounced words during the interview to clarify their intended meaning. The following day, I transcribed the interviews while the conversation was still fresh in my memory, allowing me to correct any transcription errors accurately and retain the original meaning.

As presented in Table 1, participants have a good understanding of the English language and managed to answer interview questions in English with little support except for one who

preferred to have the interviews in Arabic because of her low proficiency in expressing herself in English. As my mother tongue is Arabic, I was able to conduct the interview. I then translated the interview into English because I have work experience as an Arabic-English translator. Regardless, I am aware that translation can cause the issue of adaptation of meaning upon the interpretation of the translator rather than giving the exact meaning, as noted in (Larkham 2024). Hence, after translating, I met this participant again and asked her to read the text at her own pace and confirm that it matched the meaning she wanted to convey.

The next section discusses data analysis. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity were encountered during data generation and transcription, which are discussed in the ethics section of this chapter.

2- Generating Initial Codes

Following the transcription phase, I uploaded all data, including interviews, audio files, and creative writing samples, to NVivo, a high-quality qualitative data analysis software. I then started coding. Codes are building units of analysis in which the researcher captures specific meaning segments and labels them (Clarke and Braun 2021). Three rounds of coding took place, going forward from code to reference, backward from reference to code, and then randomly to ensure that all meanings related to research questions and topic understudy were thoroughly captured as recommended by (Thompson 2022; Clarke and Braun 2021). With each round, I have made changes to label names to make them more specific, and I have combined some codes with others or divided them into different codes to ensure that codes only capture specific meanings. For example: the initial code label was imagery and creativity, which I then developed into two codes: imagery in creative writing and creative writing features.

I conducted abductive coding for all data. Abductive approaches to coding can be used to find a middle ground between inductive and deductive approaches (Hurley, Dietrich and Rundle-Thiele 2021). My research questions are driven by the hypothesis of the social cure approach and writer identity theory, as discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, deductive coding was first followed in which coding is "associated with theory-driven and positivist methodologies, which aim to objectively test phenomena" (Hurley et al., 2021, Mantere and Ketokivi, 2013 cited in Thompson 2022:4). At this stage, I extracted quotes related to the theoretical elements and coded them. For instance, George's encounter, "*when we meet and when we see each other it's like a way of encouraging each other",* is coded under the sub-theme teamwork and the main theme of support. Simultaneously, it was

important to code data inductively with an open mind and without assumptions, for example, Maurice encounter, "*when I'm writing with the group. I feel like I'm free to write what whatever I want, just to free myself, just to free my writing, just to free my mind".* This is coded under the freedom in creative writing. Abductive coding resulted in a better understanding of refugees' perspectives, which will be discussed in (Chapters 5 to7).

Additionally, because the data included creative writing samples, I conducted semantic and latent coding. In semantic coding, only the explicit meaning coming directly from the data is coded, while latent levels allow the interpretation of the researcher in which implicit meaning is considered (Clarke and Braun 2021). For example: The following extract of a poem, "*Ahead a pathless road for me, I wonder where to be",* is coded once under the feeling lost code (semantic code) and the refugee identity code (latent code), as I understood from the poem's context and my discussion with the writer during the second interview.

Lastly, I produced a codebook in the form of an Excel sheet and started to cluster codes in similar segments of meaning to generate themes. Thompson (2022) asserts that a codebook is a useful tool to increase clarity and can be applied towards the end of the coding stage. The themes then began to appear more clearly.

3- Generating, reviewing, and defining themes

This section summarises phases 3, 4, and 5 of reflexive thematic analysis phases as mapped by (Braun and Clarke 2006). According to Braun and Clark (2013), themes should establish a coherent and meaningful connection, constructing a cohesive storyline for the data. I started Phase 3 after a few rounds of coding and clustering codes. I labelled groups of codes into themes under each of the three research questions, which generated nine themes. Then, I created a thematic map by handwriting to review my themes and form connections with different views. I also reviewed the references attached to each code under each theme to be able to name the themes. The thematic map helped me build a hierarchy of themes and identify the main themes and sub-themes. Phase 5 is illustrated in Table 2 in which I present three themes 'Seeking Meaning', 'Finding Support', 'Gaining Agency' and three sub-themes for each.

Table 2: Main Themes

Theme 1	Seeking Meaning: Developing a Sense of Worth and Purpose Over Time.		
Illustrative quote	*I need eyes to see. I draw eyes, maybe I see differently*		
Sub-themes	1-Merging past and present in CW	2-Finding Hope	3- Developing a positive sense of self through writing
Theme 2	Finding Social Support		
Illustrative quote	*They are my family. We share the same ideas; we feel each other*.		
Sub-themes	1-Denial of support and belonging: Refugees' stigmatised identities and social dynamics	2-The writing group as a community	3-Writing together in the creative writing group
Theme 3	Gaining Agency		
Illustrative quote	*This small home of writers can bring us to the world.*		
Sub-theme	1- Agency in creative writing groups	2. Social creativity strategies	3. Collaborative narrative to face stigma

These themes and sub-themes are interconnected in a layered, mutually enabling relationship rather than following a strictly linear or horizontal structure. Each theme builds upon and reinforces others to create a dynamic where individual and collective growth within creative writing groups unfolds over time. Each theme builds on the others in a progressive manner. Seeking meaning initiates personal growth, social support strengthens integration and resilience and agency emerges from the combined effect of these factors, which enable refugees to face stigma and find empowerment through collaborative and socially contextualised creative writing.

4.7. Ethical considerations

Ensuring ethical standards and confidentiality is paramount when conducting research with populations with marginalised status, such as refugees. Wood (2016) argues that ethical considerations are often treated as a minor step to be quickly addressed, yet they are integral to every phase of the research process. Hence, a responsible and reflective researcher should consistently prioritise ethics in all aspects of their work (Wood 2016). To protect participants' identities, I generalised their demographic information, presenting age ranges rather than specific age as previously presented in Table 1. Although I encouraged

participants to use pseudonyms on consent forms and during the interviews, some expressed pride in their identities and wished for their real names to be used. In these cases, while I respected their request, I ensured that their demographic details remained vague to safeguard their privacy. Goodwin, Mays, and Pope (2020) assert that qualitative research participants should have the autonomy to make their own decisions related to the data they share. They added that a change of name may not be the only way to protect the participant's identity, but rather obscuring the details related to the person, such as their environment, organisation and other details, can help in making data less sensitive (Goodwin, Mays and Pope 2020). Nonetheless, all names were eventually anonymised to avoid any future ethical concerns.

The ethical approval from the university ethics committee required multiple revisions. This lengthy process allowed me to anticipate potential issues and adequately address participants' concerns about their safety as participants in my research project. I provided each participant with consent forms and information sheets (Appendix 3 and 4), including contact details for myself, my supervisor, and the university for any questions or potential withdrawal from the study without consequence within a month of each interview. I helped participants understand the different terms on the consent form and the participants' information sheet and answered any questions they had. I reassured participants of their autonomy and alleviated any anxieties they had about participating in the research.

Additionally, I anticipated some issues that might appear during data generation and planned for them. For example, participants may share traumatic personal stories and may experience emotional distress during the interview because questions can indirectly trigger memories, or issues may emerge within the texts that they choose to share. To avoid such risk, participants were not asked to speak or write about any difficult experiences; they were directed to the available supporting channels provided as a paper with the participant information sheet, and they were given the flexibility to withdraw from the interview. It is also crucial to address the possibility of participants disclosing sensitive information, such as domestic abuse and unconvicted criminal activities. Before data generation, I informed participants about the circumstances under which I would have to break confidentiality and share information with relevant agencies. Additionally, I followed the recommendations of the national learned societies and sought guidance from my supervisor, who is experienced in handling such issues.

I also recognised that some participants might feel pressured to participate. Wood (2016) asserts that researchers should avoid creating any sense of obligation for potential participants to join a study. For example, indirect approaches, like requesting assistance from a headteacher to recruit teachers, can unintentionally pressure staff to participate in order not

to refuse a request from their employer (Wood 2016). To address this issue, I provided clear consent forms and explained that I was an independent doctoral researcher with no governmental affiliation, ensuring that participants understood there would be no negative consequences for withdrawing from the study. For online data generation, I verified participants' identities through formal interview invitations sent by the writing group organiser and reassured them of their anonymisation of their responses. I also implemented strict data security measures to protect the confidentiality of the collected data. Clandinin and Caine (2008) highlight that narrative research with vulnerable populations requires careful adherence to ethical guidelines. Sensitivity, confidentiality, and anonymity are critical when dealing with traumatic stories. By following the Social Research Association's ethical guidelines and obtaining Nottingham Trent University's ethics panel approval, I ensured that all potential ethical issues were addressed throughout the research process.

Lastly, as a PhD candidate, I considered that I might face emotional distress as well, and if that were to happen, I would discuss any issues with my supervisors, seek university counselling services and space interviews to avoid being overwhelmed. I could only handle a maximum of two interviews a day because the stories they shared and the emotions were heavy for me as a researcher. Hence, taking breaks between interviews helped ensure the quality of conducting interviews, as recommended by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018). Quickfall (2022) highlights the importance of doctoral researchers in education to be mindful of the emotional risks involved in research, noting that research can have emotional impact because it often involves personal connections with participants. Support from supervisors and colleagues is essential for the well-being of researchers (Quickfall 2022).

4.8. Reflexivity and Positionality

In Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the researcher's reflexivity is a key feature, as the researcher is seen as a knowledge provider and an active participant in how data are shaped and analysed (Clarke and Braun 2021). They further classify reflexivity in reflective thematic analysis into three categories: "personal reflexivity, functional reflexivity, and disciplinary reflexivity" (Clarke and Braun 2021:13). Personal reflexivity refers to the researcher's own ideas, values, and experiences that influence the research. Functional reflexivity focuses on the choices made by the researcher in designing the data generation process. Finally, disciplinary reflexivity refers to how the researcher's educational

background affects their perspective on the topic under study and the production of knowledge (Clarke and Braun 2021).

Furthermore, in the context of my research, understanding the role of social identity in building trust with my research participant is essential, especially when considering the dynamics between insider and outsider groups. As discussed in Chapter 2, The Self-Categorisation Theory explains how individuals categorise themselves and others into groups that shape their social identity (Hogg and Turner 1987). This categorisation leads to in-group favouritism, in which individuals favour members of their social group over those of out-groups (Haslam, et al. 2018). This favouritism can significantly impact trust levels because individuals are more likely to trust those they perceive as part of their in-group. Furthermore, the insider-outsider dichotomy presents challenges in building trust, particularly when individuals from different social identities and backgrounds interact, as in the case of Our Stories group. The insider-outsider distinction is particularly relevant in research involving marginalised communities, as it affects trust, and the depth of engagement between the researcher and participants (Tewolde 2023). Tewolde (2023) argues that the positionality of researchers is fluid, and researchers may navigate between insider and outsider roles depending on the context, interactions, and the extent to which they are perceived as belonging to the group. Aligning with this, Breen (2007) asserts that in the context of qualitative research, the insider-outsider dichotomy is often oversimplified, as researchers may occupy positions along a continuum between these roles. She adds that this positioning can significantly influence various aspects of the research process, including topic selection, scope, access to participants, data collection, analysis, and the maintenance (Breen 2007).

Understanding these dynamics and building rapport and trust was essential for building trust when introducing myself as a researcher. Throughout the data generation period, I engaged in personal reflexivity by acknowledging my background and its relevance to the study. As someone who comes from a family of refugees and non-native speakers, I was aware of the shared experiences between myself and my participants, particularly regarding living in the UK, improving English language skills, and navigating university education. However, I consciously maintained an open mind, ensuring that my experiences did not overshadow the diverse narratives of my participants. Respecting their viewpoints and finding meaningful segments in their stories were priorities in my approach. For functional reflexivity, as I am interested in creative writing and have published several poems and short stories, I have been keen to produce knowledge through stories. This led me to adopt a narrative inquiry approach, which I believed would best capture the richness

of the participants' experiences through their storytelling. Lastly, in disciplinary reflexivity, my educational background as an ESL teacher and creative writing played a role in designing the interview questions. I was attentive to the broader aspects of language acquisition, considering all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), while also recognising the developmental features of creative writing in novice writers.

An additional aspect to consider is my position with respect to the participants and how power dynamics could affect the ethical considerations of my research. Solie (2024:1) highlights that "through multidimensional reflexivity, researchers can identify power asymmetries and their implications for the research process". As a researcher and educator, I hold a position of power that may influence how participants perceive me and how they engage with the research process. I reflected earlier on this point in which participants were initially reluctant to answer my interview questions. While I share a cultural and linguistic background with some participants, this does not eliminate the inherent power imbalance that exists between researchers and participants. This is particularly applicable when working with marginalised groups such as refugees.

Furthermore, my position as a PhD candidate who speaks English fluently might make participants feel pressured to speak English correctly, such as in the case of Maurice I presented earlier. To deal with potential power imbalances, I adopted a respectful and open approach where I actively encouraged participants to share their stories at their own pace and the accents they use without any pressure to be grammatically correct. I only asked for word clarification if needed. I also emphasised that participation is voluntary and that participants can withdraw at any time without negative consequences. By being transparent about the research process, discussing the potential impact of the research on the participants' lives, and respecting their autonomy in choosing what to share, I aimed to create an ethical and supportive environment and empower the participants. I also thanked them for contributing to researchers' knowledge in the field of refugee education, which made them feel proud. This reflexive attention to both my positionality and the power relations in the research process aligns with the broader ethical responsibility of conducting research with marginalised status populations.

4.9. Summary

This chapter has outlined the four pillars of a research paradigm. This study provides an overview of the narrative inquiry approach. This chapter outlines the details of the study design and data generation. Subsequently, it introduces data analysis and applies reflective

thematic analysis to all data. The chapter concludes with a presentation of ethics and the role of the researcher.

The next three chapters will present the findings with extracts to illustrate each of the three themes and bring forward the voices of the participants. The presentation of the findings in three different chapters is based on the themes, time points, and three research questions. The relationship between the findings is critically discussed in Chapter 8 to provide a complete narrative of this research project.

Chapter 5: Seeking Meaning

I need eyes to see. I draw eyes, maybe I see differently.
- Hassan

5.1 Overview

Following the details of the methodology for data generation and analysis, it is time to move on to the first of the three chapters, which presents the key findings of this research. As a reminder, to explore the role of creative writing groups in the social integration of refugees, I conducted a qualitative study involving 11 members of *Our Stories* creative writing group as one of the initiatives of non-formal education for refugees. The participants were refugees aged between 20 and 50 years old from eight countries across Africa and the Middle East. The dataset consisted of 21 in-depth narrative interviews and 33 creative writing samples. I identified three distinct yet interconnected themes through reflexive thematic analysis: Seeking Meaning, Finding Support, and Gaining Agency. These themes form the foundation of the findings' Chapters (5 to 7).

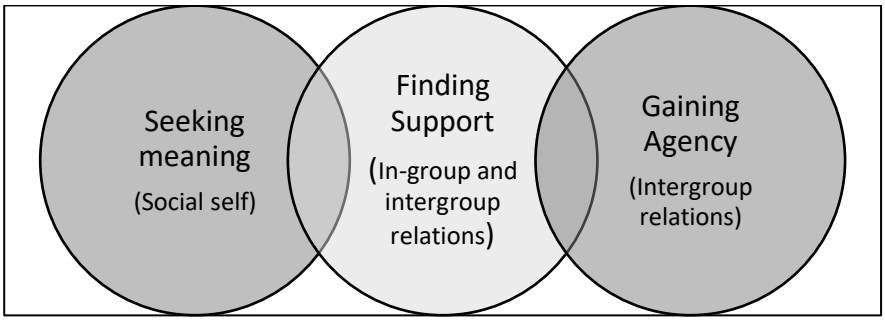
I now introduce the relation between the three themes. Then, I present the first theme and related results.

5.2. Relations between the Three Themes

Seeking Meaning forms the foundation for the themes explored in subsequent chapters. Figure (10) illustrates the interrelationships among the three themes as I view them in this thesis. The search for meaning on a personal level creates conditions for participants to seek and find support within the writing group (Chapter 6). This support, in turn, empowers refugees to express agency through creative writing (Chapter 7). Thus, this chapter establishes the first step in a continuum that moves from personal identity formation to group-level processes in creative writing groups and, finally, to inter-group dynamics with the host society and social creativity. This continuum is based on the Self-Categorisation Theory as one of the theories of the social identity approach, which suggests that to understand a person's thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours, it is essential to consider how individuals categorise themselves in relation to others (Jetten, et al. 2017). Turner (1987) further explains that when social identity becomes salient, individuals become more aware

of their similarities with those within their group (in-group relations) and what distinguishes them from those outsides of it (inter-group relations).

Figure (10) Interrelations among the three themes.



(Author's own work)

5.3. Aim and Analytical Structure of Theme 1

The first theme of the data analysis is Seeking Meaning. This theme explores how refugees in *Our Stories* creative writing group develop a sense of meaning through their participation in the group in response to the first research question.

> RQ1: What insights do refugees' perspectives and creative writing samples provide regarding their sense of meaning and value of writing?

This theme focuses on the personal level of identity formation from the perspective of the Social Identity Approach to Health and Well-being and Writer Identity Theory. The exploration of the seeking meaning theme aligns with the meaning hypothesis of the social cure perspective, which indicates that "when people define themselves in terms of shared social identity, that identity will focus their energies and imbue them with a sense of meaning, purpose, and worth" (Haslam, et al. 2018:29). The personal level of the Social Identity Theory as part of the Social Identity Approach is presented in the social self. The Social Identity Theory, in its origin, is a theory of the social self and self-esteem that can be derived from groups that are central to the self (Brewer 1991). The social self is affected by the different social identities that individual may have (Brewer 1991). This theme also connects to the autobiographical and discoursal self within the writer Identity theory.

The personal narratives that I present in this chapter are marked by the members' reflections on the past, their struggle for hope, and their confidence in writing. This chapter presents the analysis of the data related to this theme, followed by a discussion of the key

findings and theoretical contributions. Table 2.1 lists the theme and sub-themes presented in this chapter. Along with presenting the sub-themes, this chapter reflects on Time One 'First arrival to the UK' of the three-time points, as I discussed in the methodology chapter. Although the three-time points may overlap, I chose to focus on one-time point in each chapter.

Table 2.1: Seeking Meaning Theme

Theme 1	Seeking Meaning: Developing a Sense of Worth and Purpose Over Time.		
Illustrating Quote	*I need eyes to see. I draw eyes, maybe I see differently*.		
Sub-Themes	1.1. Merging the past and present in creative writing	1.2. Finding hope	1.3. Developing a Positive Sense of Self through Writing
Cases (No. of participants)	4	5	3
Counts (No. of extracts)	8	5	6

This theme is divided into three sub-themes, beginning with 'Merging Past and Present in Creative Writing', which represents a logical starting point for discussing the members of the *Our Stories* creative writing group by focusing on their past and how it links to their present. The extracts then move to reveal a glimpse of hope emerging from the poems and interviews with group members, introducing the second sub-theme 'Finding Hope'. As the members could see their thoughts and feelings turning into real words, they started to gain confidence and began to express themselves freely. Freedom is something they might have lost during their immigration journey. Hence, the third sub-theme is 'Developing a Positive Sense of Self through Writing'.

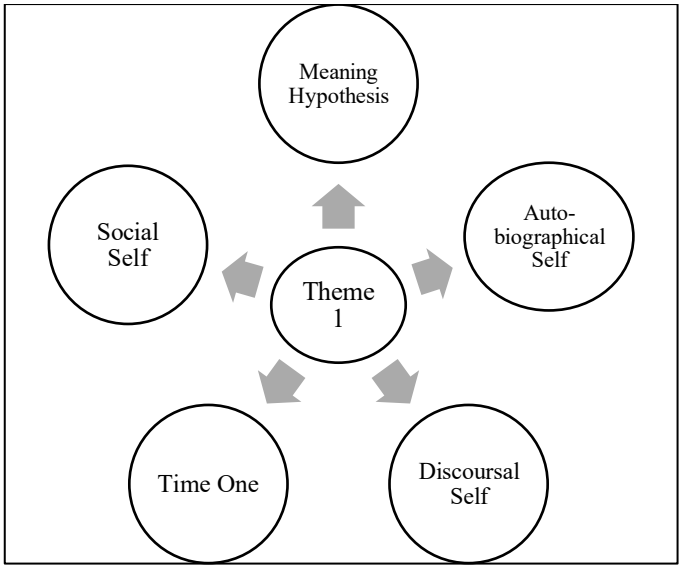
Analytical Structure for Theme 1

As explored in Chapter 2, this thesis investigates the sense of meaning that refugees develop within creative writing groups by applying the meaning hypothesis, framed within the social cure perspective. This approach is considered alongside the concepts of the autobiographical self and the discoursal self, both of which focus on personal history and memories and how they are expressed through writing. Figure (11) shows the model I developed to analyse the extracts in this chapter. This model ensures that the elements of the theoretical framework

are focused on to answer the first research question from the dataset. Each element has been previously discussed in this thesis. I summarise what each element stands for.

The Meaning hypothesis is one of the Social Identity Approach to the health and well-being hypothesis, which indicates that "When individuals define themselves based on a shared social identity, that identity directs their efforts and provides them with a sense of meaning, purpose, and self-worth" (Haslam, et al. 2018:29) . The social self refers to the personal level of the Social Identity Theory and the different social identities an individual can have (Brewer 1991). Time one refers to the period of time of refugees' arrival to the UK, as reflected in their writing samples. The autobiographical self as part of the writer identity theory refers to an individual's history, memories, and life events as part of the development of the writer identity (Ivanič 2004). The discoursal self refers to how a writer presents their autobiographical self in the moment of writing.

Figure (11) Pictorial description of the analytical structure of theme 1 'Seeking Meaning'



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5.4. Results

Sub-theme 1.1: Merging Past and Present in Creative Writing

Creative writing provides participants with a space to reflect on their past experiences as an essential step in rebuilding their sense of meaning, self-worth, and purpose in both life and writing. The trauma of displacement and the loss of home and family can disrupt one's identity, requiring refugees to reconstruct their sense of self to integrate past losses, adapt to

new environments, and navigate between their home and host cultures (Puvimanasinghe et al., 2015). This process aligns with the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC), in which individuals redefine their identities in response to significant life transitions, often by engaging with new social groups and re-establishing connections to both their past and present selves (Haslam, et al. 2018).

This sub-theme starts from Time One; the beginning of the stories the refugees narrated during the interviews and within their creative writing samples. Reflecting on the past appears in almost every sample of their writing, even in a couple of words. In a conversation with the group leader, she mentioned that asking members to write about their past is challenging. On the one hand, it does help them to be proud of their past, speak about it, and find empathy in listening to similar stories or even greater challenges people face. On the other hand, recalling memories from the past can be traumatic or can bring negative energy into the room. Therefore, she did not ask members to write about their past as she realised that the past was already present in all topics they chose to write about, or she suggested ranging from writing about food to writing about the city they in which they currently reside.

The following are eight extracts from four transcripts from Ibrahim, George, Hassan and Marieann to present how creative writing can help members merge the past with the present. Focusing on four participants and some personality characteristics that shaped their writing can bring their voices forward in the analysis, which are important elements of the poetic inquiry approach in which participant-voiced poems are presented, as discussed earlier in the methodology section. The extracts in all findings' chapters are either from creative writing samples or interviews. In some cases, a creative writing extract is followed by an interview extract for the same participant. These interview extracts were either responses to specific questions asked by the researcher about the creative writing sample or part of a broader conversation rather than a direct response to the writing. Combining creative writing extracts with interview responses helps to present the intended meaning behind participants' writing and the narratives that emerge in interviews. To distinguish between the two, I have noted whether an interview extract is a response to a direct question about the poem or part of the conversation. I will reflect on those extracts using the words of the participants from the second set of interviews and the meanings they wanted to convey as narrators of their own stories.

Extract 1

> *I will put on my glasses. There's something wrong in my eyes today*
> *-Ibrahim's interview*

The opening extract demonstrates the heaviness of talking about memories. Ibrahim made a rough journey of migrating through the sea to reach the UK. He is now settled in the UK and is enrolled in an undergraduate programme, repeating the same degree he received back home to start a career in the UK. Speaking about the past, as he explained, one of his poems brought tears to his eyes, and I had to stop the interview for a few minutes. His encounter reflects the emotional complexity of migration and refugees' difficulties in reflecting on the past. Eastmond (2007) explained that displacement causes a significant disruption to individuals' sense of self as they enter a new context and unfamiliar conditions.

Extract 2

> *I left behind my mum's version of koftas fingers*
> *The most delicious koftas I have ever had in my life*
> *I used to have this dish in winter with my family in Sudan*
> *I also left behind my mom.*
> *-Ibrahim's poetry*

> *The Kofta is like something nostalgic. Bringing all the nostalgia, Yeah. All the all the good memories that you left. When you were a child, and then the I don't know how to link that. But the food I think the food is the link. And here as well. So people like they were very thoughtful of others. And the link was food.*
> *-Ibrahim's interview (In response to researcher's question about the poem: "What stages of your life is the poem presenting? What memories?")*

The topic of food in all creative writing samples I collected is immediately linked to their national, ethnic, and family identities. Ibrahim's reflection on leaving behind his mother's kofta ties food to family and loss of culture. Stories about traditions and gatherings with loved ones are always presented with the topic of food. Fischler (1988) argues that food plays a crucial role in expressing an individual's social identity because the foods individuals choose to consume shape them biologically, psychologically, and socially. Ibrahim said during the interview that food represented his nostalgia for his family's house in Sudan and particularly for his mother, whom he had to leave behind. Family networks from the social cure perspective represent an essential factor in an individual's social identity and meaning-making (Haslam, et al. 2018). Shared social identity with family membrs can bring social identification which means that people engage in things with love and passion (Haslam, et

al. 2018). This passion is presented in Ibrahim's second line of the poem, *'The most delicious koftas*', and his reflection afterwards in saying that in the UK, food was the way people showed him their welcome. In addition, through the lens of the meaning hypothesis (Haslam, et al. 2018), this memory that he shared with *Our Stories* provides him with a sense of belonging and self-worth generated from his memories.

In light of the writer identity theory, the autobiographical self of Ivanič (1998) is represented by Ibrahim's personal history and emotional ties to his family and homeland. His discoursal self reveals the pain of separation from his family, "*I also left behind my mom"*, which carries a sense of grief. Simultaneously, sharing those memories brings comfort to him.

Extract 3

> *What happened!?*
> *I just remember that tornado took me off the ground wildly,*
> *circulated times after time into its deep grey core*
> *and threw me angrily away.*
> *Where am I? Why I can't see?*
> *Is it really that dark?*
> *My ears full of snoring radios*
> *turning into an unbroken sharp horn with dusty taste in my mouth.*
> *I touch the cold and hard ground to scape this nightmare.*
> *There's something, feels like a pen!*
> *It is a pen, but what can be done by a pen!?*
> *I need eyes to see...I draw eyes, maybe I see differently.*
> *-Hassan's poetry*
>
> *With a pen, you can create the life you want, you can give life to anything that you want with a pen. You can create the world that you want to, and do anything that you would do as a God with endless power in your work.*
> *-Hassan's interview (In response to researcher's question about the poem: "Now that you're writing more, what do you think a pen can do?")*

Hassan, a young man in his early twenties who appeared full of life, started narrating his story. He joined *Our Stories* group to fight his nightmares and traumatic memories by writing poetry. This extract reveals a deep sense of alienation from his past and the host culture. Time One is present in his description of "*tornado took me"* and the sense of being trapped in "*a deep grey core*" is chasing him. He showed his struggle to find meaning in his new environment as a newcomer to the UK from the Middle East by saying in the interview, *"I don't know what happened, I got detached from my previous life. I didn't know what to do"*.

This confusion highlights the overwhelming nature of his displacement and the identity crisis it has triggered.

The extract further reflects the autobiographical self of Ivanič (1998), as Hassan remembers his personal history of migration and inner conflict. Upon asking him what he could do with a pen, he explained that a pen is an endless power with which he can create a new life, just like a God creates life. The pen represents a source of hope and empowerment that resembles finding a magic wand that can transform his life vision and help him move on as his writing and life vision evolve.

Extract 4

> *There, where brown is common,*
> *We grow up with roots*
> *As steady as our pyramids.*
> *Wind blows from the past,*
> *Urging us to keep on the right path*
> *-Ibrahim's poetry*
>
> *This poem is about us, Sudanese culture, Sudanese identity and lots of things. Some Sudanese are brown, so they're not black, they're not white. So the sand, if you see Sudan from a high view, it's brown. Especially in the north, where the pyramids are there, it's a brown desert. So this is the link, the brown colour links people with pyramids as well the civilization that we came from.*
> *-Ibrahim's interview (In response to researcher's question about the poem: "You mentioned 'steady as our pyramids', can you tell me more about the image of the pyramids used here?")*

This extract illustrates Ibrahim's discoursal self where his autobiographical experiences are reflected in the present moment through the lens of his cultural and national identity. As Ivanič (1998) suggests, the discoursal self-conveys the writer's personal story, which is shaped by the broader social context, including "values, beliefs, and power relations" (Ivanič 1998: 24-26). Ibrahim presents the values and beliefs he inherited from being a Sudanese and standing still faced with challenges, just like the ancient pyramids in his country. By using the imagery of pyramids, he symbolises strength, stability, and resilience. He mentions that his brown skin tone resembles the colour of the pyramid are equal in power. The pyramids, which are symbols of ancient wisdom represent the pride Ibrahim carries with him as he faces the challenges of his new life in the UK. Seeking meaning from looking at the past to shine in his current situation makes this extract important to discuss in merging past and present sub-themes. In addition, the right path Ibrahim mentions refers to remembering his ancestors when he is in an unstable state of wondering in which their advice can put him

on the right path. His desire to continue his education and find his place within academia in the UK comes from his parents' insistence to see him educated throughout his childhood, as he mentioned in the interview, *"your grandparents and your parents, you feel they are watching you, but in a good way. Therefore, whenever you are feeling off the road, they are trying to bring you back again"*. Kellezi et al. (2021) assert that in times of difficulty, family identities provide meaning and assist in dealing with difficulties.

This extract also reflects on social identities in line with the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979), where Ibrahim's national and ethnic identity as a Sudanese gives him a sense of meaning. Thus, this analysis of Ibrahim's extract highlights the role of social identities, including national, ethnic, and home identities, in giving meaning to refugees. It also relates to the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC), in which maintaining existing social identities in times of change can positively affect well-being (Haslam, et al. 2018). Ibrahim's national and ethnic identity and the resilience he derives from it allow him to maintain a sense of continuity.

Extract 5

It's super early in the morning,
the sun is rising by spreading the red colour in the sky,
another day beginning.
Simply it'll finish by sucking the colours from the sky,
like hand sellers coming and going with colourful dresses.
I've been walking on this abandoned road for ages.
My mom's voice in my head telling story.
The grown grass in the cracks of the road
turning to yellow in the hot summer,
the filthy broken water fountain in front of a wall
with happily playing kids painted on it,
all of them sensitise me!
I wanna go home.
-Hassan's poetry

The autobiographical self, which refers to an individual's history, memories, and life events as part of the development of the writer identity (Ivanič 2004), is present in his mother's voice echoing as he walks on the long road of being a refugee. Hassan reflects on his childhood and the dreams he had built for his adulthood. The loss of his vision for his future is illustrated in the image of the sky losing all colours as he said in the interview, *"I'm not reaching anywhere because I'm not having any access to anything that I wanted to*. This section presents Hassan's Time One, in which his vision is blurry and the future is out of his reach. In addition, he reflects on his inability to find meaning as he feels frustrated and lost.

Hassan did not only leave his country because of conflict but also had disagreements with his own society's values. He struggled with ideas about life and God's presence in his home. Religion from the social cure perspective can enhance positive connections to group members; hence, contradicting the group views of religion and God can result in a loss of social connection, isolation, and identity struggle (Haslam, et al. 2018; Bobowik, Basabe and Páez 2014). Hassan's disorientation also reflects the loss of connection and social resources that he would drive from his original group and the struggle to find new social groups to belong to. He showed a need for social prescribing in which engaging in community activities provides a medium for social connections and understanding, which can improve the well-being of individuals (Muhl, et al. 2023).

According to the Social identity theory, Hassan, as an example of a disadvantaged member of his original group, chose social mobility to deal with his situation in which an individual abandons his group to join another in the hope of enhancing his well-being (Tajfel and Turner 1979). The challenge Hassan faced was that he left one group to avoid disadvantage and then entered a context in which the disadvantage continued but transformed into a different format. Bobowik et al. (2014) argue that social mobility strategy may have negative effects on the social well-being of individuals as they experience isolation and other challenges from being detached from their original group. Hassan's longing for home and feelings of isolation reflect the psychological toll of this choice where the new social group has not yet provided the belonging or well-being he seeks. Nonetheless, this poem demonstrates the role of creative writing as a way to cope with disorientation and create meaning from challenging experiences.

Extract 6

My heart is a legendary wolf
He pursues his own path to the safe place
He is determined and never surrenders
Going beyond anything we can imagine
As part of the pack, he is caring and protective
Family-orientated
Always defending the weak.
My heart is a mysterious wolf
-George's poetry

George is a family-oriented man who came to the UK with his wife and two children. In this poem, George describes his heart as a wolf in connection to his childhood, where his mother used to read him the legendary story of Mowgli, who was raised by wolves. Haslam et al. (2018) discuss how responses to trauma are deeply influenced by social identities,

particularly in how individuals derive meaning and purpose from their group membership poem describes his heart as a "*legendary wolf*" which reflects the aspects of his social identity as a father and family man, including strength, protection, and resilience. In addition, George's saying "*as part of a pack*" refers to the familial social structure that provides him with strength and a sense of responsibility. Muldoon et al. (2019), in their study on social identity and trauma, highlight that individuals who identify strongly with supportive social groups, such as their families, display greater resilience when facing traumatic events. In the case of George, his social identity as a father played a role in his response to trauma, and he focused on his responsibilities as a caregiver.

Consistent with this, McAdams (1993) argues that individuals who seem to have well and power are often motivated by key events that shape their memory and personality and that positive emotions can be driven by interpersonal relations that a person has an impact on. This is presented in the feeling of responsibility George shows towards his family and the role his mother played in shaping his personality by reading heroic stories for him. McAdams (1993:11) further adds that in difficult times, we tend to form a "heroic narrative of the self" to bring meaning to our lives and struggles, which is shown in the title of this poem "*my heart is a legendary wolf*".

Extract 7

> *My city (host city in the UK) is wonderful in its diversity*
> *The diversity that reminds me of my childhood in a lovely country*
> *Who was then also rich in diversity*
> *Unfortunately, my country lost the harmony in diversity*
> *Which I found again here (in the UK),*
> *And that gives me hope*
> *That my country too will regain that harmony in its diversity*
> *-George's poetry*

George writes about the resemblance between the city he currently resides in and the home country where he spent his childhood. Finding the connection between his past (autobiographical self) and the present made him feel that he could also call the host city his "*my city*". This acceptance of the new place can be analysed through Brewer's (1991) concept of the social self, in which George negotiates his multiple identities as a refugee and a member of a new community. Diversity in George's perspective forms the main pillar connecting countries. This loss of diversity led him to lose connection with his country, feel unaccepted by his group, and move out to seek safety. Despite the loss of diversity in his home country, he believes that the UK's diversity can serve as a model for the future of his

country. This hope aligns with the meaning hypothesis (Haslam, et al. 2018), as George finds purpose and hope in envisioning positive social change.

George's use of creative writing as a medium to assert his belief shows his discoursal self of the writer's identity theory. His choice of a positive tone implies that he is trying to find positivity in hardship as Ivanič (1998:38) asserts that a writer's language can form a "means of expressing social identity".

Extract 8

> *You see, you write about yourself, where you come from, why you are here. What's happened to you, every day you write it because of what we are living here. The pressure sometimes you can forget things. But when you write it down and you take your paperwork and say, oh, yeah, that's when I came here four years ago, six years ago. That is what I thought. And it's good to keep it for tomorrow. And then you remember what you passed through, where you have been, what you wrote.*
> *-Marieann's interview*

Marieann is an elderly woman who fears she will forget her memories because of the pressures of daily life. She fears that children may forget their origins and the reason their parents fled their country. Marieann's reflections on writing serve as a mechanism for maintaining collective continuity, a social identity process. Collective continuity refers to the preservation of shared history, values, and experiences across generations, ensuring that a social group's identity remains intact despite life change (Kellezi, Guxholli, et al. 2021). Writing to document the past and preserve it for the future is one of the main reasons Marieann is attending the writing group workshop. As she said in the interview, *"There's a lot to write. Everyone has a story"*. Mariann sheds light on an important aspect of creative writing for refugees, namely, their need to document their history and thus preserve their identity. In his study on the oral history of refugees and asylum seekers in London, Dudman (2019:4) highlights the importance of documenting stories to refugees' individual and social identities, as documenting and archiving personal stories contribute to the broader understanding of group identity:

> Archives are often the backbone on which historical narratives are developed and societies' understanding of their shared pasts are constructed, helping to conceptualise community understandings around notions of belonging and otherness and the formation of both communal and individual identities. Who we are, where we come from, where we belong, and which community/ies we associate with, are all intrinsically linked to a sense of history of who we are—a

> sense of ownership and belonging to a certain cultural heritage (Dudman 2019:4).

This documentation process can also be understood as a form of psychological resilience in that writing becomes a crucial method of retaining control over her sense of self, family history, and cultural continuity. Marieann's act of writing also reflects the autobiographical and discoursal selves of the writer identity theory (Ivanič 1998). Her focus on documenting where she has been, what she has passed through, and her reasons for fleeing connects directly to the autobiographical self, showing the experiences that shape her identity as a writer. Simultaneously, her discoursal self is revealed in the way she expresses these memories in writing.

This sub-theme highlights how creative writing helps refugees merge past and present, drawing on cultural and family identities to find meaning and resilience in their new lives. This process allows the participants to reframe their trauma, connect with the host culture, and maintain a sense of self-continuity through displacement. The next sub-theme explores finding hope through creative writing. This transition towards hope is a crucial step in rebuilding meaning in life, self-worth, and purpose, as participants find strength in their own stories and the collective experience of the group.

Sub-theme 1.2. Finding Hope

This sub-theme illustrates a transition from focusing on past experiences to discovering new sources of hope and meaning in present and future lives. The extracts in this sub-theme reveal a gradual shift towards finding new possibilities and hope despite the challenges they have endured. As a form of creative expression, storytelling can be a powerful tool for participants to regain control of their narratives. Puvimanasinghe et al. (2015:2) emphasise that "telling stories can repair the ruptures to refugees' identities," assisting them in re-establishing a sense of purpose and self-worth and finding hope. Similarly, Frank (2013) and Lieblich, McAdams, and Josselson (2004) indicate that narrative practices empower individuals to reclaim their voices and integrate their experiences of trauma more positively.

In the following sections, I present six extracts from five participants: Paul, Ibrahim, Makbel, Hassan, and George. Their writing reflects a growing awareness of hope, new beginnings, and personal resilience. These participants gradually shifted from focusing on past losses to expressing optimism about their futures, illustrating how creative writing can facilitate not only the processing of past trauma, but also the rekindling of hope.

Extract 9

Hope is the greatest weapon against adversity
But lack of it leaves only uncertainty (...)
But light will conquer darkness,
on the horizon a sparkle of brightness.
There is a glimmer in my eyes, I will be fine.
The sun will rise, and hope will shine.
-Paul's poetry

Paul is an African man in his late 30s. He is the only participant who considers himself a native speaker. In the interview, he mentioned that he had attended a boarding school in his homeland that taught English, and he arrived in the UK when he was a 15-year-old child. He struggles to speak the original language in his home country. This situation presents Paul with a struggle as he identifies more closely with his English-speaking linguistic identity while being restrained by his immigration status. He is an engineer who could not continue working because of his immigration status, which brings some frustration into his writing, as exemplified in the words "*uncertainty, and darkness*" and implies the challenges he faces in integrating into the host society.

This poem further reflects a transition from Time One, in which the challenges of migration dominate, to Time Two, in which hope begins to emerge. Paul's poem resonates with the meaning hypothesis (Haslam, et al. 2018) within the social cure perspective. His search for hope reflects how shared social identities and supportive environments can help individuals regain a sense of meaning and purpose. the creative act of writing provides him with a medium through which he can articulate and shape his understanding of these complex emotions. Creative arts such as writing can gradually help refugees and asylum seekers find their way and strengthen their identities (Dieterich-Hartwell and Koch 2017). Paul's discoursal self emerges through his choice of language and tone in the poem. His use of contrasting imagery "*darkness vs. light*" and his assertion that "*hope will shine and rise*" show his attempt to write a poem that affirms his resilience.

Extract 10

It creates a way to fly easily in the white cloud
Flies above the sky and feels the fresh air
It lights up your mind and soul, keeping you hovering above the sparkling sky
-Makbel's poetry

When writing I don't just go in with my feelings or with my memory or with my imagination. I need all of them.

-Makbel's interview (In response to researcher's question about the poem:"When writing about the sky, did you draw from memories or feelings?").

This young girl chose her pseudonym to be 'Makbel' which she believes means the freedom seeker. In her time with the group, she developed three elements of creative writing: feeling, memory, and imagination. She shows that with her imagination and words, she can find a sacred place in which she can create the life of her dreams without restrictions. She justifies her choice of white cloud by saying, *"No one can make her dirty"*, about her rejection of being labelled as a refugee, as she said, "*It is a dirty label"*, which links to the Stigmatised Identities sub-theme in the next chapter.

Makbel's extract illustrates the social cure process by demonstrating that creative writing provides her with a tool to express her emotions and journey to finding hope. The ability to imagine herself flying above the sky in a place where she feels free and safe reflects how writing helps her cope with the stress and uncertainty of waiting for her asylum claim to be processed. Because Makbel still had her asylum claim with the government at the time of the interview, she was reluctant to speak directly to me during the interview, but she found her expressions flowing within creative writing or discussing her writing. At the start of the interview, she mentioned, "*when I feel comfortable, I start to speak because at first, I have pressure because I don't know what to say, and I forget all the words. But little by little, I can speak if someone can understand me".*

Her autobiographical identity was present throughout the interview. According to Bird (2013:66), writing provides space for writers to "develop ideas that they connect with on an identity level." This connection can help refugees see the value and purpose of creative writing from both personal and social perspectives. This extract can be seen as part of her ongoing journey from Time One to Time Two. In Time One, she is constrained by the pressures of waiting for an asylum claim and the stigma associated with being a refugee. However, in Time Two, she begins to envision a future in which she is no longer defined by these external forces but by her aspirations and identity as a "freedom seeker." Her writing reflects this transition, illustrating the gradual emergence of hope in her narrative.

Extract 11

You know, the zero point, the zero is nothing in mind. But there's meaning. I need to find that meaning. Finding meaning, when the paper is white, there is nothing, you cannot read anything, you cannot see anything. But you can put something on your mind. That's the main meaning for me. And that can make you be a writer. Imagination, you are trying to understand that there is nothing but to make something that makes you a writer.

-Makbel's interview

Makbel's extract illustrates the process of finding meaning through creative writing as she transforms a blank page into a space of imagination, hope, and self-expression. She describes Time One when she struggled to make sense of her life and find meaning by saying nothing *in mind*. She refers to that phase of her life as a blank page. With the help of creative writing, meaning begins to appear on paper. Building meaning shows Makbel's ability to rebuild her life. As she said in her second interview, *"I am the power of everything in my book. I can create, I can write, and I can dream. I can live in my future, which makes me powerfull"*. This power of words Makbel describes began to give her hope and future perspective, which are essential to her social identity as a refugee and in constructing her writer identity. Hunt and Sampson (1998:13) in their book about presenting the self in creative writing suggest that writing can act as a distraction from the pain people suffer and "it can address deeper concerns, such as the need to express in writing what is being felt […] or help to find a shape and meaning to life".

In addition, the meaning hypothesis by Haslam, et al. (2018) can explain what Makbel is experiencing: when individuals engage in meaningful activities within a supportive social context, they can navigate life transitions, such as forced migration. By writing, Makbel constructs meaning and transforms her sense of self through the process. Her discoursal self is evident in how she presents her ideas using imagination and metaphorical language. Ivanič (2004) emphasises that the discoursal self involves how individuals represent themselves in their writing. By using her imagination to fill the blank page, she overcomes the limitations she is facing and gives herself a sense of hope and possibility.

Extract 12

> *I think I was in a shell, in a small shell. I didn't use to see the world like I see now. And after this immigration, you know, it changed our eyes. And after leaving, I saw many people, everyone has their own stories, their travel, everybody. You know, you're in the middle of Maslow's pyramid and you fell off, you see what you had before and you didn't know, you had them. And you're down on the earth. And you see, from the beginning, it's a completely different experience.*
> *-Hassan's interview*

Hassan's extract reflects his migration experience, symbolised by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. His metaphor of "*falling off Maslow's pyramid*" illustrates a significant disruption in

his life and struggle to fulfil his most basic physiological and safety needs. This experience of displacement led him to a shift in his worldview. He began to find hope through the validation of his suffering by recognising that many other refugees share similar stories. The extract aligns with the literature on social identity in trauma studies on how individuals who share traumatic experiences can validate each other's suffering. Kellezi and Shah (2023) emphasise that talking about trauma within a community of people who understand and listen provides survivors with a sense of validation. Hassan's reflection in the interview, *"I saw many people; everyone had their own stories*," demonstrates this recognition of shared suffering.

The sense of shared social identity as refugees helped him find meaning and purpose in his suffering. Haslam et al. (2018) highlight that when people connect with others based on a shared social identity, particularly one shaped by trauma or adversity, they derive a sense of meaning and self-worth from their collective experiences. Furthermore, the collective nature of suffering can be a tool for building resilience and social support. Kellezi and Shah (2023) argue that when individuals come together and share their stories, they can also support each other in confronting injustice. By realising that he was not alone in his suffering, he found the strength to navigate his traumatic past and current struggles as a refugee.

Hassan also expresses nostalgia for his home country, where he was in the middle of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and finding love and belonging. As a refugee, he dropped to the bottom of the pyramid because basic his needs are denied. In a recent study on Ukrainian refugees, Pop (2022) addresses the need to adapt Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of human needs to one specifically designed for refugees' needs, as shown in Figure (12). Pop (2022) suggests that in addition to the basic physiological and safety needs outlined by Maslow, refugees have two additional needs crucial to their well-being: the need to retain their identity by feeling valuable within a group, and the need for communication. These needs help refugees to gain their independence and find their place in the host country (Pop 2022).

Figure (12): The hierarchy of needs among refugees

Source: Pop (Pop 2022:142) – (*Permission to reproduce granted by the Creative Commons public licenses* https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ *)*

Both needs addressed in Figure (12) relate to the first and second themes of this research project 'Seeking Meaning' discussed in this chapter and 'Finding Support' in the next chapter.

Extract 13

This is the bridge of life
Built of hustles and happenings and hope
It spans from birth to death
The approach is skeptical
But on the other side, we find peace of mind
I built this bridge with struggle and sacrifice
I built it for humanity
Let us swim across this bridge coming out victorious
This is the bridge of future

This is the bridge of reconciliation
Built of frustration, meetings and mediation
It spans war
The approach is uncertain
But on the other side, we find peace
I built this bridge with cries and pains
I built it for the nation
Let us move across the bridge with love
This is the bridge of reconciliation

-George's poetry

In this poem, George, whom I previously introduced as a family man, describes how he proudly crossed the bridge of migration with his family. In this poem, George connects his struggles and sacrifices to the larger meanings of humanity, reconciliation, and finding hope. Like many refugees, George struggled to meet his basic needs post-migration, as reflected in his earlier statements about the difficulties of adapting to a new language, food, and culture. This struggle is linked to the hierarchy of refugee needs presented in the previous extract.

The first part "*bridge of life*" is a personal narrative that spans from birth to death. The second part "*bridge of reconciliation*" spans the period from war to peace. George acknowledges an emerging shared social identity with other refugees who face uncertainty and hope for a peaceful life, "*The approach is uncertain, but on the other side, we find peace".* In light of the Social Identity Approach, refugees who face challenging circumstances are more likely to create a shared social identity, which forms the basis for group identification and support (Alfadhlil, et al. 2019). Furthermore, writing poetry enabled George to articulate his personal and collective goals shared among other refugees. Dieterich-Hartwell and Koch (2017) argue that creative writing allows refugees to bridge the gap between their old identities and the new identities they are forming in their host countries. George's reflection on building bridges for humanity and reconciliation suggests that writing gave him a space to reflect on his migration journey and build future hopes.

Overall, this sub-theme highlights how creative writing allows refugees to transition from focusing on the challenges they face to envisioning hope and new beginnings. Through storytelling and poetry, participants gradually reclaimed their narratives and showed resilience and self-worth. Writing becomes a means to imagine a positive future, establish shared connections with others facing similar challenges, and find purpose in their journey towards social integration.

Sub-theme 1.3. Developing a Positive Sense of Self through Writing

This sub-theme explores how creative writing enhances a positive sense of self among refugees. Creative writing groups provide a platform for self-expression, which is crucial for processing emotions and reclaiming narratives after migration. Rousseau et al. (2004) assert that art workshops for immigrants and refugees enhance emotional well-being and empower individuals by allowing them to recognise their inner strength and resilience in the face of difficult circumstances. Through writing, participants navigate their experiences of

vulnerability and transform them into stories of survival and hope, as highlighted in the previous sub-theme.

In addition, Writer Identity Theory highlights that the sense of self is socially constructed through both speaking and writing (Ivanič 2004). Writing becomes a medium through which individuals negotiate multiple social identities and allow space to reflect on the changes that affect their lives and social identities. According to the Social Identity Approach (Jetten et al., 2017), shared group memberships can significantly influence well-being by fostering a sense of belonging, purpose, and meaning (Jetten, et al. 2017). This sub-theme explores aspects of developing a positive sense of self by presenting seven extracts from three transcripts for Mary, Maha and Maurice.

Extract 14

> *I feel confident to speak with people although I know my language is not perfect. Like what I do with you now (laugh). I tried to speak by myself. I try to find what I want for myself. I learnt that from this group, before I was shy, I go like to take my sister with me. I take someone with me to explain to me. Now, I learnt to do something by myself. I'll just speak out.*
> *-Maha's interview*

Maha is a woman from North Africa who is struggling with the English language. She had no education back home following the cultural belief in her country that education is of no use for women as they end up being housewives, as she said in the first interview, *'I got to learn by myself*. She first started learning reading and writing in English six years ago upon her arrival to the UK. She moved to the United Kingdom to join her sister after her parents passed away. She described the reason for her migration as follows: "*I was very upset and angry and I felt lost. Then I came to my sister in England"*.

As a member of *Our Stories* group, Maha expresses her struggle as she said, "*writing is very difficult for m*e, and she compares herself with others who at least learned how to hold the pen to the paper as children. Maha relied on others, particularly her sister, to navigate daily interactions because of her lack of confidence in speaking English. However, as she engaged more with *Our Stories* group, she developed the confidence to speak for herself independently. This shift signifies an important step in her self-esteem and development of a positive sense of self. As Stickley et.al. (2019) assert that creative writing groups for refugees can enhance confidence in language skills. The group provided Maha with a supportive environment where she could practice her English without fear of judgement. This is essential for those who grew up in a context that discouraged female

education. The shift from shyness to assertiveness in her interactions mirrored her internal journey towards self-reliance and independence. According to the Social Identity Approach, group membership and the positive reinforcement it provides can strengthen self-esteem and reshape identity (Jetten, et al. 2017). Maha's sense of self-worth grew as she realised her capability to handle her day-to-day interactions with an English-speaking society.

Extract 15

> *Honestly, I changed a lot, I feel safe with the group. Even if I don't need anything, they are always helpful in anything I need, they talk to me anytime, they help me in writing, legal issues. Although we are from different cultures, they treat me very well. I did not receive such kindness back home unfortunately. I feel like a human. We hug each other, call each other if we have a problem, invite me to their homes. People discriminate but not in this group. My mentality is way better with them*
> *-Maha's interview*

In this extract, Maha expresses how the support she received from her writing group profoundly impacted her sense of self and well-being. Maha notes that although the group members come from different cultural backgrounds, she feels welcomed and treated with kindness, which she has not experienced in her home country. Maha in this extract demonstrates that being a member of *Our Stories* group helped her gain confidence in herself and write, "*I did not receive such kindness back home. I feel like a human"*. This encounter relates to humanisation and dehumanisation as part of the Social Identity Approach. Vaes et al., (2012) explain that people tend to see their group as more human than others, which can affect how they treat and relate to members of different groups. For Maha, *Our Stories* group formed a safe place where she felt accepted, which had positively impacted her confidence and mental state. The feeling of "*like a human again*" reflects the emotional validation she receives from her group.

Maha's reflection on being treated well despite cultural differences shows group members' diversity. The act of hugging, calling, and inviting each other into their homes symbolises the formation of strong social bonds. As Dieterich-Hartwell and Koch (2017:5) suggest, creative writing groups often function as "*safe havens*", where participants find a sense of home and emotional security. The group's welcoming approach helped Maha rebuild her positive sense of self-worth.

Extract 16

> *I think I've really improved a lot because when I started, there were so many things I couldn't spell. I couldn't talk I couldn't express myself. Because I'm always shy. I don't want to say something that I really don't know how to say. I couldn't understand what people were saying. But coming to the group and writing, it really brought the inner me, like, you can actually do it you can write. I thought you need to go to a higher level of education for you to be able to write to be a writer. For writing, it's just an imaginary whatever you imagine whatever you like you can continue to write, it does not necessarily mean you need to be a writer like study. It's just something that comes within you, that comes in your mind, your heart, and whatever you think that's what you put into writing.*
> *-Mary's interview*

Mary is an African mother who is full of humour regardless of her difficult life and loneliness. She forcefully left behind her four-year-old son, reflected in her deep sadness and her creative writing pieces. As she described in her interview, *"I didn't have time to bring a photo. It's so painful. It's just the image of him in my head that I stick to"*. Mary was heavily pregnant during the first interview in the second interview, her baby was two months old, as she reflected,*"Everybody loves my baby is like, it's part of the family*. This vulnerable situation is important to describe because it plays a role in the narrative Mary tells and how she sees the group as her way of survival. Rousseau et al. (2004) demonstrate that groups engaging in creative activities are valuable for refugees in forming social connections, building positive self-esteem, creating a safe space for self-expression, and developing social identities within the host society.

Mary is also reflecting on discovering her writer identity after joining the group. The power of imagination helped Mary to have the words to speak about her memories and the son she had to leave behind, as she described in the interview: "*I'm trying to imagine when I left him and how it is going to look like now"*. According to Sarbin (2004), imagination is an important element in the construction of a narrative, which in turn has a profound impact on identity development. In line with that, Kennedy (2002:5) in an interview with the novelist Lilian Faschinger, the latter says that imagination can help women in situations of loss and war to create new identities, "when the imagination is used, unconscious processes are also taking place that in part go through the generations and back to the foremothers, the mothers and grandmothers; That means that when one fills that void with so-called imagination". Mary found a home in her imagination and pieces of writing that connect to her son and family.

Extract 17

> *It also makes me feel confident in myself when talking because I go to many schools. I was scared. When I was told to talk to the children, I said. Amelia (group leader) told me, "No, you can do it. You can do it (laugh). But now I can express myself, and I can talk with confidence in coming to the group I am writing. I could express myself before I couldn't sit down with you and talk. I just tell you no, no because I cannot speak.*
> *-Mary's interview*

Mary's growing confidence is illustrated in this extract, in which she discusses how support from the group leader, Amelia, encouraged her to speak in public and express herself more freely. Mary reflects on Time 1 in her first days with the group and how reluctant she was to express herself in fear of being judged or misunderstood. However, the creative writing group provided a space where she could practice self-expression without fear, leading to a profound change in her courage to communicate. This mirrors the findings of Stickley et al. (2019), who observed that creative writing groups can serve as sanctuaries where refugees build confidence and hope.

Extract 18

> *I was really frustrated at the beginning when I couldn't understand someone speaking. I wasn't able to say two words in English. Hey, I went to school. I was not stupid. It was just because of that stigmatisation. At the beginning when I started with the group, I wasn't ever able to write two phrases without many, many, many mistakes. But now I am improving my writing and my spelling and my grammar.*
> *-Maurice's interview*

Maurice is an African man who suffered serious back injuries before his journey to the UK. Upon arriving at the interview, he told me that this was the first time that he had left his walking stick at home. His injury, which he avoided discussing with me, was presented in one of his poems: "*You can trample me underfoot like boots on muddy ground. But still, like spring flowers, I rise*. This traumatic event shaped his journey to the UK and affected his ability to attend regular English classes.

The political situation in his country caused French to be the dominant language, and English speakers were treated as a stigmatised minority, as he mentioned in the interview: "*I was scared even to speak English just because I say maybe someone can just laugh at me*." Upon arriving in the UK, his low English proficiency caused him frustration. When studying the experiences of second-language creative writers such as a group of refugees, it

is essential to consider their writer identity along with their language choices and struggles as they are linked together (Zhao 2015). Zhao emphasises that "we need to improve our understandings of how creative writing is employed by second-language learners, not only for language or literacy acquisition purposes but also as a self-empowering tool to achieve particular social positioning" (Zhao 2015:170-171). This struggle for linguistic identity is presented in the 'Finding Support' theme in the next chapter, in which I demonstrate how members of the group found support in facing those stigmatised identities. After presenting Time One in this extract, Maurice spoke proudly about improving his writing, which made him feel empowered as he started to gain back his sense of self and personal control.

Extract 19

> *To be honest, when I'm writing or when I'm thinking about writing, maybe it's just the only way to be free, to explain what you want, how you feel, and then it is the only moment to express myself. Yes, the only moment I'm free.*
> *-Maurice's interview*

Maurice's experiences in *Our Stories* group play a crucial role in enhancing his self-esteem, as it provides him with a space where his voice is valued and his experiences are validated. Through sharing his writing with others who understand the pains of loss and migration, Maurice finds affirmation in a community that respects his story, contributing to a positive sense of self. Wei (2022) asserts in his study about creative writing workshops for Vietnamese refugees that those workshops help refugees create poetry but most importantly form personal and social identities by sharing their memories within a social and institutional context.

For Maurice, this positive sense of self is closely linked to the freedom he feels within the group. This freedom is symbolised by the ability to express what he feels and the emotions he has kept hidden for some time. As he mentioned in the interview, "*We realised that we could take those pains out and share them with those people"*. This realisation is related to the shared social identity of refugees, who share the pains of loss and migration. Maurice also reflects on his discoursal self, where he can write down his memories and share them with others through poetry and stories. This shows the development of his writer identity through belonging to the *Our Stories* group, which further enhanced his self-esteem by affirming his voice and place within the group.

Extract 20

> *I remember when Amelia said, describe your feeling like an image. When you hear something like that, you say how is this possible but by using some words you feel like oh my god I can feel myself in this word. It was unbelievable. Oh my gosh. when you take your time to listen, tch tch tch, you feel like cool down, even when you were in a bad situation, oh no my heart have a rest. You feel like something is happening in your body, maybe you are travelling over there facing those waterfalls and then you feel something different just happened to you. That's how my feeling was every time when we write'*
> *-Maurice's interview*

This extract reveals how engaging with creative writing, specifically through imagery, contributes to Maurice's self-esteem by enabling him to connect deeply with his emotions and express himself. The group leader's guidance in using imagery and sensory detail helped Maurice feel seen and understood, which enhanced his sense of self-worth and validation. As he explained, using words to capture his feelings allowed him to experience a transformative impact on his self-perception. The creative writing workshop format can enhance the interaction of members and the effect of poetry writing on the identity of participants (Wei 2022). For Maurice, this sensory engagement provides emotional and physical relief and helps him manage the stress and challenges he faces post-migration. Lammers and March (2018) describe that studying the writer identity of individuals over time can help researchers understand how they gain agency and personal control across different social spaces and times.

By immersing himself in imagery, Maurice experiences a sense of calm and empowerment, as he said, *"oh no my heart have a rest*," which contributes to building resilience and self-confidence, aligning with the social cure perspective. This process of self-expression reinforces his writer identity and helps him articulates his experiences. For Maurice, the act of writing creatively using all senses helped him manage his emotions and strengthen his self-esteem within the supportive space of the group.

Overall, this sub-theme illustrates how creative writing groups help refugees build self-esteem and reshape their identities. Writing sessions provide a safe space for self-expression, where participants can gain confidence, share emotions, and find validation. Following the analysis of the data in Theme 1, I will discuss the key findings of the study, highlighting their significance and implications. I will provide further discussion of their contribution to theory and practice in Chapter 8.

5.5. Key Findings of this Theme

'Seeking Meaning' is the first theme identified from the reflexive thematic analysis within the context of refugees in the *Our Stories* creative writing group. This study focuses on refugees' journey to the UK post-migration and their endeavour to find meaning in their new environment. To establish a strong foundation, this chapter begins with a theme that addresses the struggles refugees face in dealing with displacement, trauma, and the loss of social ties. The findings of this theme demonstrate that creative writing groups can provide refugees with a space to reflect on their past, present, and future, which helps them find meaning and purpose in their life in the host society. Participants' writing and interviews often reflect a blend of memories from their home countries and the challenges of adapting to life in the UK. This process of 'Merging Past and Present', as explored in Sub-theme 1.1, shows how refugees use writing to integrate their previous social identities with their emerging ones in the host society, highlighting that some social identities are lost while others continue to exist. According to Haslam et al. (2018), the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC) provides a framework for understanding how individuals reconstruct their sense of self after significant life transitions. Participants' creative works demonstrate that they find meaning in navigating changes in their social identities.

The extracts also show that the many participants in *Our Stories* group join with a sense of dislocation and loss of their physical home and multiple social identities represented by the loss of cultural identity, family identity, professional identity, or religious identity. Creative writing in a group of people who share a refugee identity provides a sanctuary to explore these feelings and find empathy and social support from group members and facilitators. Hence and as noted in the introduction, the theme of 'Seeking Meaning' is closely related theme of 'Finding Support' as personal meaning-making is often facilitated through social interactions and social support in the group. This also connects to the third theme 'Gaing Agency', as finding meaning and support can motivate participants to work together and integrate into the host society.

Additionally, the sense of hope that emerges in participants' writing is another key finding. Sub-theme 1.2, 'Finding Hope', reveals that belonging to a creative writing group can gradually shift refugees' perspectives and give them hope by exploring opportunities and forming new social connections. This, in turn, can have a positive effect on the well-being of refugees, as indicated by the social cure perspective on SIA. It also aligns with research on the role of narrative in constructing identity, which suggests that constructing

hopeful stories about the future can help individuals regain a sense of control over their lives (Puvimanasinghe, et al. 2015).

Lastly, participants reported gaining confidence in their writing by speaking about having more trust in their ability to write and feeling a sense of freedom and autonomy through narrating their stories. Sub-theme 1.3, 'Developing a Positive Sense of Self through Writing' highlights different aspects of feeling confident, as their involvement in the group allows them to express themselves in a safe and supportive environment. This sense of confidence is vital for refugees, as it helps them develop a sense of meaning despite the migration difficulties.

By showing how creative writing can facilitate meaning-making and enhance a positive sense of self, the findings of this theme provide evidence for the importance of incorporating creative expression into refugee support programmes. Future research should investigate how these programmes can include activities that encourage participants to write and talk about their experiences and navigate changes in their social identities.

5.6. Contribution to Theory and Practice

This section presents the contribution of the 'Seeking Meaning' theme to theory and practice concerning the Social Identity Approach to Health and Well-being (social cure perspective) and the Writer Identity Theory (autobiographical self and discoursal self). As discussed earlier, this theme focuses on the social self and how refugees develop a positive sense of self by creating meaning out of challenging migration experiences. This theme aligns with the meaning hypothesis within the social cure perspective, which posits that a sense of purpose is crucial for psychological well-being (Haslam, et al. 2018). By participating in creative writing groups, refugees can engage in a process of self-reflection that enhances their sense of meaning and well-being. Hence, the main contribution of the theme is that it provides the perspective of refugees as members of a creative writing group who seek meaning from their migration journey.

The findings related to Merging Past and Present provide essential insights that extend the application of the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC) (Haslam, et al. 2018). SIMIC indicates that major life transitions, such as displacement, require individuals to adapt to new identities while maintaining a connection to their past. In my analysis, I highlight specific moments that address this identity tension, such as instances where participants discuss the loss of valued roles or relationships from their previous lives (e.g. Ibrahim talking about leaving his mother. These reflections illustrate how creative writing serves as a bridge

that allows participants to integrate aspects of their former identities with their emerging identities in the host society.

Moreover, this analysis reveals both the social cure and the social curse processes within the bridging of the past and present. Social cure processes were evident when participants found support, understanding, and validation within the creative writing group, which strengthened their sense of belonging and helped them rebuild their self-worth. Conversely, social curse processes arise when individuals experience feelings of isolation due to their displacement, which can intensify feelings of exclusion (e.g. Mary, reflecting that no one understood what she said, and she felt isolated when she arrived in the UK). To guide the reader through these processes, I highlight moments of identity loss and transformation more clearly throughout the analysis and highlight examples of social cure and social curse mechanisms.

Moreover, the sub-theme 'Finding Hope' demonstrates how narrative practices like creative writing can contribute to restoring refugees' sense of purpose and future hopes, thus serving as a social cure. These findings indicate that non-formal educational programmes focused on creative expression could be valuable interventions for helping refugees develop narratives of resilience and hope. This can extend the social cure perspective (Jetten, Haslam and Alexander 2012) to a new context of refugees as members of creative writing groups.

However, creative writing also involves facing and reflecting on significant losses, which can evoke traumatic memories. Within the creative writing groups, participants often confront memories of displacement, loss of loved ones, and separation from familiar cultural practices. Such reflections can act as a social curse because revisiting such experiences can intensify feelings of sadness or isolation. This dual role, in which creative expression offers healing and exposure to painful memories, illustrates the complex nature of the social cure and curse processes. By acknowledging these dual processes, I emphasise how these groups enable refugees to navigate and integrate their loss with hope in the future.

Lastly, the 'Developing a Positive Sense of Self through Writing' sub-theme contributes to the discussion of the therapeutic aspects of creative writing. Rousseau et al. (2004) highlight how creative expression can enhance refugees' emotional well-being, which is supported by the findings in this chapter. It also extends the application of Ivanič's (1998) autobiographical identity and discoursal self to demonstrate the significance of the writer's identity for refugees in seeking meaning.

5.7. Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the first overarching theme ‘Seeking meaning’ and detailed the main theme and three sub-themes. Each sub-theme was linked to illustrative extracts to illustrate different elements of the sub-theme. All in all, Time One is the beginning of this collective narrative. The next chapter presents the findings of the second overarching theme ‘Finding support’ and Time Two.

Chapter 6: Finding Social Support

They are my family.
We share the same ideas
we feel each other.
-Mika

6.1 Overview

This is the second chapter of the three chapters that present the findings of this research. The preceding chapter describes the journey of seeking meaning for refugees on a personal level within the creative writing group. As I built the themes to present a continuum extending from the individual level to the group level to the community level, this chapter about Theme 2, 'Finding Social Support', is concerned with group dynamics, including in-group relations and inter-group relations. When individuals who are facing hardship are offered social support, they can add meaning to their lives, discover new connections with the community, and develop ways to show agency and creativity (Brandling and House 2009).

From the data generated, support emerges as a central theme, closely linked to refugees' capacity to seek meaning and assert agency through social creativity. Specifically, the more support refugees and asylum seekers receive, the greater their ability to pursue meaning and develop agency, and vice versa. Dieterich-Hartwell and Koch's (2017:1) study on creative arts for refugees highlights that "support and affirmation through creative arts can strengthen individuals in their process of moving from an old to a new environment". Similarly, Haslam, Reicher, and Levine (2012) define social support offered by in-group members as actions where individuals or group members offer resources to each other, including material support, emotional support and informational support.

Theme 2, 'Finding Social Support', is illustrated by this extract from the data: *"They are my family. We share the same ideas; we feel each other".* The chapter is also arranged around Time Two of the study's three-time points, which reflects on refugees' time shortly after joining *Our Stories* creative writing group and their need for support and building a community. The support hypothesis underscores the significance of social groups to health and well-being (Haslam, et al. 2018). As noted in Chapter 2, this significance lies in the psychological benefits of belonging to social groups, including providing social ties with in-group members, working on a collective purpose that enhances the sense of meaning, and developing a shared social identity that gives a sense of agency and support (Jetten, et al. 2017).

This chapter is structured around three sub-themes. The first is 'Denial of Support and Belonging: Refugees' Stigmatised Identity and Social Dynamics' because stigmatisation affects the social identity of refugees, influences their social interactions and forms the need for support and belonging to a group (Major and O'brien 2005). The second sub-theme of the chapter, titled 'Writing Group as a Community' builds on refugees' need for support and illustrates the formation of an inclusive community for refugees. The creation of a community within *Our Stories* group can nurture collective self-esteem and provide a place for a social cure and, in some cases, a social curse, as will be discussed in this chapter. Creative writing groups for refugees are not only spaces for literary expression but also platforms for building connections, fostering resilience, and life-long relationships (Stickley, et al. 2019). The final sub-theme is titled 'Working Together in Creative Writing', where the partcipants develop a sense of belonging, connection, and efficacy as a team. This sub-theme presents a perspective on the shared art of storytelling and supporting one other in writing. The members of *Our Stories* group collaborate as a team of writers in the creation of poetry, stories, and various forms of expressive content, thereby actively engaging in identity maintenance. The empowering aspect of storytelling and reaching out to the UK community are discussed in the next chapter.

Table 2.2. shows the hierarchy of themes presented in this chapter. After analysing my qualitative data, including interview transcripts and creative writing samples, following reflexive thematic analysis as outlined in (Clarke and Braun 2021), I illustrate my findings through the voices of my participants presented in verbatim extracts. The extracts in this chapter provide a thorough response to research question 2:

> RQ2: How do refugees perceive and experience social support in their writing communities?

Table 2.2: Finding Social Support Theme

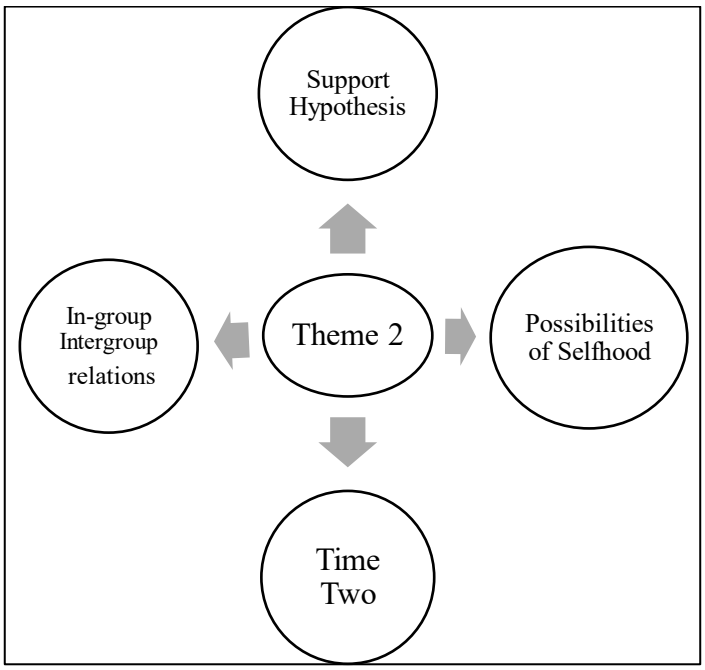
Theme 2	Finding Social Support		
Illustrating Quote	*They are my family. We share the same ideas; we feel each other.*		
Sub-Themes	2.1.Denial of Support and Belonging: Refugees' Stigmatised Identity and Social Dynamics	2.2. The Writing Group as a Community	2.3. Writing together in the Creative Writing Group
Cases (No. of participants)	6	5	4
Counts(No. of extracts)	8	6	7

6.2. Aim and Analytical Structure of Theme 2

As detailed in Chapter 2, this thesis examines the support provided and received within refugees' creative writing groups through the support hypothesis as part of the social cure perspective while exploring the possibilities of selfhood within the social practices discourses of writing in Writer Identity Theory.

To implement this connection in the data analysis for the 'Finding Social Support' theme, Figure (13) illustrates the analytical structure for the extracts in this chapter. This model is designed to maintain focus on the key elements outlined in the study's conceptual framework. The purpose is to guide me in addressing the second research question. Each element has been discussed previously in Chapter 2, and I briefly summarise what each element stands for. The support hypothesis indicates that when people identify with a shared social identity, they give each other support and view the support they receive positively (Haslam, et al. 2018). In-group relations refer to relations among refugees as members of *Our Stories* group, while inter-group relations relate to relations between *Our Stories* group members and the host society. The possibilities of selfhood is one element of writer identity theory that reflects the social identity aspect of writer identity, in which writing is influenced by the social, cultural, and institutional context of writing (Ivanič 1998). Time Two refers to the time point of looking at refugees shortly after joining *Our Stories* creative writing group.

Figure (13) Pictorial description of the analytical structure of theme 2, 'Finding Social Support'



(Author's own work)

6.3. Results

Sub-theme 2.1: Denial of support and belonging: Refugees' Stigmatised Identity and Social Dynamics

This sub-theme discusses the challenges of having a stigmatised identity and explores its impact on surrounding social dynamics. As presented in Chapter 3, identity stigma encompasses the adverse societal attitudes, beliefs and stereotypes linked to a specific social identity, often resulting in the marginalisation of individuals bearing that identity (Goffman 1963). Goffman (1963) further classifies stigma into three types: physical deformity stigma, individual attitude stigma and tribal stigma, with the latter being associated with social status in a given society. Adeeko and Treanor (2022) assert that when an individual is labelled as a refugee, they carry the consequences of acquiring a stigmatised identity, a process that reflects both social identification and categorisation. Similarly, Vigil and Baillie Abidi (2018) argue that the persistence of a refugee label encourages the formation of minority groups among individuals who share this stigmatised identity. These groups serve both as a support system and as a platform to collectively challenge stigma.

The following are the voices of Paul, George, Hassan, Mary, Maurice and Alice, presented in eight chronological extracts to guide the reader through a narrative journey. The journey starts in Time One, from facing the ocean waves to reaching the English channels,

navigating asylum restrictions, adapting to a new society and confronting the isolation and stigma associated with their refugee identity and the complexities of language barriers.

Extract 1:

Long days of emptiness,
lost in my aimlessness
My hope is now hopeless.
My name is now nameless.

Surrounded by a dark sea, warm beams flee.
Ahead a pathless road for me, I wonder where to be.
Virtually unwelcome, I feel numb.
Hearts are sinking, hope is shrinking.
A grave of emotions, as vast as the oceans
Hope is tense, pinned against a fence.

Existence with borders, silence with marching orders.
My dream and my hope lay in an envelope
A lack of empathy only nurtures my debility.
My hope becomes less, I am under a press.
My spirit is broken, less of a token.
-Paul's poetry

Paul reflects on the critical phase of his life when he encountered problems with his immigration status. Although creative writing never held much appeal for him, he volunteered with *Our Stories* group to help the group leader set up the group. This choice stemmed from his inability to work as an asylum seeker, leading to a profound sense of hopelessness, as expressed by the feelings of exclusion, emptiness, and aimlessness exemplified in his words "*emptiness, aimlessness, hopeless*". According to Major and O'Brien (2005), the initial stage of stigmatisation unfolds when access to essential life facilities such as employment and driving is restricted. These limitations can significantly impact an individual's social status and overall well-being. Consistent with this perspective, stigma begins to take shape when the characteristics defining an individual's social identity are devalued in a social context (Crocker et al., 1988, cited in Major and O'Brien, 2005). It also aligns with Fino's (2024) concept of public stigma as a type of stigma refugee face. In addition, Paul shows awareness of this stigma by saying, *"My name is now nameless",* which raises the argument whether being able to vocalise a stigmatised identity is beneficial or harmful to well-being. This is reflected in Ballentyne's (2021) study in which she highlights the challenge of balancing social cures and curses in refugees' social groups. This awareness reflects on the rejection identification model presented in Chapter 2, in which

identification with in-group members in disadvantaged social groups can increase the resilience of its members, which helps them maintain their well-being (Haslam, et al. 2018).

Furthermore, during the interviews, Paul revealed a newfound interest in poetry, appreciating its freedom from rules and its capacity to express his thoughts openly. Kubokawa (2022) argues that writing a poem in a second language to express their sense of meaning can be a transformative experience that empowers writers. In this poignant poem, he narrates his journey from Africa by recounting the long days spent in the darkness of the ocean and the constant fear of being unwelcome as a refugee upon arrival. "*It's not easy, you know. You pack your whole life in a suitcase*, Paul emphasised during the interview. Upon arriving in the UK, his aspiration to attain refugee status subjected him to prolonged waits to receive an envelope that would determine his future. This experience is characterised by feelings of uncertainty and discriminatory barriers imposed on those seeking asylum.

Extract 2:

> *We struggled to adapt, we struggled with the English language, we struggled with the food, we struggled because we didn't know anyone.*
> *-George's interview*

This extract underscores the impact of refugees' stigmatised identity on their adaptation challenges, as seen in George's repeated phrase, "*We struggled*". He also faced loneliness and a lack of social connections despite being accompanied by his wife and children, as expressed in George's words, "*We didn't know anyone*". This stems from a lack of broader social connections and support networks that may have been accessible in his original community. In addition, refugees leave one group to escape disadvantage and threat, only to find themselves in a new context in which disadvantage persists in a different form. Toyoki and Brown (2014) elaborate that carrying a stigmatised identity can result in loneliness and marginalisation.

Furthermore, refugees face significant shifts in culture, language, and social structure (Ballentyne, et al. 2021). The alteration in language and culture is presented in the extract by saying, "*we struggled with the English*" showing the profound changes in social dynamics that impact the lives of refugees. George's extract gives an example of the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC) (Haslam, et al. 2018). To elaborate, George demonstrates the complexity of identity maintenance in the refugee experience as his cultural and linguistic identity becomes difficult to sustain in the new context as a form of identity threat. Ballantyne et al. (2021) suggest that maintaining social identity post-migration is

challenging when cultural, linguistic, and social structures shift dramatically. Lastly, George reflects on the burden of his parental identity by using the pronoun (We) as an essential aspect of his social identity. Parenthood in the context of refugee status carries the added burden of protecting and providing for one's children in a new environment and emphasises physical separation from a known community. Kellezi et al. (2019) assert that separation from family, especially in the context of detention and migration, is stressful for individuals and increases their sense of loneliness.

Extract 3

> *I saw a lot. I think that's more than my age. I needed more time to experience all of that at once. When you are in a normal life, and you lose that, you lose your culture, friends, family, and all of a sudden all gone and you're alone in a country that you don't know the language, the culture. When you are a refugee, there is a feeling of being like an uninvited guest and no one wants you to be there but you are there. So mostly, you know, I'm just talking to the wall.*
> *-Hassan's interview*

Similar to the challenges George faced upon migration, this extract captures the sense of loss and the lack of agency that refugees experience. This lack of control also stems from the overwhelming experience of migration at a young age. Hassan's narrative reflects the Rejection-Identification Model, in which rejection by the host society due to his refugee status leads to further identity-based marginalisation. Hewitt (2002) argues that a feeling of control and influence over one's environment is crucial for sustaining self-esteem, while rejection by the dominant group negatively affects their sense of empowerment.

Furthermore, his statement, "*you are a refugee, an uninvited guest",* also implies a loss of agency in terms of belonging and a feeling of social exclusion that many refugees encounter. According to Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999), social exclusion from the majority group can negatively affect the self-esteem of marginalised individuals. In Hassan's case, his inability to align himself with a new social group or regain a meaningful sense of belonging diminished his agency, leaving him powerless. This situation highlights Hassan's need for social prescribing in which individuals are connected to community-based social groups and activities, such as volunteering, art classes, or support groups, to enhance social connections and overall well-being (Wakefield, et al. 2020). Hassan also mentioned his profound loss of identity, 'all of a sudden all gone,' including his cultural identity and family identity represented by the loss of all social ties. According to the SIA, social connections are fundamental to identity formation and maintenance, as they provide

emotional and psychological support, a sense of belonging, and validation (Haslam, et al. 2018). He also reflects on the loss of linguistic identity "*you don't know the language*", this inability to speak the language reinforces his sense of alienation from the host society. From a social cure perspective, social isolation can have harmful effects on well-being and feelings of helplessness (Jetten, Haslam and Alexander 2012), which is evident in Hassan's narrative.

Extract 4

> *We have so much to offer to the world.*
> *Even if people try to push us down*
> *Limit the possibilities that are open to us,*
> *Deny Who We Are*
> *Still, we rise.*
>
> *You can accuse me of what I haven't done.*
> *But still, like true justice, I rise.*
>
> *You can trample me underfoot*
> *like boots on muddy ground.*
> *But still, like spring flowers, I rise.*
> *-Maurice's poetry*
>
> *'This one shows when I'm really upset about the situation, writing is just my only way to free myself to say whatever I want. Because I know no one can chain my imagination, my description, my everything. I feel like I can be powerful when I'm writing because this one shows that even when people want me to be desperate, I will never be desperate and even if you try to break my legs I will try to stand up again.'*
> *-Maurice's interview (In response to researcher's question about the poem:"Can you tell me about the images you used—space, rocks, sand?")*

This collaborative poem is written as part of a play performed in a church inspired by 'Still I Rise' poem by the African female poet Maya Angelou, which speaks about overcoming hardships and racism with pride. Maurice, who arrived in the UK with a severe back injury, often articulated his struggle through poetry by employing verses echoing the injustices he endured in his homeland. In the opening stanza, Maurice employs the collective pronoun "*we*" to refer to the ingroup relations in *Our Stories* group and their shared social identity as refugees. His words reflect the stigma associated with the refugee label and the lack of agency he might face "*deny who we are, limit possibilities*". Maurice also acknowledges inter-group processes in which he feels that refugees are rejected by the outgroup "*deny who we are, accuse me of what I have not done*". Drawing from Alfadhli and Drury (2018), the poem

shows that while refugee identity may have a societal stigma, it can paradoxically provide a social cure by bringing individuals together in solidarity. This also resonates with the rejection identification model (Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey 1999), which informs most social cure research. The recurring refrain, "*Still, we rise*", relates to Drury's (2012) insight that a shared identity, in this case refugee identity, can serve as a source of collective strength and social support to each other.

As the poem progresses into the second and third stanzas, Maurice undergoes a narrative shift, adopting first-person pronouns -*I, Me*- to reflect the dynamics of self-hood in a social context, aligning with the Writer Identity Theory by (Ivanič 1998). According to Bird (2013), when writing creatively, individuals draw upon socially available resources that are deeply rooted in their identification with specific communities. The extracts show that Maurice's motivation to rise above difficulties stems from his membership in *Our Stories* group. The freedom to express himself within this writing community is the source from which he forms resilience. The main point of the poem is in the last lines: if we, as a collective, can rise above challenges, then I, as an individual, can rise as well. Hence, the poem presents elements of shared social identities, empowerment to face stigma and the transformative potential in collective narratives, which I elaborate further in the next chapter.

Extract 5

> *let them know that it's not what they see on the TV or what they hear. that's not the way we are, we are different people. We are people like them. So, you understand, we need to love, we need care. We need humanity. We honestly don't need people to look down.*
> *-Maurice's interview*

In explaining the first line of his poem in extract 5, "*We have very much to offer to the world"*, Maurice referred to the stigma surrounding refugees and stereotyping by the outgroup, specifically in media. This demonstrates how such images presented in media can significantly influence the perspectives of the UK community towards refugees. He sums up the needs of refugees in three words: "*love, care, humanity*". Maurice's idea aligns with the findings of O'Brien and Major (2005), who assert that stigma can lead to discrimination, stereotyping and harmful impacts on the personal and social identity of those stigmatised. Similarly, in their study on refugee identity, Vigil and Baillie Abidi (2018:1) emphasise the social effect stemming from the refugee label, advocating for the creation of a space where "individual and collective refugee experiences mutually shape." Within the context of the

extract, Maurice uses the pronoun "*we*" to signify that the need for support is shared among the members of *Our Stories* group.

Extract 6

> *There was also a girl who was desperately kind, sincerely smiling, loving, and hopeful. Her laugh was more beautiful than any song. She has been voiceless now for years, hiding in the farthest corner of my soul. The saddest woman who has lost her father, herself and the right is filled from head to toe with anxiety and fear, which render her face harmless in a terrible grimace of disappointment.*
> *-Alice's creative sample*

> *I'm just concerned about my immigration status. What if I strike? Or like, not be happy or complain? It might affect my case, you know, it wouldn't show me in a good way. And the Home Office is always finding excuses. To just like, deport you. So I'm always kind of, you know, accurate in words.*
> *-Alice's interview (in a conversation about expressing opposing opinions in her university).*

The extracts highlight the fear of sharing and expressing among asylum seekers. Alice crossed the English Channel in a small boat to flee from Azerbaijan with her disabled mother when she was only a teenager. The prolonged wait for a response from the Home Office, beyond the expected six-month processing period mentioned on the UK Government website, left Alice disheartened, demotivated and in a state of despair. External factors such as delays caused by COVID-19 or other humanitarian crises can further extend the waiting period (Home Office 2023).

Alice's mother, who is mute, relies on Alice as her voice in a foreign land that remains oblivious to her Azerbaijani sign language. Alice resembles her mother's muteness as an asylum seeker in that she has also lost her language and been "*voiceless for years*". Sideris (2003) asserts that loss surrounds the life of refugee women, starting with the loss of social life and status to the loss of language. Through unstructured interviews spanning two years with 30 refugee women, Sideris (2003) observed that the deprivation of essential aspects of life profoundly impacted their self-perceptions and confidence. The refugee women in Sideris's study expressed the loss of their social identity as war deprived them of social connection, a sense of purpose, and original identity. From the perspective of Sideris's study, the refugee women directly linked their identity to their social lives, and the loss of one led to the loss of the other.

Fortunately, subsequent communication from Alice revealed that she had obtained refugee status after a seven-year wait. At the time of the interviews, she was studying criminology at a prestigious university in England. Alice actively advocates for the rights of asylum seekers in the UK, which I discuss in Theme 3 'Gaining Agency'.

Extract 7

> *My English is great and I can understand, like easily communicate. But the thing is, some of them except me to understand because of my British accent. So, when I speak to them, to start like conversation, they start like well, let me say so. So, I say wait, wait, I'm not a native speaker slow down, please.*
> *-Ibrahim's interview*

Extract 8

> *When you are speaking English in my country, once they know that you come from an English zone, they say you are less than human. You cannot sit at the same table because they think they are superior. When I came here, I was really frustrated at the beginning when I couldn't hear or understand someone speaking. Where I wasn't even able to say two words in English. Hey, I went to school. I was not stupid. It was just because of that, stigmatisation.*
> *-Maurice's interview*

The refugee identity often carries a stigma linked to linguistic confusion. Ibrahim, in the previous extract, studied English in Sudan and now speaks with a fluent British accent; however, he hesitates to be perceived as a native speaker. This hesitation stems from his fear that many people do not understand everything and his desire to preserve his original Arab ethnic identity. Similarly, in this extract, Maurice, who originates from a country where English is stigmatised, finds himself uncomfortable using the language even after migration. The Social Identity Approach provides a theoretical framework for understanding the linguistic identity of refugees as a linguist minority group and the society outside the group as a dominant majority (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Jaspal (2009) discusses the relationship between language and social identity, asserting that language plays an essential role in shaping individuals' social identity, enabling them to either belong to a group or distinguish themselves from it. McNamara (1987) further supports this perspective, arguing that the SIA can provide a dynamic and context-dependent platform for analysing language attitudes formed in inter-group settings. Together, these perspectives illuminate how language not only reflects refugees' attempts to balance cultural preservation with integration but also

underscores the challenges they face as they negotiate their identity within a dominant linguistic culture.

In the case of Ibrahim, he was showing convergence in adopting a British accent, which refers to the individual's desire for social acceptance, by using linguistics tools used by the dominant majority, such as accent, tone, and even nonverbal gestures as hand movement (Zhang and Giles 2018; Y.Bourhis, El-Geledi and Sachdev 2007). Simultaneously, he was keen to preserve his ethnic identity by incorporating Arabic whenever possible, a practice known as language maintenance. This approach takes a middle position in the desire to retain one's language use and original identity as much as possible (Zhang and Giles 2018; Y.Bourhis, El-Geledi and Sachdev 2007). In contrast, Maurice displays a negative reaction towards the language of the dominant majority, which is referred to as divergence (Zhang and Giles 2018; Y.Bourhis, El-Geledi and Sachdev 2007). Experiencing language confusion with the support of the writing community in *Our Stories* group helped them overcome this challenge as the extracts show in the next sub-theme.

Overall, addressing refugee stigmatisation in this sub-theme theme highlights the resilience of refugees shown in the extracts. It sheds light on the urgent need for support, the formation of a community, and the aspiration to contribute meaningfully to the host society.

Sub-theme 2.2: The Writing Group as a Community

This sub-theme sheds light on the formation of a community within *Our Stories* group. This creative writing group, similar to the writing group in my pilot study, serves as a vital community for those displaced from their homes and provides a sense of belonging and a space for expression through storytelling. This group thrives because of the diversity of its members, who come from various cultural backgrounds, religions, and experiences. Although members are diverse, their shared social identity as refugees promotes understanding and empathy among them. Alfadhli and Drury (2018) found in their study on refugees that a mutual sense of destiny resulted in the development of a shared social identity and support on personal and social levels among refugees regardless of the challenging circumstances and the stigma attached to the refugee label.

Moreover, in the interviews, the members reflected on the challenging times brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, in which *Our Stories* group played a crucial role in supporting the members' emotional well-being. The act of writing poetry in a Zoom virtual meeting room became a therapeutic outlet for navigating uncertainty, which, as a result, strengthened the bonds among group members. The seven extracts to follow will show that refugees can find common ground among each other through social relations, leading to the

establishment of a supportive environment that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers. The various aspects of support within the community of *Our Stories* helped nurture members' collective self-esteem. Collective self-esteem refers to a member's perspective of the value of their group in relation to their well-being and social identity (Marmarosh and Corazzini 1997).

Extract 9

> *'Everybody loves my baby, it's part of the family. Because I was there when I was pregnant. And when I gave birth, and when I did my baptism, they all made a different dish, and they brought it to the church. They are really part of the family. And whenever we do writing skills, since Steph is the one who's hosting it, she carries him while I do my writing. So it's like togetherness, like we are all together, I have a helping hand there. I feel really well, it's a good day, because I know everybody's going to carry my baby. I'll be free at that point. So, when I get home, it doesn't stress me at all. I wish I could take him there every day. Because it's like one big family.*
> *-Mary's interview*

When I had the first interview with Mary, she was heavily pregnant and full of fear about facing parenthood on her own while still being traumatised by leaving behind her first child. Several months later, I met her for the second interview. Mary's narrative highlights the importance of the social support she received from *Our Stories* group; these were her family members in times of need. From the perspective of social cure, in times of dire need, individuals who strongly identify with a cohesive group tend to experience heightened reassurance and support from fellow members, thereby mitigating stress and simplifying challenges (Kellezi, et al. 2019).

In the context of refugees who typically take migration journeys alone, *Our Stories* group has demonstrated a unique place where they can build family-like bonds in the absence of their families. For example, members would consider themselves uncles and aunts for a new child. In their study on family identity as a social cure and curse, Kellezi et al., (2021) emphasise that family dynamics are essential in coping with hardships, particularly in cultures where family ties hold paramount importance.

Extract 10

> *Hearts are rising, new life is born, a baby cries.*
> *A wave of emotions as vast as the oceans.*
> *A new hope from a newborn, hope flies.*
> *Hope wanders freely, because boundaries are silly.*
> *Freedom with no borders and no marching orders.*

Life is beautiful, my soul irrefutable, oh what happy songs.
A home of love and dreams, filled with warm sunbeams.
-Paul's poetry

Following Mary's encounter, Paul's poem reflects on the significance of welcoming Mary's newborn and the transformative impact it had on the collective dynamics of the group. The expressions of joy through lullabies for the infant and shared laughter evoked a sense of nostalgia, as articulated by Paul (a wave of emotions). At the same time, this new life brought hope for a better future in the host country. Paul's poem also shows aspects of Ivanič's (1998) possibilities of selfhood that he discovered within this new social context, which is reflected in his writing "*A home of love"*. The metaphor of "*a wave of emotions as vast as the oceans*" represents the deep and shared emotional experience among group members and how they draw strength and unity from the birth of Mary's child. The poem also speaks to a broader sense of optimism in the future of freedom and possibilities with no restrictions "*Hope wanders freely because boundaries are silly*".

From the perspective of the Social Identity Approach, Paul's reflections demonstrate how shared social identity can reinforce collective identity among group members. In the case of Mary's newborn, members experienced a sense of maintaining their social identity as uncles and aunts, which they have lost by the physical separation from their extended families, aligning with the SIMIC model discussed in Chapter 2 (Haslam, et al. 2018). Besides, the positive emotions and newfound sense of selfhood that Paul expresses "*my soul irrefutable*" reflect how the group's shared experience with the newborn contributes to the formation of a resilient and shared social identity as refugees supporting each other.

Paul's poem also resonates with the writer identity theory, which emphasises how writing can be a tool for self-expression and identity formation, particularly within social contexts (Stickley, et al. 2019). The imagery of "*hope, love, and freedom*" in the poem suggests that Paul is using his writing as a means of expressing his fear, hope, and emotions developed within this new social context of *Our Stories* group.

Extract 11

Now I can express myself and I can talk with confidence in me because you meet people in the group from different backgrounds and different cultures. So you could actually see yourself talking to someone from Iran, from Pakistan, to a British person, to the Cameroon person, Ivory Coast, and Zambia. Just like that you see yourself talking to so many people, so when you come across them on your way, you don't get scared like I don't understand what this person is saying because you've seen them before.
- Mary's interview

In addition to developing family-like bonds, *Our Stories* group thrives on the diversity of the members. Mary reflects on the exposure to different cultures and nationalities in the group, which made her more capable of confidently communicating with the outgroup, which is the UK community in general. Her encounter reflects a positive social identity by demonstrating that her membership in a diverse social group has shaped her self-perception, confidence, and communication skills. This exposure contributes to the development of a social identity that is inclusive and accepts differences and reduces the fear of the unknown. A recent study about the influencing factors of the social cure and curse of refugees in the UK asserted that institutions that are concerned with refugees can either construct or obstruct their sense of self, which in turn affects the social identity and well-being of refugees (Ballentyne and Drury 2023).

Resembling that, Dieterich-Hartwell and Koch (2017) argue that creative art groups as institutions directed at refugees can act as a social cure as they enhance the well-being and integration of refugees into society. During the second interview, Mary discussed that the confidence she gained influenced her writer identity, as evident in her creative writing pieces and willingness to participate in outgroup activities: "*Before I came into the creative life, I used to be this lonely, sad person. But writing, I think, put me out. Like, I feel I'm happy*". The newfound confidence in communication is attributed to the support they give and the receive and the experiences of meeting people from various cultural backgrounds, indicating that these interactions have played a role in shaping her writer's self-perception and expressions. This impact of the social context aligns with Ivanič's (1998) possibilities of selfhood in a social context, as explained in Chapter 2.

Extract 12

> *They like to hear my opinion and I feel that I'm always at their heart. That really makes me feel that, Oh, there are people that really like me, love me the way I am. It made me feel very happy and it helped me to connect with others and be able to exchange and integrate myself with others, and this helped me to go out of my small box,*
> *-George's interview*

George continues the narrative Mary began by showing the positive influence of social connections on his emotional well-being and how these interactions contribute to the affirmation of his identity as a person. Being heard is essential to a refugee's well-being after enduring the journey of migration. Ballentyne and Drury (2023:2) reflect on a crucial moment in the life of refugees when they reach the UK border; at that point, their identities

as family members, professionals, or any other identity they carried back home do not matter and they are bound by the legal policies and regulations. It might take a long time before their opinions are asked for or their voices are heard.

George expressed a strong sense of belonging and acceptance within *Our Stories* group. His statement, "*They like to hear my opinion and always at their heart*" indicates a deep emotional connection with others. This sense of being valued and loved for who he is contributes to his ability to reach out to society by going out of his small box. The social cure perspective indicates that social interactions and connections have a healing effect on individuals and can facilitate personal growth and a sense of integration with the larger community (Wakefield, et al. 2019).

The extract also provides insight into George's writer identity and how it is shaped within the social context. The use of the first person "*I feel, made me feel*" emphasises the personal nature of the narrative, which aligns with the definition of the social identity "the sense of self that people derive from their membership in social groups" (Tajfel, 1972 cited in Haslam, et al. 2018:12). George expresses his emotions and experiences to give a glimpse into his perspective as a member of the group. This extract and other poems by George that I have provided in different sub-themes show that the writer's identity appears to be closely tied to the social relationships George has, such as *The Wolf* poem about his family relations.

Extract 13

> *I did not receive such kindness back home, unfortunately. I feel like a human. We hug each other, call each other if we have a problem, and invite me to their homes. People discriminate but not in this group. My mentality is way better with them. They respect my religion, they care about me eating Halal food, or finding a place to pray. They have humanity.*
> *-Maha's interview*

Unlike other encounters with participants about support, Maha focused on her existing identities that she was committed to maintaining, including her religious identity as a Muslim and linguistic identity as an Arab, aligning with the social identity continuity pathway in SIMIC (Haslam, et al. 2018). Maha expressed the lack of kindness she had experienced in her hometown, which implied her feeling of isolation or being unaccepted in her previous social environment. She appreciated the need for positive social interactions for her well-being. According to Maha and other members, *Our Stories* group recognises and respects the spiritual diversity among its members, allowing for a holistic approach to well-being that acknowledges the importance of spirituality in building a community. Kellezi et al. (2019)

found that religious identity can function as a means of connection and support among group members. Although the members came from different religious backgrounds, they respected and appreciated each other's religion.

Maha also highlighted positive social behaviours in the group, such as hugging, calling each other for support, and inviting each other into their homes. These actions encourage a sense of belonging and connection among members, thus highlighting the role of social interactions in shaping one's identity.

Extract 14

> *I'm a Christian. I go to church. They wanted to play a song for my birthday but then we couldn't go to church anymore (because of Covid). You understand? The practice was the last one we could enjoy. For my birthday, the writing group just did it on Zoom. They did it for me. I really appreciated it (laugh). Everybody went on Zoom and did the birthday party. There was cake and candles. It was really fun and I enjoyed it. They found a birthday cake Online and sent it to me.*
> *-Peggy's interview*

Peggy also reflects on the importance of her religious identity and the rituals of attending church on Sundays. The topic of COVID was raised during the interview, with the flow of the conversation about support with most of the participants as it was a critical time of social isolation. UK government coronavirus lockdowns and measures lasted from March 2020 to December 2021 (IFG 2022). The pandemic worsened existing difficulties for refugees, such as limited social networks and obstacles in accessing rights and services (Martuscelli 2021). Additionally, it introduced new challenges for this group, such as the shutdown of migration services; these new obstacles compounded the original struggles faced by refugees and led to a sense of experiencing the pandemic's impact twice (Martuscelli 2021). Peggy demonstrates the importance of staying connected with *Our Stories* group members through virtual meetings to ensure that she is emotionally well supported.

Extract 15

> *I was bored staying at home. I didn't have anything to do. In Sudan, I wasn't that sociable. Maybe I changed here. I was really shy. I was an introvert. I have got just two friends in Sudan. But here I have got loads of friends. Just literally, yes. Lots of online meetings during the Covid. That went okay for me because I didn't have any chance*
>
> *-Ibrahim's interview*

Ibrahim's encounter illustrates the positive impact of creative writing groups in expanding social networks and providing emotional support during social isolation, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ibrahim contrasts his limited social connections in Sudan with the numerous friends he has made through online meetings facilitated by the creative writing group. This is crucial during a pandemic when physical interactions are limited. The extract also highlights the group's role in reducing loneliness and providing a sense of belonging. This aligns with the social cure perspective, which entails that shared social identity enhances mutual support and improves mental health (Haslam et al., 2018). In addition, Ibrahim's positive experience with online meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the potential of virtual platforms to maintain and enhance social interactions. This adaptation to digital communication platforms reflects the resilience and flexibility of refugees' social structures in response to external stressors like the pandemic.

Ibrahim's comparison of the number of friends he had made in the UK and his hometown indicates his willingness to adapt to a new environment. This entails that *Our Stories* creative writing group serves as more than just a platform for creative expression; it functions as a support system. The shared interest in writing creates a common ground and a sense of community and mutual support among members. This shared social identity, as indicated by the social cure perspective, enhances members' mental health and well-being (Alfadhli and Drury 2018).

Sub-theme 2.3: Working Together in Creative Writing Groups

This sub-theme expands on the previous one 'Writing Group as a Community' with a focus on the creative writing activity itself and the support they provide each other as writers in the group. The six extracts in this section demonstrate that teamwork in *Our Stories* group extends beyond the act of creative writing itself. It involves a dynamic exchange of ideas, active listening, editing, and giving feedback. In a conversation with the group leader, she emphasised the importance of creating a culture within the group that encourages open dialogue, where members feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences. Additionally, positive feedback motivates writers and reinforces a sense of community within the group. Simultaneously, the group leader actively encouraged the members to avoid negative feedback to demonstrate her understanding of the vulnerability that can accompany sharing personal stories.

Extract 16

> *Something funny, but we wrote more of writings during that time (Covid). Because I think people were more able to attend and more eager to participate and to give. So during that time of isolation we were able to write more poems than ever. And during that time that we decided to write that book and publish it.*
> *-George's interview*

The need for support during the pandemic motivated members to attend our *Stories* virtual weekly sessions. The anthology George refers to in his encounter symbolises achievement in times of hardship. The collection of poems the members wrote and put together was the first thing they showed me when I visited the group. It was published, sold, and included in the main city library collection. In a recent study about refugees in lockdowns, the authors encouraged researchers to focus on the reliance of refugees in their narratives, as it is socially significant to address refugees as "survivors with social potential" rather than "passive victims" (Couch, Liddy and McDougall 2021:243). They added that although refugees were in lockdown and isolation, their voices were not (Couch, Liddy and McDougall 2021).

This commitment of *Our Stories* group to writing during the COVID-19 pandemic and its isolation indicates that the writer's identity is connected to the social context of the group. The use of 'we' suggests a collective identity, indicating that George considers himself part of a group who has mutually faced the isolation. The group's decision to undertake the project of writing and publishing a book reflects their understanding of the importance of creativity and expression as a response to challenging times. Stubbs (2022), in his book about creative writing during the pandemic, mentions that writing can help us look deeply into the positivity of isolation and to reflect on the home we live in. Stubb's reflection is illustrated in the poems published by *Our Stories* group in the anthology in which topics of home, peace, and diversity are included.

Extract 17

> *The first time I attended a meeting for the group, we were able to write a poem. I was very impressed. How come? No way we're able to write this poem. Yeah, that really impressed me. From there, I decided to not miss a meeting.*
> *-George's interview*

George, like many other members, was astonished by his creative writing skills. The positive experience of producing a poem accompanied by a sense of shared accomplishment kept members keen to attend regularly. George's commitment implied a growing sense of his

writer identity and interest in attending future sessions with the group. In light of the social categorisation theory as part of SIA, when individuals are part of a group that holds a comparatively lower status compared to other groups, they focus on positive aspects that make the group distinctive and able to provide social change (Hornsey 2008). The topic of social change is presented in the third theme 'Agency and Social Creativity'.

This extract also provides an image of the development of the writer identity within a social context. It starts from the initial self-doubt *"no way we're able to write"* to "*that impressed me*", which indicates a shift in his perception. Ivanič (1998) explains that the term "possibilities for self-hood" as part of the four elements of the writer identity indicates that writing as a member of a social group can contribute to writer identity change. George's encounter reflects a process of identity formation, both socially within *Our Stories* group and as a writer. This shift from doubt to admiration shows an emerging writer identity as he recognises his creative potential as part of the creative writing group.

Extract 18

> *When we write the poem together, everyone writes their feelings on a piece of paper and we collect them together. By supporting, they might explain to you the meaning of the word, and express it in different ways. Or you can just complain, my God, I don't want to write this. And they would say like, I don't want to write as well (whispering, lower tone, laugh), but sometimes you might write something.*
> *-Alice's interview*

Alice is reflecting on an important aspect of writing as a team, that is, writing poems collaboratively, which is one of the main activities in creative writing workshops. The team supports each other in making linguistic choices, depending on their fluency in English. They also support each other in expressing mutual feelings towards writing itself. This approach to writing a poem can enhance positive social identity for group members as refugees writers who have the power to produce beautiful pieces of poetry together. Ewing (2005) state that under any condition, the process of migration is a highly challenging and emotionally intense journey marked by disruption and disconnection from one's community. The act of contributing their feelings to a shared poem emphasises having shared emotional dimensions of refugees' identity, which connects members on a deeper level and increases their level of support.

Alice shows that the group provides a supportive environment by acknowledging the reluctance they might feel towards writing and laughing. This can strengthen the social bonds within the group, which agrees with the support hypothesis where members give and

receive support, as stated earlier (Haslam, et al. 2018). At the same time, this resistance to writing from Alice, who is a young lady full of life, adds a layer of authenticity and agency to the writing process in accepting that not everyone has the same interest in accomplishing a specific writing task. Furthermore, the act of writing individually before placing the pieces in one poem promotes individual writer identities, allowing each participant to contribute their unique perspective to the poem and highlight their contribution.

Extract 19

> *If it's creative work, I wouldn't correct people. Amelia used to tell me that, in a poem, you don't have to be very good at grammar, grammatically be accurate, like you can improvise and mix like kind of four words. I think it's not right to correct someone's poem*
>
> *-Alice's interview*

Following the writing process, the team starts editing. The focus here is on speaking and listening skills, where members display their work and give feedback to each other. Alice explained in the interviews that giving feedback is a sensitive process because members may share personal stories or their level of English proficiency is low. Moreover, she shows appreciation for the freedom of creativity, which should not be restricted by giving negative feedback or criticism. Lim (2010) states that writers who use English but belong to non-English cultural communities may exhibit special sensitivity and cultural anxiety. Giving positive feedback can encourage members to be confident in writing.

Alice, like other members, follows the advice of the group leader (Amelia), showing a mentor-student relationship and suggesting that the writer's identity can be influenced by interactions with others in the writing community. In this case, Amelia's advice to avoid criticism aligns with a writer's identity that values the uniqueness of each writer's voice and encourages a supportive and non-judgemental writing environment (Bird 2013).

Extract 20

> *I read to the group and I like to listen because I will get more ideas from that as well. When I listen, I try to understand, to feel, and to hear them. You know what they mean, what did they say that, and that's why I like to listen, and because when I listen, I would write more as well.*
> *-Makbel's interview*

As part of the editing process, Makbel reflects on reading out her work to the group members. Lim (2010) mentions that reading aloud allows writers to physically engage with their writing and notice any flaws in language. This practice of standing in front of

an audience forces writers to take ownership of their writing (Lim 2010). Makbel also mentioned that listening to other members inspired her writing and gave her a chance to understand the writing of other members by asking questions. Makbel illustrates a level of empathy with others when listening by saying "*I listen, I understand, feel, hear*" her developing emotional connections with the group and demonstrates empathy and understanding.

Additionally, Makbel's encounter relates to the writer identity theory, in which both writing and listening within a group context play a critical role in shaping an individual's writer identity (Burgess and Ivanič 2010). By engaging with the group in listening and giving feedback, Makbel strengthens her identity as a writer in which she can offer opinions on the writing of others. Her statement, "*I would write more as well*" reflects how participation in the group as an active listener and reader helped her creativity and connection to her writing.

Extract 21

> *I forgot to mention when you said, why not read your poems out loud? The reason is that most of my poems are quite depressed. And I don't want to make people sad. That's why I don't want to read out. It is my struggles, my feelings, my fears, like hard times. Usually, I write poems when I feel so bad, or depressed. That's why all my poems are so sad. When I feel so good. It's very rare I will be inspired to write a positive poem. I believe the sadness of the poem brings more taste than happy poems.*
> *-Alice's interview*

The downside of giving positive feedback to members is that some members have developed an understanding that there is no room for negativity. For refugees, writing creatively would most likely endure heavy emotions like grief, nostalgia, and anger. Alice's encounter shows awareness of the social context in which her poetry is shared and reveals a social identity that is sensitive to the emotional impact her sad poetry may have on the group. This provides an example of a social curse in the context of creative writing groups. She also reveals aspects of the authorial writer's identity by recognising that her poetry can impact her audience. According to Ivanič (1998) in the self as author, writers start to consider themselves authors by bringing their voice and beliefs to show their feelings and position in writing. It is apparent that Alice uses poetry as a therapeutic outlet during times of distress and rarely writes in positive times, which also play a role in enhancing the well-being of refugees. Sharing traumatic memories and sad feelings

can help refugees deal with these memories and find meaning in difficult experiences (O'Neill 2004).

Extract 22

> *These people have more problems than me. That's why I will feel free to share. Before I was shy, I didn't tell my story straight away. I didn't tell anyone. I put everything in my heart. But when I see people share very hard stories, I feel free to share with everyone.*
> *-Maha's interview*

Contrary to Alice's encounter, Maha found comfort and courage in sharing her story after listening to other sad stories. This comparison between her situation and the experiences of others in the group is likely influenced by the development of a shared social identity of refugees. According to Alfadhli and Drury (2018), refugees often assess their situations and experiences with the perceived struggles of those around them who share a similar social identity. The vulnerability of other members gave Maha a sense of safety and freedom to share her story without being judged. This observation of others sharing hard stories have reshaped Maha's literary identity. She referred to herself as being "*shy*" at the beginning and now feels "*free to share with everyone*". This implies a shift towards a more confident writer identity, where she found inspiration and courage among the group as a team of writers.

Overall, the process of writing collaboratively or helping each other to write individually can break cultural barriers and create a space where participants feel empowered to share their narratives.

6.4. Key Findings of this Theme

Data analysis related to the 'Finding Social Support' theme in the context of refugees as members of *Our Stories* creative writing group reflect on the nature of support perceived by the group. This theme is central among other themes as it shows the core importance of the creative writing workshops, which in turn can have an impact on the personal level in theme 1 'Seeking meaning' and on the UK society level in theme 3 'Gainig Agency'.

For many refugees, the stigma associated with being a refugee has a heavy impact on their life and social identity. The different encounters by the participants showed that this inevitable stigma forms a dire need for building a community where people can find empathy, support, and a shared purpose. This denial of support from the hose of society can be a social curse for those refugees. Data in this chapter demonstrate that many members joined *Our Stories* group in response to the loss of social resources. Joining the group, they

built a community where they could collectively challenge the stigma and image of refugees in the UK community. Refugees join art groups, such as *Our Stories*, carrying heavy memories of their migration journey, dealing with challenges to obtain their legal status, housing, and education, and hoping to find sanctuary within the group for a few hours a week. This social dynamic of vulnerable people dealing with loss, adapting to the host society, and hoping for a better future created the need for a space of creativity and expression. According to Dieterich-Hartwell and Koch (2017), research studies indicate that encouragement and validation through creative expression can empower individuals as they transition from a familiar to a new environment.

In this community of refugee writers, social relationships were established, forming a family-like dynamic. The data provide insight into the shared social identity of refugees, which strengthens their connections. This shared identity is built into mutual struggles in migration and adaptation, loss of social life, and struggle with their refugee status. Beyond being a space for writing poems, creative writing workshops serve as social places where connections, support, and solidarity form (Wei 2022). During the COVID pandemic, the group was the bridge to social life in times of closure and isolation, which was important for the well-being of refugees. The group's meeting and activities according to the encounters of the participants helped in forming a collective self-esteem in which members thrive as part of a group.

In addition to building relationships, the group worked together as a team of writers to produce poems and stories. My analysis shows that most members had their first experience with the idea of writing creatively in a group or a similar group in the UK. The analysis identifies the challenges members face to start writing concerning their writer identity as being shy, afraid of misjudgment, or difficulty writing in English. For many members, listening to other stories and writing collaboratively empowers them and encourages them to share. The groups support each other by providing positive feedback and editing their work. While avoiding negativity in giving feedback aimed to ensure a healthy and supportive environment, some members became reluctant to share their traumatic stories, while others were unsure if the positive feedback was a real reflection of the quality of their writing. This issue is further discussed in Chapter 8 of Limitations and Implications. Overall, their teamwork as a group of refugee writers was fruitful. The amount of writing they produced and the confidence they gained motivated them to reach out to the UK community to share their stories, which is discussed in Chapter 7.

Future research should examine the challenges creative writing group members face when expressing their traumatic experiences and navigating feedback dynamics within the

group. Furthermore, reflecting on Mary's pregnancy encounter in this chapter, there is a dearth of studies about the role of social support for refugee women during pregnancy and labour and how separation from existing support networks affects women during pregnancy and their ability to cope and care for the new-born.

6.5. Contribution to theory and practice

The following discussion presents the contributions of the 'Finding Social Support' theme to theory and practice, particularly within the framework of the social cure perspective (support hypothesis, in-group relations and inter-group relations), writer identity (Possibilities of selfhood in a social context), and the reflection on Time 2 (shortly after joining the creative writing group). The main contribution of this theme is that it provides an understanding of the significant role of support within the context of creative writing groups for refugees.

The analysis shows that membership in *Our Stories* creative writing group for refugees has a social cure effect on members by enhancing their positive social identity. Prior research on the social identity of refugees emphasises the importance of having a shared social identity (Alfadhli and Drury 2018). This research shows that creative writing groups can provide a platform to build a supporting community where refugees can develop a shared social identity as refugees and as writers who have voice and power. This shared identity can help members navigate the challenges associated with refugee stigma and loss of social resources. This theme contributes to the social cure theoretical perspective by demonstrating how creative writing groups serve as a supportive community for refugees' social identity.

Additionally, The research sheds light on the sustained impact of the creative writing workshops on the social identity of refugees. The group forms a source of collective self-esteem, especially during challenging times, which highlights the enduring significance of this supportive community. The results also highlight the role of *Our Stories* group in shaping the writer identity of its members. Many participants who joined with shyness, fear of judgement, or language difficulties found empathy and empowerment in the collaborative writing process. These insights contribute to the broader discussion on the formation of the writer identity (Ivanič 1998; Bird 2013) by adding the context of refugee experiences.

Lastly, the 'Finding Social Support' theme substantially contributes to both theory and practice in the realms of social cure, group relations, and writer identity. By highlighting the core significance of creative writing workshops to build a supportive community, this

research provides valuable insights into the transformative potential of creative expression for refugees as a powerful tool to enhance their social identity.

The implications of this research, which will be discussed in Chapter 8, extend beyond academia, offering guidance for those engaged in supporting and empowering displaced individuals. Overall, the results of the support theme along with the other theme will show that the study makes significant theoretical contributions to the corpus of literature on the social cure and social curse perspectives as part of the SIA to Health and well-being in enhancing the social inclusion of refugees and their well-being.

6.6. Summary

In summary, this chapter addressed the second research question: How do refugees perceive the support within their writing community? by investigating social support in the context of the *Our Stories* creative writing group. The analysis indicates that social support is significant in improving refugees' well-being and provides a space for a positive shared social identity. Specifically, this chapter presented three sub-themes that show the role of support in the context of stigmatised identity, how refugees build a supportive community in creative writing groups and how members support each other in writing as teams. The extracts in this chapter indicate that supportive creative writing groups can provide members with emotional and social support that enables them to address the impact of adapting to a new context and express their experiences of isolation and stigmatisation. The following chapter will introduce Theme 3 'Gaining Agency', discussing refugees' social engagement and reaching out to the host society.

Chapter 7: Gaining Agency

This small home of writers can bring us to the world.
-Alice

7.1. Overview

The previous finding chapters revolved around the themes 'Seeking Meaning' and 'Finding Social Support'. This chapter brings this narrative journey to its final destination, where refugees from *Our Stories* group reach out to the UK society to challenge the stigma associated with their social group. The theme 3, 'Gaining Agency,' is coherent with the division of data theoretically to address different aspects of the social cure perspective and address each research question separately. Additionally, although the three themes interrelate, the results chapters are divided into group-level processes, as presented earlier in Figure (11), to show the interrelation of the three themes, starting from the social self in Chapter 5, in-group relations in Chapter 6, and last, inter-group relation in this chapter. Inter-group relations, from the perspective of the social identity approach, refer to the interactions and dynamics between different groups based on their social identities and how individuals perceive and interact with members of their group (in-group) and those of other groups (out-group), based on their social identities (Tajfel and Turner 1979). These perceptions and interactions are influenced by the desire for positive self-esteem and the need to see one's group in a favourable position compared to others (Bezouw, Toorn and Becker 2021).

This chapter presents an analysis of the data related to Theme 3, 'Gaining Agency,' followed by a discussion of the key findings. The theme is presented by this extract from data: "*This small home of writers can bring us to the world".* The data related to this theme reveal aspects of the interplay between social cure and curse. This theme is presented in three sub-themes, starting with 'Agency in Creative Writing Groups'. This sub-theme highlights the role of the creative writing community in developing a sense of empowerment among group members. The second sub-theme, titled 'Social Creativity Strategies', takes a closer view of the main strategies members of *Our Stories* group adopt to face the stigma attached to the refugee identity. The last sub-theme, 'Collaborative Narrative to Face Stigma,' is about reaching out to British society.

Table 2.3 presents the theme and sub-themes presented in this chapter. I present my findings in a wide range of extracts, including creative writing samples and interview transcripts. I analysed all data following reflexive thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun 2021).

Table 2.3.: Gaining Agency Theme 3

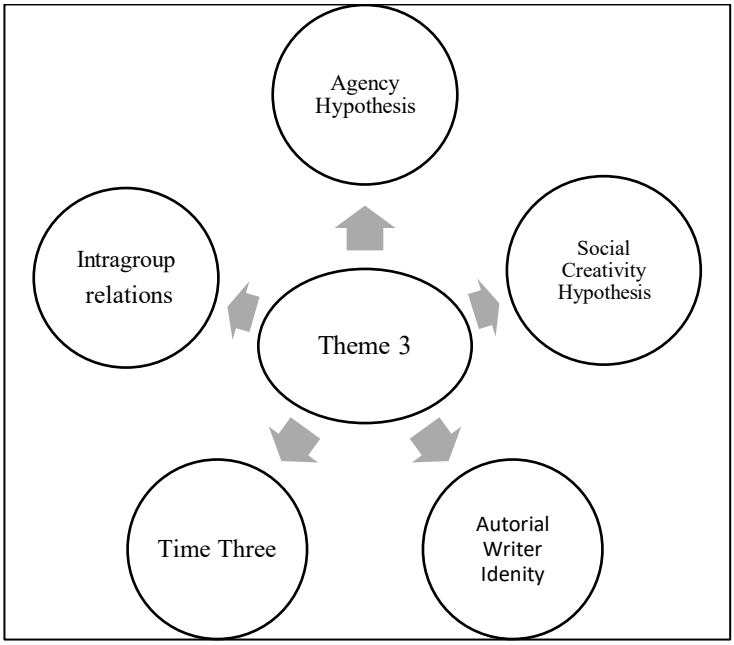
Theme 3	Gaining Agency		
Illustrating Quote	*"This small home of writers can bring us to the world."*		
Sub-Themes	3.1. Agency in Creative Writing Groups	3.2. Social Creativity Strategies	3.3. Collaborative narrative to face stigma
Cases (No. of participants)	7	8	6
Counts(No. of extracts)	8	7	8

7.2. Aim and Analytical Structure of Theme 3

As discussed in Chapter 2, this thesis investigates the sense of agency in refugees' creative writing groups as part of the social cure perspective alongside the authorial self in Writer Identity Theory. To implement this connection in data analysis for the 'Gaining Agency' theme, Figure (14) illustrates the model I have constructed for the analysis of extracts in this chapter. This model is designed to maintain focus on the key elements outlined in the study's conceptual framework, including the social cure hypotheses related to this theme, inter-group relations as defined in the overview section, and Time 3, one of three time points discussed in Chapter 4. The figure can serve as an analytical guide for addressing the third research question:

> RQ3: How do creative writing sessions empower refugees to resist stigma collaboratively and work towards generating social change through their narratives?

Figure (14) Pictorial description of the analytical structure of Theme 3 ‘Gaining Agency’



(Author’s own work)

7.3. Results

Sub-theme 3.1 Agency in Creative Writing Groups

This sub-theme elaborates upon the foundations established in Theme 2, 'Finding Social Support', illustrating how the formation of a community and collaborative writing efforts generate a sense of agency and empowerment among group members. Creative writing is a dynamic process that goes beyond word composition; it is an exploration of the self and an assertion of agency. In creative writing, agency is reflected in the self as an author, which is one of the components of the writer’s identity and refers to the presentation of the writer’s voice and position within the text (Ivanič 1998). Corresponding to the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2, agency within the social cure perspective is linked to the writer’s third element, the self as an author, which empowers writers to shape narratives in alignment with their vision. Consequently, *Our Stories* writing group facilitates an exploration of varied perspectives, which enriches the literary landscape with multicultural narratives.

This sub-theme contains seven extracts from six members narrating their journey to gain agency. It begins by illustrating students’ progress in mastering the English language, thereby enhancing their educational prospects and skills. The extracts also show members finding their voice in creative writing and in British society.

Extract 1

> *One of the reasons why I decided to write a lot is to improve my English, and my writing. As I want to become a lawyer, I need to do a lot of writing and reading. I do enjoy writing as well. But my friend told me if you want to become a lawyer, you should be colder, not sensitive, not creative, and what you're doing is not related to the law degree. I didn't agree, it's not true, I can still be a good lawyer and more compassionate to people. So hopefully, one day I will prove that to him.*
> *-Alice's interview*

Alice, who studies criminology as an undergraduate degree, understands the requirements of being a successful graduate in the UK and finds that being a member of a creative writing group supports her academic journey. Alice believes in a more empathetic approach to the legal profession; hence, she challenges the stereotypical identity associated with law students as unemotional and uncreative. This resistance to stereotyping demonstrates her active role in shaping her professional identity beyond the societal norms of lawyers who focus on factual information rather than emotions. An individual's professional identity can grow and develop over time, leading to a deeper and more nuanced perception of their relationship with themselves and with others, which becomes part of an individual's self-conception (Levinson 1992; Monson and Hamilton 2010). This also reinforces the concept of agency from the social cure perspective, which shows that individuals are not only passive recipients of social roles but also active shapers of their identities (Brewer 1991).

Alice's identification with the members of *Our Stories* group made her believe that being compassionate to the needs of others was a sign of maturity and success. In line with the agency hypothesis, shared social identity can empower disadvantaged groups, leading to an increase in self-efficacy among group members (Haslam, et al. 2018). Alice also demonstrates confidence in the characteristics she developed as a writer and her desire to prove her importance to her colleagues. This creativity approach can support her English fluency and give her valuable skills and perspectives for her future career in law.

Extract 2

> *When I started narrating the details of my journey, I felt that people are interested and wanted to know more. One of my tutors who heard my full story was astonished, and he told me what you did in five years I have not done in my whole life.*
> *-Ibrahim's interview*

After being a member of *Our Stories* for some time, Ibrahim discovered the courage to share his journey to the UK with his colleagues and tutors at the university. Breaking the silence. Highlights a significant turning point in his journey. His reflection, "*I felt that people are interested and wanted to know more"*, emphasises that this validation from others was a source of empowerment and recognition of the value of his story. This is central to his evolving sense of meaning and his writer identity. The extract also shows the interrelationships among the three main themes, as presented in Figure (11). Ibrahim links finding courage in himself to finding support within the group to narrate his story and finally receives positive reinforcement from the outgroup towards his story.

Ibrahim's decision to share his story with his university colleagues and tutors is an example of how refugees begin to reclaim their narratives when they feel supported. Perry (2008:7) asserts that storytelling allows individuals to position themselves in relation to their families, communities, and the larger world. In addition, Ibrahim highlights the effect of the feedback he received from the out-group on his confidence in narrating his story, which is also linked to the feedback and encouragement he receives from the in-group where he writes about his journey. Jetten et al. (2017) assert that individuals who feel accepted and valued by their group are more likely to develop a sense of meaning, purpose, and self-worth.

Extract 3

> *I was interested to write a story, even a small story, and I decided to come and join this group, you know, I could improve my English as well. I started thinking about that. And two months or three months ago, I started to write just write 200 words every day in my own language (Farsi), actually, just write anything. It doesn't matter it does make sense or not just write under 200-250 words. And I can do that practice at home. I need to write every day. Because I know it's a long way. It's not something easy.*
> *-Hassan's interview*

Hassan, who used to work as an engineer, resembles Alice's encounter when joining the group to improve his fluency and fulfil his aspiration to write about his journey. His decision to join the group was not just about language improvement; it also stemmed from his desire to explore creative writing, a goal shared by only a few others in the group. This membership led to significant development in both his writing habits and commitment. As a member of *Our Stories* group, Hassan experienced empowerment through a shared social identity that includes his status as a refugee and writer. This empowerment was crucial in strengthening his identity as a writer and encouraging his dedication to writing. Ivanič (1998) describes the

authorial self as a component of a writer's identity, emphasising the sense of agency and authorship that writers develop towards their work.

Furthermore, Hassan's motivation to improve his English and write in Farsi at home reflects a dual identity: one that is tied to his native culture as an Iranian and another that is adapting to British society. This duality demonstrates how individuals navigate multiple social identities in different social contexts by choosing which aspects of their identity to foreground. A study on social identity and creativity suggests that having multiple social identities is linked to increased creativity as it enhances the cognition abilities of individuals (Steffens, et al. 2016). Additionally, the act of writing in Farsi shows that Hassan took agency in his improvement, as despite his goal to improve his English, he is keen to maintain his cultural and linguistic identity after moving out of Iran. The extract also suggests that Hassan's writer identity is closely linked to his language use and his journey as a language learner and writer. He expresses a clear goal "*to just write 200 words every day*" and acknowledges the challenges: "*It's a long way. It's not something easy*". This suggests that Hassan developed a writer identity that is aware of the process and the persistence required.

Extract 4

> *It creates a way to fly easily in the white cloud*
> *Flies above the sky and feels the fresh air*
> *It lights up mind and soul,*
> *keeping you hovering above the sparkling sky*
> *-Makbel's poetry*

> *I read to the group and they asked about the explanation why I chose that one. When you fly in the cloud, it means you have everything, you have power, you have a clear life and you start to see the world as well. You'll refresh your knowledge; you will discover the world. In the writing power, I can say I can live in my dream, and I can change everything I want, I can go back to my past, I can live in my future and I can live now. I can explain everything in my writing. I know I am the power person because I control all writing in my mind. That means I am the power person. Imagination, you are trying to understand that there is nothing but to make something that makes you a writer*
> *-Makbel's interview (In response to researcher's question about the poem: "When you wrote this poem, did you read it to the group?")*

This poem was presented earlier in sub-theme 1.2, 'Finding Hope'. This poem is also presented here in theme 3, as it sheds light on gaining agency and power in writing. She reflects on Time 3, where she starts realising the power of imagination and writing creatively and the impact it can have on her life. The experience of having control over her life, "*I*

control all in my mind", reflects the importance of in-group relations. In line with the agency hypothesis, disadvantaged groups' social identities are significant because they empower individuals (Haslam, et al. 2018). This sense of control can be seen as a social cure, as it suggests that Makbel discovers strength and healing in her ability to shape reality through writing.

Furthermore, Makbel's use of cloud imagery reflects her authorship of the text. According to Ivanič (1998) imagination and the visual elements of writing create the writer's identity and represent the authorial self of the writer. Makbel chose the flying metaphor to demonstrate her perspective on rising above any conflicts or adversity, and it also symbolises a sense of liberation from societal constraints. Additionally, Makbel, who at the time of the interview was enrolled in an undergraduate university programme, shows enthusiasm for learning by saying (refreshing knowledge and discovering the world), which indicates that she is finding strength in creative expressions to document her transformation and growth. She also believes in her ability to (explain everything in writing) which speaks to a high level of self-efficacy and confidence in her skills as a writer. Makebel's overall beliefs in the transformative power of writing, which indicate an emerging authorial writer identity.

Extract 5

> *Amelia nominated me for an interview with the radio to share my experience. Throughout this interview, many people have heard me speak about my experiences. Emma also gave me the opportunity to speak to the counsellors. I am not taking it as being famous. I'm taking it as my voice is heard so people can know a lot about asylum seekers. Honestly, I want to eliminate the stereotype of refugees.*
> *-Ibrahim's interview*

Ibrahim spoke proudly about the opportunities he had encountered as part of *Our Stories* group. Ibrahim represents Time 3 in which group members start reaching the out-group. He spoke to the media and the counsellors to raise awareness of the stereotype of refugees, a step he took as a result of the encouragement and trust of the group leader. Ibrahim, in saying, "*my identity does not matter",* presents his identification with the collective identity of the group members, which reveals the emotional significance attached to the overall value of the in-group relations. Haslam et al. (2018) assert that what happens at the group level impacts the individual level, and having a shared social identity and identification with the group can empower individuals with a strong sense of control. Furthermore, Ibrahim's desire to change the status quo of refugees by saying, "*wipe out that stereotype".* This indicates social competition as one of the identity management strategy that involves a conscious effort to

redefine the social perception of the group by moving away from stereotyping towards understanding. Haslam et al. (2018) state that social competition prompts groups to collectively challenge the status quo by engaging in actions, such as political advocacy, to advance their rights.

Ibrahim also stressed the importance of his voice being heard to advocate for refugee rights. The term 'voice' in the context of writing refers to the writer's expression of his vision, which shows his authorial self in writing; voice also refers to the verbal use of words to show the speaker's alliance with a social group (Ivanič and Camps 2001). Ibrahim resembles other encounters of group members in demonstrating a shift in understanding creative writing from mere self-expression to forming a purposeful and informative dialogue where he can educate and reshape perceptions. This illustrates the connection between developing a shared social identity as writers and the power of voice in creating social change.

Extract 6

> *In this group of, I think, yeah, I'm heard, but outside is difficult. I don't think our voices are that loud. Because you're competing with, say, for example, the people like Nigel Farage -British broadcaster and former politician-, you know, they've got a bigger voice than we do. And maybe skin colour plays a role in this. But we just have to keep shouting and screaming, and hopefully, it will get through.*
> *-Paul's interview*

In contrast to Ibrahim, Paul did not share the enthusiasm of having his voice heard outside *Our Stories* group. Paul, at the same time, presents his affiliation to *Our Stories* group as being a respected member, which can enhance his positive social identity. The contrast between feeling heard within the group "*I'm heard*" and feeling marginalised outside it "*outside is difficult*" highlights the role of group dynamics in shaping his social identity. According to Haslam et al. (2018), group dynamics involve several factors that can impact individuals' well-being, including finding social support, trust, and a space for showing agency. It also reflects on the rejection identification model discussed in Chapter 2 (Haslam, et al. 2018). This distinction also highlights the challenges faced by disadvantaged groups in being heard in a broader societal context, where more dominant voices "*such as Nigel Farage*" often overshadow them.

Paul also shows awareness that having a stigmatised social identity can significantly influence who is heard and who remains overlooked. Regardless, he asserts that fighting for his voice to be heard, despite his refugee status or skin colour, is the way to show resilience and a refusal to be silenced: "*We have to keep shouting*". This resilience is presented in another extract from Paul in sub-theme 3.3, where he discusses his podcast. The sense of

having a shared struggle and collective identity is presented in the use of inclusive language, "*we, our*" which signifies the importance of a communal voice to advocate for social change.

Extract 7

> *The problem is I don't have a strong connection with writing. Sometimes I lose my ideas when I start writing. Maybe this is because I never learnt writing as a child, speaking is stronger for me. I have written these (poems in the anthology) with the help of my husband, translating words with Google Translate, so it is not purely my writing.*
> *-Maha's interview*

Although previous extracts have shown that members can develop agency towards their writing, it is important to give voice to those members struggling with the process. Being illiterate during her life in Morocco, Maha struggles to find a connection to writing creatively. She does not feel a strong connection with the shared social identity of the group of writers as she feels different because she is the only one who has not received an education in either English or her mother tongue. Clark and Ivanic (2013) assert that adults who do not have a chance to learn as children can experience painful learning to write as adults. Holding a pen reminded her of the traumatic challenges she faced as a child, and she had to convince her father to send her to school. Kellezi et al. (2019) explain the impact of group norms on dealing with traumatic events in the sense that events that align with group norms are seen as less traumatic and more traumatic if they go against group norms. Although Maha's creative writing pieces were published in the group anthology, she refused to take authorship of her poems because her husband assisted her in writing, and she used a translating machine. This ties in with research on social curse, which implies that when individuals feel ashamed of past experiences, it hinders them from seeking or offering help within their group (Kellezi, et al. 2019).

According to SIA, Maha can also be facing negative social comparisons in which individuals compare themselves unfavourably to other group members; they may feel less competent, less attractive, or less successful, leading to a sense of inferiority (Okano and Nomura 2023). Nonetheless, Maha still benefits from her membership with the group as she finds a space to express her opinion in speaking, which is a strength she developed to substitute writing as she said, "*speaking is stronger for me*". Furthermore, the positive feedback and supportive interaction patterns in the group encouraged her to continue writing, which was clear in her regular attendance at the group sessions.

Extract 8

> *All of these poems are in the book. I remember it was a great feeling. Because I think Steph said she printed 500 copies. And I thought 500 That's way too many, but apparently, they're gone and I think that they're in the main library as well. We didn't put our names; I thought we should have put our names on this.*
> *-Paul's interview*

In this extract, Paul cheerfully spoke about the anthology the group produced together, and he identified the group members as writers. This collective identity is Paul's source of pride and accomplishment, as apparent in his reaction to the successful distribution of the book. The group's success can show enhancement in self-esteem as indicated in SIA that an individual's sense of self is based on their group membership (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Paul regretted writing the pieces anonymously and concealed his identity as an author of the texts, which reflects a shift in the writer's identity and authorship towards his written texts.

The desire for individual recognition and the collective nature of the anthology highlight the tension between personal and group identities in creative writing groups. Thus, Paul illustrates that the relation between social and writer identity can have some contradictions. Paul gives an example of how group success can enhance individual self-esteem and a positive social identity while simultaneously creating a struggle for personal recognition within a collective framework. This interplay between the social cure and the social curse perspectives shows that shared social identities can also be a reason for dissatisfaction, as in the case of Paul, and can have a negative impact on individuals (Kellezi, et al. 2019; Wakefield, et al. 2019). Additionally, this interplay can affect the in-group and out-group dynamics (Wakefield, et al. 2019), as Paul wanted to share this social identity as a writer in the group, but simultaneously, he wanted to be addressed as a unique individual for the out-group (British society). All in all, the writer's identity can play an essential role in shaping agency within the creative process, and the relationship between agency and shared social identities can carry some complexities.

Overall, examining agency within the social context of creative writing groups can reveal how refugees can have agency for change and present the relationship between individual creativity, societal context and the transformative power of collective creative expressions. The participants experienced empowerment by expressing their thoughts and emotions on paper, which led to a growing sense of authorship in their writing. These extracts also highlighted the challenges that some members encountered in their creative writing.

Sub-theme 3.2 Social Creativity Strategies

This sub-theme discusses social creativity strategies that have been adapted in the act of creative writing to address stigma. Social creativity involves finding new ways to redefine one's identity and improve one's social position without changing objective reality (Bezouw, Toorn and Becker 2021). According to Haslam et al. (2018), social creativity as one of the social identity management strategies is directly related to group boundaries; if in-group relations are secure but the group's unfavourable conditions are viewed as hard to change, members of the group are expected to engage in the process of social creativity to restore a positive sense of social identity. Furthermore, when members consider in-group boundaries as hard to go beyond and want to avoid comparison with the higher status groups, they tend to use social creativity strategies; alternatively, if the social order is seen as unjustifiable, members engage in social competition with the out-group through strikes or protests (Hogg 2016).

As mentioned in Chapter 2, social creativity strategies, in contrast with social competition, are seen as a mechanism of coping and can include five main strategies, "change values in the comparison, change comparison dimension, change comparison group, compare to new reference-point and re-categorisation" (Bezouw, Toorn and Becker 2021:411). In understanding social creativity, it is important to highlight that when the status of the in-group members is considered difficult to change and fitting in the out-group can be challenging; members tend to avoid social competition and adopt social creativity strategies (Bezouw, Toorn and Becker 2021). Other scholars have identified different strategies, such as Hogg (2016), but I use the five strategies because they are more comprehensive and updated. The eight extracts in this section provide examples of these strategies.

Extract 9

I am a daughter, a sister and a mother
I am a strong, intelligent, and loving woman
I read lots of books, and I am a good cook
I am happy when in the midst of happy people
I am fulfilled, and filled with laughter,
I am a goal-getter and a pace-setter
I see the twinkle of little stars at night
I am sure of victory after life's struggles
I crave to rest in God's bosom someday
-Peggy's poem

In her poem, Peggy gives an example of a social creativity strategy, downplaying the importance of the disadvantaged identity (refugee identity). This poem exemplifies social creativity by focusing on personal strengths and positive attributes "*strong, intelligent,*

loving" and strong family ties "*daughter, a sister and a mother*" rather than any disadvantaged social labels. Peggy also displays agency by emphasising her qualities, like being determined to achieve her goals. Peggy's encounters also reflect on SIMIC (Haslam, et al. 2018). She does not explicitly mention being a refugee as it is an emergent social identity shaped by circumstances; rather, she focuses on the positive social identities she managed to maintain as being a mother, sister, and daughter. This may intentionally challenge the stereotypes and stigmas associated with being a refugee. Peggy's approach can also be explained in the self-categorisation theory, which is part of the social identity approach, and it implies that understanding the dynamics of group relations is primarily based on identity categories and how identities that are salient in any given context shape individuals' perceptions, emotions, and behaviours in various situations (Hornsey 2008). Peggy downplays the importance of the refugee identity of *Our Stories* group members by referring to her time in the group as being among happy people who make her laugh.

By focusing more on the positive aspects of her identity, Peggy changes the value of comparison, which is a social creativity strategy. She also emphasises her other social identities rather than being solely defined by her refugee status in an attempt to invite her readers to learn about her strengths. This approach can be seen as a form of resistance against being marginalised based on refugee identity by using social creativity strategies (Hogg 2016). Furthermore, Bezouw et al. (2021) assert that social creativity is a coping mechanism that includes strategies to reshape one's identity and improve social status without changing the actual situation. Peggy, in this poem, also presents her social identity in terms of her family role, interests and hobbies and religious beliefs, which show an evolving authorial voice in writing able to present dynamic aspects of herself.

Extract 10

> *People see asylum seekers and refugees, as like our people were not educated, people who don't know anything. But among us, there are people who went to school, people who had their own businesses, people who were working, and people who were at the university before coming here, so they had a level of life and education. So, I want people to see us the way we really are not the way the system wants them to see us.*
> *-George's interview*

Unlike Peggy, George directly spoke about refugee identity in his interview in an attempt to change the stigma associated with refugee identity. This response to injustice regarding refugees' identity can enhance the sense of agency and empowerment among in-group

members (Galinsky, et al. 2003). Besides, the re-appropriation of stigma as one of the social creativity strategies can give a space for more positive social identities to emerge (Galinsky, et al. 2003). George asserts that refugees used to have a decent status in their societies as they were educated, ran their businesses, or were employed. He also implies that the government can impose an image of refugees as uneducated or unemployed, which does not necessarily echo reality. George's encounter suggests a comparison between the societal view of refugees and the reality of their experiences and backgrounds. This comparison is crucial in SIA because groups often compare themselves to others to maintain or enhance their self-esteem (Hogg 2016). By highlighting the diverse backgrounds and achievements within the refugee community, George redefines the group's identity from the perspective of the out-group (British society) by presenting a more positive image of the group. Simultaneously, George's extract empowers members of his community. By talking about their achievements and capabilities, they help to build a sense of pride and counteract the negative effects of stigma.

Extract 11

> *Hope wanders freely, because boundaries are silly.*
> *Freedom with no borders and no marching orders.*
> *Life is beautiful, my soul irrefutable, oh what happy songs.*
> *A home of love and dreams, filled with warm sunbeams.*
> *-Paul's interview*

Paul, in his poem, attempts to change the comparison dimension and pays less attention to any negative attributes associated with refugees. Becker (2012) argues that to stabilise group relations, members aim to find new ways to increase their group value. Paul represents how social identities are constructed, maintained, and altered through social contexts and comparisons reflecting on SIMIC (Haslam, et al. 2018). For example, he describes the restrictions and boundaries that affect the lives of refugees in the group as being silly to show a rejection of rigid boundaries, both physical and metaphorical.

Paul also writes about his aspiration for a life without restrictions and the longing for normalcy: "*Life is beautiful, happy songs*", which highlights the contrast between the often-difficult realities faced by refugees and their hopes for a better future. This contrast can shape a positive social identity and influence how individuals view themselves and wish to be seen by others as hopeful, free-spirited, and dreamy. Considering the Social Identity Theory, individuals within a group are driven to improve their group's positive image as a means of preserving self-esteem. Moreover, the Social Identity Theory as part of SIA "focuses less on how individuals operate within social groups and more on how social groups operate within

the minds of individuals" (Martiny and Rubin 2016:19). This explains how Paul's poems shift from writing about himself "*my soul*" to write about the group "*home of love*".

The poem also shows the relation between the social identity and the writer's identity. By articulating his identity characteristics in his own words and challenging the stigma, Paul's writer identity empowers him and potentially other members of the group by showing an act of taking control over their narrative. This social creativity strategy of changing the comparison dimension provides a powerful tool for challenging stereotypes and redefining refugee identity positively (Bezouw, Toorn and Becker 2021). Paul's expressions can influence how society views refugees, potentially encouraging more understanding of the complexities of the refugee experience.

Extract 12

> *We visited one school and we told them about the refugees because I am a refugee, why we travel, why we came here, and why we are different from them. You know, we are not different from them. Because if they are coming to our place, they will be the same as us. It means we are all the same in one way.*
> *-Makbel's interview*

Makbel brought a different perspective to the discussion of the refugee label and stigma, in which she downward the comparison between refugees and others. This can be seen as a form of in-group (refugees) and out-group (British society) distinction, which is a key aspect of SIA (Hornsey 2008). Makbel argues that these differences are superficial and that, under similar circumstances, the out-group members would be in the same situation as the in-group members. This reflection indicated her understanding that group identities are situational and can change based on circumstances. In this comparison, Makbel aims to encourage empathy and understanding rather than highlight differences or create a hierarchy between groups.

Extract 13

> *They tried to turn her into a monster,*
> *but she didn't let them break her.*
> *She would rather be the warrior girl.*
> *She's far away from her hometown.*
> *But after all her experience,*
> *she's still here. She's still alive.*
> *-Alice's poetry*

This extract of a poem and the following one show two different ways to compare to a new reference point as one of the five social creativity strategies listed by (Bezouw, Toorn and Becker 2021). Alice compares her situation as a refugee over time, highlighting her resilience. Her poem implies a distinction between the out-group trying to impose negative attributes on her and her individual self-concept. This reflects the fundamental aspect of the SIA and social prescribing, where individuals define themselves in terms of group memberships, and those social groups can positively impact the well-being of members (Wakefield, et al. 2019). The (they) in Alice's poem represent an out-group who portrays her as a "*monster*", while she aligns herself with an in-group that values resilience and strength, that is, "*a warrior girl*". By resisting this negative label over a long period, she maintained her self-esteem and positive social identity. Over time, her experiences as a refugee strengthened her social identity as a refugee by being strong and resilient.

Extract 14

A man filled with good wishes
A family filled with the love of life
A traveller filled with wandering
A newcomer filled with a sense of belonging
And a migrant filled with humanity
-Mary's poetry

In comparison with the standard refugee identity commonly displayed in media and discourse, Mary writes this poem to show some positive attributes of herself as a refugee. Comparison with standard as one of the social creativity strategies allows for a more favourable comparison between in-group members and the out-group (Bezouw, Toorn and Becker 2021). These lines were written as an introduction for a collaborative poem by *Our Stories* group members speaking about their arrival in the UK. Instead of focusing on loss and suffering, Mary highlights positive aspects and shared human experiences: "*Good wishes, love of life, wandering, belonging, humanity*". This approach encourages viewing refugees not only through the lens of their challenges but also their strengths, hopes, and the richness of their experiences. According to Clark and Ivanic (2013), the language and perspective of a writer are directly influenced by their social context. Mary's choice of words and her emphasis on common human experiences can bridge the gap between (us) and (them) and shapes how refugees are perceived and how they value themselves.

Extract 15

> *On school trips, we read poetry or tell them stories of our history to make them understand that we are human, and we are not as bad as people think. We have something to share. I believe when you are educated or you have something to share, like a book, people think you are good. But when you don't have anything to bring, you're not educated, they look down on you. I don't want that for me or my kids. I feel as time goes on, I will get a good education and share my story, my books that I wish to share. And I have the self-respect for me and my family.*
> *-Mary's interview*

In response to negative social identity, individuals might use subordinate re-categorisation as a social creativity strategy, which refers to finding a distinctive attribute to distinguish them from the whole group or to create a sub-group (Blanz, et al. 1998). In Mary's extract, for example, she says, "*We have something to share*", referring to *Our Stories* group in comparison to the refugee community in general. Mary, resembling Makbel (in an extract to follow in sub-theme 3.3), believes that refugees themselves have the responsibility to change the stigmatised identity related to refugees, and they have to be educated to be considered "*good*" and worthy of respect. This encounter can demonstrate acceptance of the superiority of the out-group (British society) and no desire to consider the social competition approach.

On a different note, Mary shows a strong authorial writer identity in which she links her self-respect to her ability to share and write stories. Mary's ambition to write and share her books represents her desire for agency and voice. In her view, authorship is a means of gaining respect and altering one's perception. By gaining education and sharing her stories, she asserts control over her narrative and the narrative of her community. This is particularly significant in contexts where certain voices are being overlooked. Clark and Ivanic (2013) assert that writing is a form of social action where writers can challenge power relations and demonstrate their values and beliefs to society. Mary reflects a broader understanding of the societal context in which respect can be reliant upon certain achievements or capabilities.

Extract 16

> *I show them that, yes, I came here, I learned their language, and I can speak my own language. I went to university, and I can do this and that. And I can be one of the society.*
> *-Ibrahim's interview*

Ibrahim asserted that instead of concentrating on a negative identity as being a refugee, he emphasised a more positive identity that includes both in-group and out-group. This strategy,

as the last strategy of social creativity, is called superordinate re-categorisation, in which common features of all groups become more important (Blanz, et al. 1998). By showing that he can adopt the traits and skills valued by the out-group, such as language skills and education, while retaining his cultural identity, "*speaking my language*", Ibrahim is working towards reducing potential inter-group conflict. He demonstrates that it is possible to be part of multiple social groups, and these groups do not have to be in conflict but can coexist in harmony. This approach aligns with the dual identity model of the Social Identity Theory, in which an individual maintains their original cultural identity while simultaneously integrating into the new society (Levy, et al. 2017). This model promotes greater inter-group harmony as it recognises and respects both in-group and out-group identities. Ibrahim, in his encounter, aims to create social change where refugees successfully integrate into British society. Social change as one of *Our Stories* group objectives is further discussed in the next sub-theme.

Overall, the narratives created within *Our Stories* writing group highlight the different social creativity strategies implemented by the group members.

Sub-theme 3.3. Collaborative narrative to face stigma

This sub-theme reflects on the collective effort of *Our Stories* group members to bring their narrative journey to British society and face the stigma attached to the refugee identity through their words and voices. As discussed in Chapter 3, as a result of having stigmatised identities, refugees develop the need for group identification, and together, they create a desire to address the injustice they might face from the out-group (Kellezi, et al. 2019). *Our Stories* group follows an identification pathway in dealing with stigma, which addresses the group's motivation to collectively face discrimination (Molero et al. 2011 cited in Haslam, et al. 2018)

This sub-theme highlights an equally important aspect of creative writing groups: speaking to perform their writing and reaching out with their words. The writer identity theory developed by Ivanič (1994) emerges from her observation that the sense of self is constructed as part of a social environment and can be studied within the discourse of speaking or writing. In *Our Stories* group, this collection of actions is illustrated in the group's efforts to reach media, schools including students and teachers, members of Parliament in the UK, as well as the refugee community in the UK. The eight extracts to follow illustrate this collective effort of group members to bridge the link between refugees and the host society.

Extract 17

> *They think we are bad because maybe they don't understand us. We are a guest for them. When someone come into your home, you cannot accept him because you don't know him. If you know him, you will understand him. That's what we try to do, accept us to know us. That's why if you don't know the person, you cannot judge him. That's why we say before you judge, know.*
> *-Makbel's interview*

Makbel, in her encounter, argued that social change is a dual responsibility in which refugees must introduce themselves and avoid living in closed communities. Simultaneously, the UK society represented in educational institutions, media, and governmental institutions needs to pay attention to refugees and listen to their narrative to create the desired social change. By inviting others to "*know*" them before judging, she is trying to build a method for dealing with newcomers to the country to build positive inter-group relations. Drury and Reicher (2005) assert that shared social identity among group members empowers them to actively create their future and avoid waiting passively for decisions to be taken on their behalf. Makbel asks the out-group (host society) for understanding and acceptance framed in the context of cultural and social differences, as stigma is often a result of misunderstandings and lack of knowledge about a particular group. Stigma originates from four separate mechanisms: labelling, stereotyping, social exclusion and discrimination (Link and Phelan 2013). Besides, the extract reflects on the Social Identity Theory perspective in how an individual's sense of who they are is based on their group membership (Tajfel and Turner 1979). The extract reflects this by implying a distinction between "us" (the in-group) and "them" (the out-group). This inter-group dynamic can lead to bias and discrimination when the out-group negatively stereotypes the in-group (Link and Phelan 2013). Makbel, like other members of the group, seeks to break down barriers by promoting knowledge and understanding as the basis for forming judgments, thus building positive inter-group relations with the host society.

Extract 18

> *Because I use the mic and my voice is already loud, my voice was just everywhere and the sound of my word was clear. People were just amazing. From that day, I did two or three other performances. I was relaxed. To be honest, when people listened to me when I spoke English, when they were happy, it made me happier than them.*
> *-Maurice's interview*

Maurice reflected with pride on the first group performance, in which *Our Stories* group performed a play consisting of reading a collective poem written by group members. During the performance, Maurice's stentorian voice echoed through the hall, capturing everyone's attention. The act of performing and being heard by an audience provided Maurice a sense of belonging and validation. The social cure perspective emphasises the psychological and health benefits derived from belonging to and engaging with social groups (Jetten, et al. 2017). In Maurice's encounter, the act of performing and being heard by an audience filled him with a sense of belonging and validation. Maurice illustrates how performing written work can be both a medium for social connection with the out-group and a tool for affirming the writer's sense of self. Wei (2022) believe that creative writing workshops provide a space for refugees to write poetry as well as a social context where they can share and perform their writing.

Furthermore, the writer's voice, presented by the microphone, "*my voice was just everywhere*", symbolises the empowerment he felt by sharing his words and speaking in English as a new learner of the language. The reaction of the audience, "*people were just amazing*" played a significant role in his writing experience. This positive feedback created an environment where members of *Our Stories* group felt valued and supported. The support and praise that individuals receive in response to their creative work can enhance refugees' resilience and acceptance of the host country (Dieterich-Hartwell and Koch 2017). This, as a result, can contribute to a sense of social inclusion and enhance social integration.

Extract 19

> *We visit schools just to let them know what it is like to be an asylum seeker or a refugee. Sometimes when we talk to the children, they could talk to their parents. So I believe children could change the world. The children are really powerful. When the group came to their school, one of the pupils when he got home, he accused his dad because of what he had said (about refugees). And there was another school, they wrote a letter to the MP of the council.*
> *-Peggy's interview*

One of the main activities of *Our Stories* group is visiting schools because they believe in the importance of educating the younger generation to make a difference in society, as mentioned repeatedly in members' encounters during interviews. Peggy shows the impact of his school visits on a child, as he was able to defend refugees and challenge his father's perception. The students also wrote a letter to a member of parliament to discuss issues related to refugees. In the UK, MPs have the role of evaluating and potentially introducing

new legislation, along with raising concerns that are relevant to residents and have implications for their areas and lives (UK Parliament 2023). Empowering the new generation, "*the children are powerful*" shows the desire of refugees as members of *Our Stories* group to change society and build a future for themselves. Furthermore, refugees are aware that their children will join public schools; hence, raising awareness of the refugees' situation among students can create a healthy school environment, which is out of the scope of this research project and discussed in a study by (Fazel 2015). Generally, Peggy's extract illustrates how education and awareness about refugees can lead to shifts in social perceptions among students and proactive steps towards social change.

Extract 20

> *We are not just educating students, we also meet the teachers. For some, it's the first time they ever meet refugees or asylum seekers, or they don't know about the stereotype. They follow the news, but that is not the whole truth. When they meet us in person, they get the whole picture, who we are, why we came here, and our lives. We tell them about ourselves, our stories, our experiences, our journeys, as well as what we faced before, and what we had to do to flee. Then they go with all this information and share it with others, their families, teachers or students.*
> *-Ibrahim's interview*

In addition to approaching students, *Our Stories* group approaches teachers as they are the main channel through which we educate the younger generation. These multiple efforts to generate social change fit with Haslam, et al.'s (2018) perspective in saying that although belonging to a disadvantaged group can be stressful, group members develop a sense of collective efficacy in which they can challenge difficulty and create a socially supportive environment. As the media might be misleading, Ibrahim shows that by sharing their stories, the refugees help to break down stereotypes and misconceptions, potentially reshaping their group identities. Furthermore, when meeting refugees in person, teachers can listen to individual stories, which can challenge teachers' preconceived notions about refugees or simply introduce themselves to them. This personal interaction is crucial for developing an empathetic understanding of the refugees. The reliance on teachers to share refugee stories reflects a belief in the importance of inter-group relations and the collective efforts among different social groups to generate social change.

Moreover, in relation to sub-theme 3.1 'agency in creative writing', members of *Our Stories* group exercise their agency by actively taking control of their narrative, sharing their

experiences and reaching the educational system consisting of teachers and students. This agency is further extended when teachers and students multiply the impact by sharing this knowledge with others.

Extract 21

> *I don't like being in the front. I don't like speaking and having my voice heard everywhere. I mean, I'm just not the type of person. But I like working in the background, you know, like, making things happen. That's me.*
> *-Paul's interview*

Although Paul has lived in the UK for more than ten years and considers himself a native speaker, he is always reluctant to participate in public events such as school visits and the annual Refugee Week. When discussing voice, there is a distinction between being heard and speaking up (Burris, Detert and Romney 2013). Paul sees the role of supporting others in the background as different but equally important for the group's voice to be heard, which reinforces his sense of social identity and belonging within the group. Although Paul avoids the forefront, he is confident that his role helps make things happen, which can be empowering. This empowerment is a key aspect of social cures because it contributes to the individual's well-being (Haslam, et al. 2018).

Nonetheless, this extract again shows the interplay between social cure and social curse, as there is a non-spoken expectation or peer pressure among group members to participate in social events, as personality differences might be overlooked. Hence, Paul repeatedly talks about his podcast and script writing to other group members to show that he is playing a role in reaching out to the community and that he is part of this collective narrative, as shown in the next extract.

Extract 22

> *I want to express my ideas through filming now. I wrote a script for one of the documentaries we want to film. My colleague with whom I do the podcast is a lawyer and he's looking through it to improve the script. It's about the migrants that are coming over from France, on boats arriving in Dover. The UK keeps blaming them for coming over, but there's no like route for them. People have been fleeing war. It's not like they can apply for a visa or passport. We've seen what's happening in Ukraine. It's not easy, We just want to make a short film about that. It is important to show them that we're all people, we're different, from where we come from. You shouldn't be afraid of people because you don't know what that person can offer to*

your life or your experience. Be open-minded and kind because you can always make a friend.
-Paul's interview

Paul was running a podcast channel to narrate stories about refugees' experiences in the UK. Working behind the screens with no identifiable face put him at ease while being heard by British society. He also began writing documentary film scripts narrating the difficulty of crossing the British Channel. Paul seems to find meaning and presumably satisfaction in his specific role, which aligns with the first theme 'Seeking Meaning'. Simultaneously, he managed to creatively make use of the writing workshops with *Our Stories* group and the stories they narrated to reach a wider audience through his podcast and films. Sani (2012) state that group identification results in social relations that can positively impact the well-being of individuals. Paul's documentary project reflects a deep concern for the refugee community in general, which indicates a sense of identification and empathy with them. By focusing on the migrants' journey and challenges, he highlights his group's social identity in contrast to the identity of the resident population in the UK. The narrative of "us" (the refugees) versus "them" (those blaming the refugees) illustrates the dynamic of inter-group relations from the perspective of the refugees themselves.

Paul's documentary project and podcast reflect his social and literary identity as well as his desire to influence social change through storytelling. His work seems to strive to challenge existing narratives and promote a more inclusive perspective on refugees. He understands that the media can be a powerful tool in shaping societal attitudes and gives him a platform to influence public opinion and speak about issues faced by disadvantaged groups.

Extract 23

I'm sure at the end of the third year, my English will improve. There will be lots of ways to wipe that stereotype from people's minds about asylum seekers. I am trying to include asylum seekers and refugees in any project that I work on. As you know, at the Birmingham Fringe Festival, I've got a target audience, and one of them is the asylum seekers and refugees. I'm targeting them to let them integrate into society, not be isolated from society because they will be living here in the UK. I would like them to be part of that community.
-Ibrahim's interview

Besides approaching the media, Ibrahim resonates with a previous encounter by Makbel that refugees themselves should actively engage themselves in British society. He shows that successful integration results from mutual effort between the refugees and the host

country. Integration in the UK is a two-way process defined as "communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities" (Ndofor-Tah, et al. 2019).

Ibrahim's encounter reflected his desire to change the stereotypes surrounding refugee groups. By involving them in his university projects and targeting them as an audience, he is actively seeking to redefine their social identity from marginalised groups to integrated members of the British community. Ibrahim demonstrates agency and confidence in his ability to create change by saying, "*I am trying. I have got a target*". He also mentions that isolation is a hindrance to integration. In this context refers to inter-group Isolation. This occurs when members of a group separate themselves from members of other groups. Isolation can be a response to in-group favouritism in which individuals respond more positively to in-group members than to people from the out-group (Hogg 2007). This kind of isolation can reinforce stereotypes and stigma that Ibrahim is working to avoid.

Extract 24

> *Even the people that are here in the UK also make a sacrifice by accepting people from outside. It's not all of them that accepted to make the sacrifice. But you can find a lot of people who make sacrifices to accept and make space for others. And that's important.*
> *-George's interview*

George acknowledged the importance of out-group support in maintaining the positive social identity of refugees. People tend to compare their group to out groups to make sure they are in a favourable position and in the case of disadvantaged groups, they ensure to fight social stigma and stereotyping to maintain a positive group identity (Abrams and Hogg 1990). George demonstrates that willingness to accept others is significant in the context of social integration. However, he notes that not everyone in the UK has accepted the need to make this sacrifice. This reflects the diversity of opinions and attitudes towards out-groups, which can range from very welcoming to very hostile. This variability is a key aspect of inter-group relations and can influence the overall dynamics between groups. Overall, George's encounter and the previous encounters reflect the complexities of inter-group relations, highlighting issues of sacrifice, acceptance, variability within groups, and the efforts towards social integration.

Overall, the extracts in this sub-theme focus on reaching out to British society as a group at different events and as individuals speaking on behalf of the group. Following the

identification pathway, group members reached media stations, schools and other organisations to speak about their stories in the hope of generating social change.

7.4. Key Findings of this Theme

Data analysis related to the 'Agency and Social Creativity' theme reflects on the last stage of this narrative journey where members of *Our Stories* creative writing group show authorship to their writing, how they use social creativity and social competition strategies to reach to the UK society with their voices and the impact they aim to achieve with their narrative. Refugees, as members of this group, experienced the astonishment of writing creatively in English and having their voices heard in-group and out-group through different channels. The empowerment that fulfilled the participants' writing journey enhanced their writer identity and authorship. The extracts reveal powerful encounters that present the concept of agency within creative writing groups and how agency can be sensed differently among individuals. The creative expressions of Makbel, for example, indicate that agency in her understanding refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own free choices. Data also shows the profound impact creative writing groups can have on personal and collective agency through the empowerment process of storytelling and narrative creation. Most importantly, *Our Stories* group, which resembles other creative writing groups serve as a space for marginalised voices to assert agency. By providing a platform where diverse stories and experiences are heard and valued, these groups can challenge dominant narratives and offer alternative viewpoints, contributing to a more inclusive and representative literary landscape.

To further understand how creative writing groups can function as a space for social cures, the social creativity hypothesis was applied as a lens to understand the strategies adopted by the group members. The extracts in this chapter show that members considerably differ in their reaction towards having a stigmatised social identity as refugees; however, they collectively aim to achieve a change in perspective and integration into British society. Social creativity as an identity management strategy that has not received sufficient attention in the literature presented in Chapter 2. Nonetheless, these strategies play an essential role in how individuals can shape inter-group comparisons to make them more advantageous to their group (Bezouw, Toorn and Becker 2021). This use of social creativity, as noted by (Hogg 2016), allows members to resist being defined solely by refugee status and instead present a more rounded, dynamic self-identity that encompasses their writer identity, social roles and achievements. Different encounters with refugees' use of social creativity

strategies can reshape their societal perceptions of refugees, advocating for a deeper understanding of the complexities of their experiences.

Following the application of social creativity strategies. My analysis shows that members of *Our Stories* group continue to work collaboratively to face the stigma of refugee identity and stereotyping. They consider writing workshops as a preparation stage to perform their poetry and share their stories on different platforms. The extract shows that the dominant choice of group members to face stigma is the identification pathway in which they work collaboratively to present themselves positively to the British society as the out-group. Members work actively to visit local schools, take trips with teachers, outreach to the media and participate in refugee events such as the refugee week. This engagement in social activities promotes social integration and educate people about refugees' struggles, lives, and worth in society. As my research project is concerned with the refugees' perspective, I was not able to study the outcome of those activities from the perspective of British society in general and determine whether it has a measurable effect on generating social change in the face of stigma. This limitation and invitation for further studies are discussed in Chapter 8 of Limitations and Implications.

Nonetheless, Maurice in his encounter said*, "when they were happy, it made me happier than them*", which resonates with Haslam, et al (2018), who point out that a shared social identity among group members combined with social support can cultivate a belief system focused on social change to resist any difficulties. Although such resistance may not always be successful, it has the potential to transform difficulties into confidence that they can cope as a group (Haslam, et al. 2018). In summary, creative writing groups nurture individual creativity and expression and improve a sense of communal support and inclusivity, as presented in Chapter 6. This dynamic results in collective motivation to address the stigma associated with refugee identity and to work together to develop positive inter-group relations.

Future research should examine the social curse in refugee art groups to gain insight for workshop leaders when designing projects and social activities. Moreover, researchers can study the importance of educating young students to combat the stigma of refugees and create social change, which I discuss further in Chapter 8.

7.5. Contribution to theory and practice

The following discussion presents the contributions of the 'Gaining Agency' theme to theory and practice, particularly within the framework of the social cure perspective (agency

hypothesis and social creativity hypothesis) and writer identity (self as author). In addition, following the continuum presented in Chapter 5, the focus of this chapter is on inter-group relations and Time Three. The main contribution of this theme is that it provides the perspective of refugees as members of a creative writing group, gaining agency in writing creatively, which results in a collective desire to face stigma.

The analysis in this chapter continues to show that membership in creative writing groups can positively impact refugee social identity. Based on the agency hypothesis, the extracts reflect the gain of power and efficacy through the journey with *Our Stories* group. This theme contributes to the social cure theoretical perspective by demonstrating how this perspective can be applied in the context of creative writing groups and in relation to the writer identity of members. The extracts also show the interplay between social cure and curse because of an individual's variable circumstances and personality traits. The example of Paul in avoiding public performance, yet working on writing film scripts shows that even social cure and curse can happen interchangeably as members are faced with different tasks and activities within the group. Besides, the analysis contributes to understanding the social curse in a new context; according to Wakefield et al. (2019), the social curse perspective and processes have not been given enough attention in comparison to the social cure perspective.

Looking into the writer identity theory, the results highlight authoritativeness in refugees' creative writing, which is an under-researched area in comparison to authoritativeness in academic writing, which has been extensively researched (Ivanič 1998). An overview of the three themes demonstrates that considering the self as an author is a gradual process that develops over time by practicing writing and having a shared social identity as writers of one group.

While creative writing groups benefit refugees by narrating their experiences and the injustices they might face (social cure), it can also make them more aware of the discrimination of their group (social curse). These insights contribute to a broader discussion on how shared identities can provide a source of well-being for groups that face discrimination. According to the rejection identification model, when groups face discrimination, they tend to support each other and think of strategies to face discrimination (Haslam, et al. 2018). Additionally, Schmitt and Branscombe (2002) argue that group identification is a key source to view negative situations as positive ones and stigmatised minorities can find comfort and support among their group members.

7.6. Summary

In summary, this third results chapter introduced the theme of 'Gaining Agency' by highlighting the outreach of *Our Stories* writing group members to the host society. Through their creative writing, the refugees gained a sense of empowerment and agency that enabled them to challenge the stigma attached to being a refugee. The chapter illustrated how participation in the writing group demonstrated social creativity strategies to reframe the narratives surrounding refugee identity and create new approaches for social integration, such as visiting schools, to challenge the existing stigma. This chapter addressed research question 3 by demonstrating how the collaborative nature of creative writing groups empowers refugees to resist stigma and work towards generating social change. Through shared social identity as refugees and writers and sharing their narratives, group members show agency within the group in public spaces, such as schools, media, and community events.

As this chapter concludes the three results, the next chapter will offer a discussion of the overall research findings of the three themes: Finding Meaning, Seeking Support, and Gaining Agency. This chapter critically engages with the theoretical frameworks of the Social Identity Approach and Writer Identity Theory to explore how the findings answer the research questions. The discussion is cross-referencing the literature review in Chapter 3. Furthermore, it will discuss the implications of creative writing groups for refugees' social integration and well-being and will reflect on the methodological choices, practical applications and recommendations resulting from this research project. Furthermore, it will consider the study's limitations and suggest future research directions.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion

They came from different countries. We don't know from before, but we have the same story. That make us the same because we can create, we can write, we can feel, and we can have new ideas that make us to be in one way.
- Makbel

8.1. Overview

This concluding chapter provides an overview of the key findings of this thesis and reflects on how non-formal education initiatives exemplified in creative writing groups in this thesis can support the social integration of refugees in light of the previously presented theoretical and empirical literature. The chapter begins with a summary of the key findings from the three results (Chapters 5 to 7). Following this, the chapter includes a general discussion section that builds on the discussion provided in the results chapters and synthesises the results from the three themes of the study (Seeking Meaning, Finding Social Support, and Gaining Agency) with a cross-reference to the literature review in Chapter 2.

The research contribution highlights the theoretical, methodological, and practical impacts of the study in advancing the understanding of second-language creative writing in the refugee context and the Social Identity Approach to well-being within refugee groups. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the study by acknowledging the challenges encountered. These limitations introduce directions for further research based on the current findings. The chapter concludes with a final remark on the potential impact of this study on the refugee community in the UK (England).

As noted in the introduction chapter, my reference to the term 'refugees' includes both refugees who have earned refugee status in the UK and asylum seekers.

8.2. Summary of the Key Findings

The three results chapters (Chapters 5 to 7) discussed the key findings of each theme. The findings demonstrate that creative writing groups play a crucial role in refugees' social integration and well-being as part of non-formal education initiatives for refugees. They

provide a place where refugees can build their sense of meaning, social connections, find support, and gain agency in their host society.

1. Seeking Meaning: The first key findings highlight that creative writing groups as part of non-formal education initiatives for refugees provides refugees with a space to reflect on their past and link it to their present through writing. This process reflects on their social identities, whether lost, maintained, or gained, which help them find meaning in their post-migration lives. Finding meaning can create hope and a sense of purpose in the future. Additionally, creative writing groups offer a safe space where refugees can develop a positive sense of self, which contributes to their psychological well-being.

2. Finding Social Support: The second theme focuses on the importance of social support for refugees in creative writing groups. Primary data show that refugees joined the *Our Stories* group seeking a sense of community and social connection. Through their shared social identity as refugees and writers, participants form strong social bonds that resemble family-like dynamics. This shared social identity of refugees and writers creates a space for empathy, understanding and support, which is particularly significant during periods of change and isolation, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and in facing stigma.

3. Gaining Agency and Social Creativity: The final theme highlights how finding meaning and social support in creative writing empowers refugees to gain agency and resist the stigma associated with their refugee identity. Through writing together and public performance, group members reach out with their voices to challenge the public stigma faced by the host society. Applying social creativity strategies allowed the participants to positively reframe their refugee identity and integrate into British society through collective action and an attempt for social change. The group's outreach activities further demonstrate that the impact of creative writing groups extends beyond group limits in the host society.

8.3. General Discussion

This section provides a general discussion and synthesis of the results from the three themes (Seeking Meaning, Finding Support, and Gaining Agency). The study highlights the social cure and curse processes in refugees' creative writing groups. Both perspectives complement each other and offer a realistic vision of the contribution of creative writing groups to refugee well-being and social integration in the host society. This discussion is oriented towards my

research questions to clarify and explain my answers to them and demonstrate how this study addresses the gaps in the literature.

The literature review in (Chapter 3) revealed several key gaps in the understanding of refugees' experiences within creative writing groups. Few studies have directly examined refugees' voices, with most focusing on the perspectives of workshop leaders or therapists. Additionally, research rarely examines inter-group relations from refugees'' viewpoints or provides actual samples of their creative writing. There is also a limited exploration of how refugees find meaning in creative writing, their perceptions of social support, or the specific ways in which they use creative writing to resist stigma and build agency. In addition, the role of public performance, such as reading aloud, in developing refugees' writer identities and empowering them remains under-researched.

The General Discussion goes beyond summarising the key findings by integrating and critically analysing each theme in relation to the study's research questions and broader theoretical frameworks. While the summary of the key findings presents what was discovered, the general discussion synthesises these insights through the social cure and social curse perspectives, providing an understanding of how creative writing groups impact refugees' well-being and social integration. The general discussion clarifies the thesis's contributions to the literature. This research addresses critical gaps, particularly the complex interplay between identity development, agency and stigma resistance in non-formal education for refugees.

8.3.1. Answering Research Question 1

> What insights do refugees' perspectives and creative writing samples provide regarding their sense of meaning and value in writing?

Social Cure and Curse Processes in Meaning-making in Refugee Creative Writing Groups

Creative writing groups function as therapeutic spaces for refugees. They offer a safe environment in which to process trauma and regain emotional well-being. This research question is discussed in Chapter 5, identifying the first theme based on the theoretical framework and the data analysis. I analysed all data following the reflective thematic analysis by Clarke and Braun (2013). The studies presented in Chapter 3 make it evident that post-migration refugees strive to find meaning and purpose. The findings of this thesis

extend the existing literature on the finding of meaning. First, the data on the therapeutic benefits of social groups show that the specific context of creative writing groups allows refugees to articulate their thoughts and emotions in a safe environment. Jetten, Haslam, and Alexander (2012) highlight that belonging to social groups can enhance well-being, as indicated by the SIA. This therapeutic aspect was identified by *Our Stories* group, in which participants reflected on finding emotional support and the significance of their membership to their well-being.

In contrast to Stickley et al.'s (2019) concerns that writing may not have benefits for refugees who have experienced trauma, O'Neill's (2004) and Vitale et al.'s (2017) support the idea that narrating refugee experiences can offer significant emotional benefits. This study takes a middle position, balancing the social cure perspective (Jetten, Haslam and Alexander 2012) and the social curse perspective (Kellezi and Stephen D. 2012). This thesis suggests that while writing about the past (autobiographical self) can enhance well-being for some participants, others prefer to focus on their present or future. This demonstrates the complex role of creative writing in meaning-making. It also has practical implications for workshop leaders when designing writing prompts and avoiding direct invitations to discuss memories. In fact, *Our Stories* group leader gave members the prompt to write about "the city," giving them the freedom to choose which city to write about. The diversity of responses from members and the provision of open-ended topics provides refugees with a space to reflect on more significant aspects that relate to their sense of meaning and purpose.

Second, the in-group relations formed in creative writing groups provide refugees with a sense of belonging, which furthers their sense of meaning. This finding aligns with social prescribing, which asserts that belonging to a community can address individuals' social, emotional, or practical needs (Wakefield, et al. 2020). Vitale et al. (2017) also assert that participants reported increased confidence and self-esteem through continued engagement in creative activities (Vitale, et al. 2017). The primary data gathered in this study adapt this concept to the refugee context, demonstrating how shared social identities within the writing group contribute to emotional resilience and create a supportive community. By extending the application of social prescribing to creative writing groups, this research highlights how these spaces can encourage a sense of shared identity that empowers individuals to engage with their host society.

Another key finding within creative writing groups and considering the SIA is their role in building a positive sense of self for refugees. This aligns with SIMIC (Haslam, et al. 2018) which provides a framework for understanding social identity shifts and how these shifts are influenced by group dynamics and individual behaviours and have an effect on health and

well-being (Haslam, et al. 2018). Applying SIMIC in refugee creative writing groups has advanced this model by providing valuable insight into the lost social identities of refugees, maintaining social identities, and gaining social identities through listening to their narratives and analysing their creative writing samples. Stuart (1998) identifies that writing is about self-presentation, a notion that aligns with the findings of this research, in which participants often use their writing to gain a sense of self-worth and validation. This also supports the work of Hosseini and Punzi (2023), who assert that creative writing groups empower refugees to handle difficult emotions and gain social recognition. Refugees often struggle with shifting identities after migration, and creative writing offers a space to explore lost, maintained, and newly gained identities. Perry (2008) notes that storytelling allows refugees to position themselves within their communities, a point this research extends by showing how creative writing bridges the past and the present. Participants frequently wrote about their lost social identities, such as their cultural or professional identities, while exploring their emerging roles in the host country. This resonates with Dieterich-Hartwell and Koch's (2017) findings on how remembering one's old self helps refugees reconcile their past with their current environment.

The primary data in this study contribute to the understanding of linguistic identity in the social context. Andrews (2010) and Ortega et al. (2015) emphasise how linguistic identity emerges through social interactions. This thesis asserts that although writing in a second language is a challenge for refugees, it allows for linguistic improvement, which enhances social integration in the host society. Lim (2010) calls for more attention to the linguistic choices made by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This is a gap in the literature that this thesis addresses by presenting refugees' second-language creative writing as a crucial part of their writer identity development. Weedon (1997) notes that language can enhance a writer's sense of self and confidence. This confidence is particularly important for refugees seeking to integrate into their new society. This research extends existing research on linguistic identity by demonstrating how second- language creative writing facilitates social identity reconstruction in refugee contexts.

Building on the discussion of linguistic identity, education and language development are vital elements in the meaning-making process for refugees. The interview extracts from the participants' interviews and creative writing samples of this thesis indicate that creative writing groups provide a valuable space for educational growth by providing refugees with different skills. Whelan et al. (2023) highlight the importance of creative art initiatives in helping refugees transition to higher education and border society. This research strengthens Whelan et al.'s (2023) findings by showing that the participants in this thesis frequently

expressed a sense of achievement through their writing, which reinforces the idea that education through the creative arts can offer a powerful sense of purpose and lead to social integration. This understanding can have practical implications for refugee community organisations in encouraging educational opportunities through art initiatives, such as organising visits to public libraries, museums and educational institutions.

8.3.2. Answering Research Question 2

> How do refugees perceive and experience support within their writing community?

Social Cure and Curse Processes in Finding Support in Creative Writing Groups of Refugees

The 'Finding Support' theme, which was the focus of Chapter 6, investigated the crucial role of creative writing groups in developing social and emotional support for refugees. When individuals who face hardship are offered social and emotional support, they can add meaning to their lives, discover new connections with the community, and develop ways to show agency and creativity (Brandling and House 2009). Building on this and from the data analysis, this thesis suggests that support plays a central role in refugee themes in creative writing groups. To clarify, the more support refugees and asylum seekers receive, the greater their ability to seek meaning and gain agency in their lives.

One of the key findings in response to research question 2 in this thesis is that refugees in creative writing groups create a community in which refugees form family-like dynamics based on their shared social identity as refugees and writers. This finding aligns with the social cure perspective, which posits that shared social identities can enhance social connections and significantly improve well-being (Jetten, Haslam and Alexander 2012). Studies in Chapter 2, including those by Vitale et al. (2017) and O'Neill (2004), highlight that creative writing groups allow for the development of social connections that enhance participants' emotional well-being. Similarly, Stickley et al. (2019) argues that participating in creative writing workshops helped refugees build stronger connections, develop a sense of belonging, and increase their confidence. The primary data in this thesis mirror these findings and reveal that refugees in *Our Stories* group form supportive and lifelong relationships that extend beyond writing activities. The social connections made within the group became crucial for refugees' emotional resilience, particularly during times of social isolation, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, my finding extends the

application of the social cure perspective by illustrating how creative writing groups can serve as a bridge to social life and demonstrate how the shared social identity of being refugees and writers facilitates support and collective well-being.

In addition to social support, the analysis of the interview data entails that creative writing groups also provide emotional support, which is essential to the well-being of its members. This aligns with Stickley et al.'s (2019) findings that creative writing groups can enhance the emotional well-being of refugees by providing a safe space for self-expression and social integration. Rousseau et al. (2004) argue that creative activities help refugees form new social identities. Both studies have interesting resonance with this thesis as they demonstrate how creative writing groups enable members to explore their writer identity while receiving emotional support from others. Interviews with participants revealed that this emotional support stems from the collaborative nature of the writing workshops, which encourages participants to share their experiences and support one another through feedback, which promotes self-esteem and confidence. However, findings from my study show that some participants were hesitant to share traumatic stories, indicating that while positive feedback supports refugees, it may also limit engagement with difficult personal experiences. This has implications for workshop leaders and participants in creative writing groups. They should pay attention to creating a balanced feedback environment that allows space for sharing writing that has negative feelings.

Another key finding was that the common fate shared by refugees in the writing group became a foundation for social and emotional support among the in-group members. The concept of common fate, discussed by Drury (2018), indicates that individuals who experience similar struggles are more likely to develop a shared social identity and support one another. This is particularly evident in the way refugees in the *Our Stories* group share their experiences of migration, loss, and adaptation. The group acts as a space where participants can share their hardships and find empathy. This resembles Alfadhli and Drury's (2018) argument that shared social identities can act as a social cure by providing psychological benefits such as belonging and support.

This thesis adds to this argument by demonstrating that through a common fate, refugees can create new social identities. The Social Identity Model of Identity Change introduced earlier, implies maintaining existing social identities and gaining new ones (Haslam, et al. 2018). The refugee identity is a maintained identity that they had before joining the group; the writer's identity as a shared social identity is gained, and both are shared social identities among group members. In addition, other shared social identities are formed among group members, such as mothers, students, and Africans, and these identities are all important in

building strong social ties and support among group members. This is an innovative view that is different from the common fate research. It adds a new perspective to the understanding of the role of non-formal education in supporting refugees' social integration. The data in this thesis demonstrate that writing creatively about a common fate and migration experiences strengthens the shared social identity among refugees, as framed by the Social Identity Approach (SIA) and Writer Identity Theory. Through writing in a group setting, refugees reflect on their individual experiences and show empathy with other stories, which strengthens their social connection and sense of belonging. This highlights that creative writing groups provide a place for positive shared social identities, including the writer identity, which provides a source of social and emotional support for refugees.

Despite the positive outcomes of shared social identities, belonging to a disadvantaged group of refugees can also act as a social curse (Kellezi and Stephen D. 2012). The findings of this study reveal the social curse aspects of refugee creative writing groups. While shared refugee identities provide support, they can also lead to distress and marginalisation. Ballentyne et al. (2021) argue that stigmatised identities like the refugee identity can limit individuals' ability to adapt and integrate into the host society. This resonates with the Rejection-Identification Model (Haslam et al., 2018), where refugees in the *Our Stories* group found support and positive opportunities within the group while simultaneously struggling with the stigma attached to their refugee status in the UK society. This finding contradicts the generally positive view of art groups in the literature presented in Chapter 3. By highlighting the social curse and cure aspects, this thesis demonstrates the complex and sometimes harmful effects of shared identities in creative writing groups.

8.3.3. Answering Research Question 3

> In what ways do creative writing sessions empower refugees to collaboratively resist stigma and work towards generating social change through their narratives?

Social Cure and Curse Processes in Gaining Agency in Refugee Creative Writing Groups to Resist Stigma

One of the key findings related to the 'Gaining Agency' theme, which is the focus of Chapter 7, is the collective effort among *Our Stories* group members to face the stigma associated with their refugee identity. Resistance took the form of storytelling and public outreach. The *Our Stories* group worked collaboratively to develop their authorial writer identity and to use their voices to challenge the stigma of refugee identity. Livingstone (2023) asserts that

in post-conflict situations, having a platform where minority groups can express their concerns is crucial for their well-being. Although previous studies, including (Rubesin 2016; Vigil and Baillie Abidi 2018; Nichols 2020) highlight the importance of giving voice to refugees, they do not provide a detailed platform for how refugees can collectively narrate their stories and reach out to society. This study extends that research on creative writing groups by demonstrating how these groups serve as a vital space for refugees to articulate their experiences, challenge societal stigma, and develop a collective narrative that builds resilience and supports social integration. Through shared storytelling, refugees can express individual journeys while also constructing a collective voice that resonates with broader societal issues, thereby working towards social change and promoting understanding within the host community.

Another important finding related to resisting stigma is that refugees in creative writing groups employ social creativity strategies to challenge the existing stigma of refugees, which I have not encountered in my search of literature related to creative writing groups for disadvantaged communities. The primary data presented in (Chapter 7) shows that participants in *Our Stories* use social creativity to resist stigma. Hogg (2016) highlights the role of social creativity in allowing marginalised groups to redefine their identity and present a more positive sense of self.

The primary data also show that the group's shared goal of changing societal perceptions and promoting social integration provides a powerful motivation for members to work together. This shared purpose encourages them to engage in outreach activities and promote understanding through their creative works. Through writing and performing, they present themselves as writers, contributors, and active members of society, challenging negative societal narratives. The primary data from this study illustrate that by collectively writing and performing their works, participants resist being defined solely by their refugee status. Additionally, Bauer, Boemelburg, and Walton (2021) conclude that reframing refugee identity as resilient and strong empowers refugees to feel confident in their ability to succeed. This study extends the application of their findings by demonstrating that creative writing groups offer refugees a platform to write and share their stories publicly, which further enhances their sense of agency and allows them to resist the stigma attached to their identity.

While reframing refugee identity does not immediately change the refugee situation, it gives participants a sense of meaning and diminishes their self-stigma, as discussed by (Fino 2024). Creative writing groups provide an essential platform for refugees to share their stories, which can help them take control of their narrative and build a more positive sense of self. As Griffiths (2009) suggests, art groups can empower refugees to plan their future

and reinforce their agency. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Greatrick (2017) also emphasise that creative writing workshops can challenge mainstream perceptions of refugees and highlight the importance of self-expression and community building. The data from *Our Stories* resemble and extend these findings by showing how participants use their stories to resist stigma and reframe their sense of self. Hence, this thesis offers a concrete example of how social creativity strategies and writing can enhance refugees' agency.

Finally, the findings highlight the role of creative writing in enhancing social integration. By sharing their narratives publicly, the participants created a bridge between refugees and the host society. They invite the public to understand refugees' experiences and to humanise their stories to encourage understanding and support. Refugees can present their experiences and struggles to the wider UK society through their narratives. This outreach is a significant aspect of creative writing groups as it allows refugees to participate in society, break persistent stigma and stereotypes and enhance their integration into the wider UK community. O'Neill (2018) supports this by showing that storytelling helps refugees present themselves to society, especially in times of uncertainty. Creative writing groups play a vital role in the social integration of refugees by providing refugees with a platform to assert agency and control their narratives.

Nonetheless, while creative writing groups provide spaces for agency and resistance, stigma remains a burden for refugees, which is a form of social curse. Participants in this study mentioned on many occasions during the interviews that the misconception of refugee identity is a source of marginalisation that hinders their ability to integrate into society. Alfadhli et al. (2019) emphasise that understanding how refugees react to stigma is essential for supporting them because it directly impacts their well-being. Despite their efforts to challenge stigma through creative writing, many participants struggled with feelings of injustice because they were defined by their refugee status. This highlights the need for researchers and workshop leaders to understand the social cure and social curse dynamics of belonging to creative writing groups. This understanding of both processes reveals the variety of refugees' experiences and responses to stigma and the importance of providing support that empowers refugees to challenge stigma.

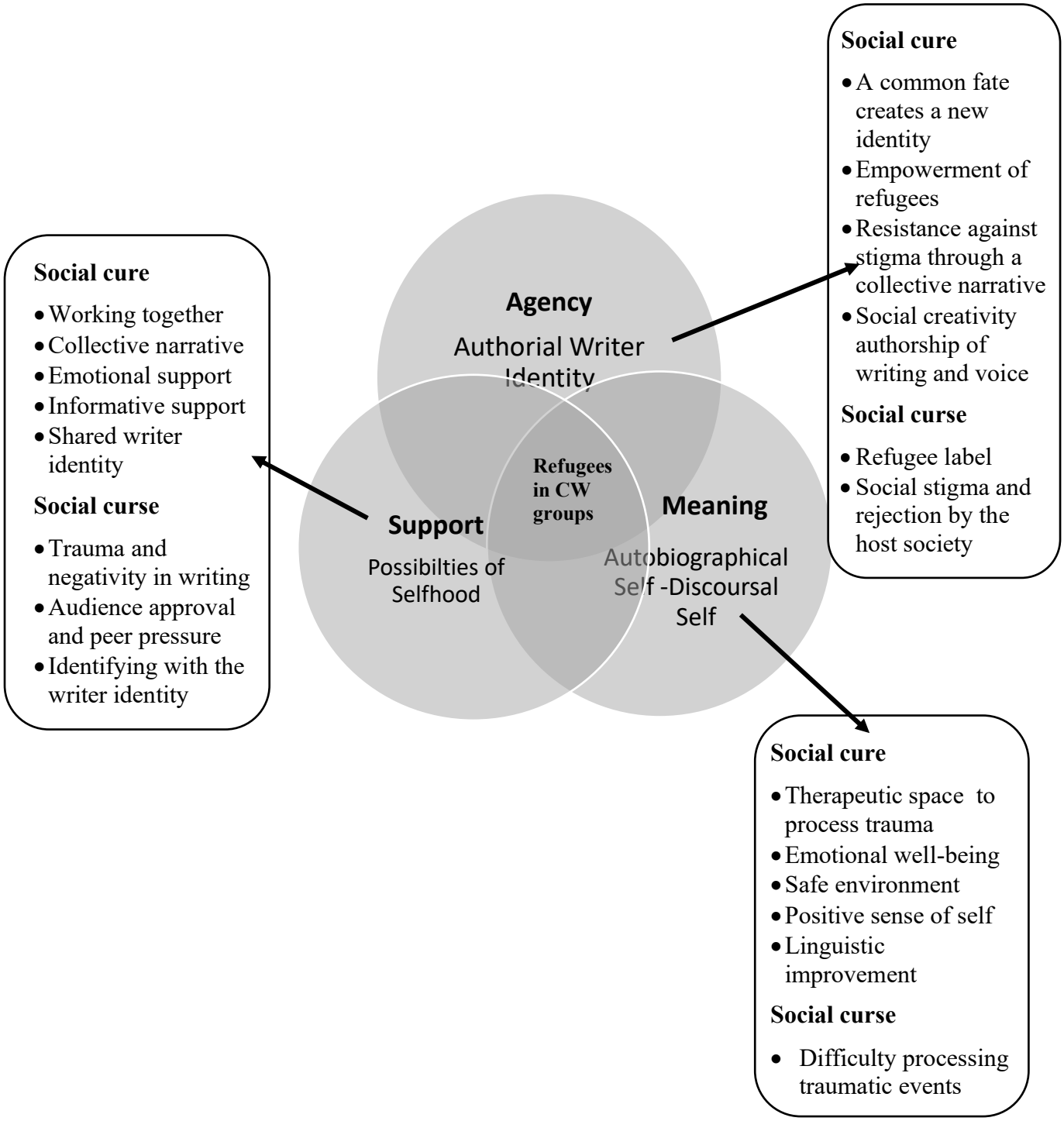
Another social curse process highlighted by this study is the challenge of embracing the writer's identity (Ivanič's, 1998), as it can be influenced by individuals' backgrounds, beliefs, and social lives. This challenge has both social and individual dimensions. For refugees, the difficulty in embracing a writer's identity, especially when writing in a second-language or learning to write for the first time, reflects individual struggles and also social pressures related to adapting to new cultural and linguistic expectations. The primary data revealed

that writing in a second-language or learning to write for the first time was challenging for some refugees. Ouellette (2008) explains that individuals with disadvantaged social status may face social struggles in embracing the writer's identity, particularly when it comes to asserting agency and authorship within their communities. This study extends Ouellette's argument by illustrating refugee challenges in creative writing groups. These findings assert that while creative writing groups can help individuals gain agency and authorial writer identity, they can also evoke difficult emotions.

Overall, this section presented a discussion of the key findings of the three themes and the social curse and curse. This section illustrates the significant impact that creative writing groups can have on enhancing refugees' well-being and social integration in their host societies. The study also highlighted the ongoing challenges of stigma and marginalisation for refugees. Figure (15) presents the theoretical framework (SIA to Health and Well-being and the Writer Identity Theory) and the main study findings in the context of refugees' creative groups, as discussed in this chapter. It categorises the social cure and social curse for each theme (agency, support, and meaning) based on data collected from refugee creative writing groups. The progression from Figure (8) presented in Chapter 3 to this figure demonstrates the evolution of the research focus: from a fragmented understanding of *refugees* and *creative writing* in the literature to a detailed, data-driven exploration of how creative writing groups function as both social cures and potential social curses not only in the aspect of *social support* but also *meaning* and *agency*.

Figure (15): Theoretical framework (SIA to Health and Well-being and Writer Identity Theory) and main study findings in the context of refugees' creative groups.

(Author's own work)



8.4. Research Contribution

This thesis on the social integration of refugees in creative writing groups makes significant theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions, which are detailed in this section.

8.4.1 Contribution to Theory

The results chapter details the contribution to theory for each theme. This section summarises the overall contribution to theory. The thesis theoretically contributes to advancing the application of the Social Identity Approach to Health and Well-being, which that social groups to which an individual belongs can either enhance their well-being or detrimentally affect it (Reicher, Spears and Haslam 2010) , and the Writer Identity Theory, which explores how writers derive a sense of self and identity through their writing (Ivanič 1998) within the context of refugee creative writing groups in the UK (England). The study enhances theoretical understanding by highlighting the role of creative writing groups as a social cure space and simultaneously a place where social curse processes can occur. By investigating the social cure and curse processes, this research project offers insights into the complexities of identity maintenance, support, agency, and resilience among refugees. This thesis also successfully combines the two theoretical approaches to understand how creative writing groups can impact well-being.

The Social Identity Approach

This research extends the application of the key theoretical models of SIA discussed in Chapter 2. It adds a new context to explore the social cure and curse perspective by conducting data generation in creative writing groups for refugees. Previous studies on social identity (Alfadhli and Drury 2018) have highlighted the importance of shared social identity for refugees; this thesis extends their work by specifically focusing on creative writing groups. While previous studies, e.g. (Perry 2008; Miled 2020) have discussed the importance of creative writing, they have not focused on how refugees derive meaning, support, and agency from their art groups. Furthermore, this research integrates the social prescribing perspective, as discussed by Wakefield et al. (2020). Creative writing groups act as a form of social prescribing, where refugees engage in creative activities that offer emotional and social support. This context expands the application of social prescribing beyond health interventions, including social and creative practices that enhance social integration.

Furthermore, this research provides insights into in-group dynamics and inter-group relations that evolve to explore refugee social integration. By investigating the internal dynamics within creative writing groups, this study applies the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC). It offers insight into how refugees lose, maintain, and gain multiple social identities (e.g., refugee, parent, writer) as they face the challenges of migration. This study also applies the Social Identity Model of Collective Resilience (Alfadhlil, et al. 2019), which indicates that a sense of common fate enhances group salience and collective support. This study extends the model by exploring how creative writing groups facilitate the formation of in-group support among members as refugees as emerging writers. The shared experience of displacement and the creative process encourages the formation of a shared social identity that helps members cope with trauma and adversity.

Beyond the dynamics within creative writing groups, this study addresses inter-group relations between refugees and their host society. By incorporating the Rejection-Identification Model (Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey 1999), this research examines how refugees' experiences of stigma from their host society enhance their in-group identification and salience. Combining in-groups and inter-group relations offers a more comprehensive view of the social cure and social curse processes involved in refugees' social integration. Previous studies presented in Chapter 2 has focused on the social support aspect but less on meaning and agency as essential elements to enhance health and well-being and cope with discrimination. Hence, the theoretical insights gained from this research demonstrate how group dynamics influence the overall well-being and social integration of refugees.

The Writer Identity Theory

This thesis also contributes significantly to the Writer Identity Theory (Ivanič 1998) by examining how refugees in creative writing construct their writer identities post-migration in the context of creative writing groups. This contribution is particularly valuable as it integrates the Writer Identity Theory with the Social Identity Approach to understand the social integration of refugees through creative arts.

Concerning the elements of the writer's identity discussed in Chapter 2, the study demonstrates the importance of the autobiographical self (memories, traumas, and hopes) in recounting their past experiences and writing about them, which can help them make sense of life changes. This research expands Ivanič's (1998) concept of the autobiographical self by illustrating how recounting past experiences within a creative writing group contributes to the well-being of refugees. In addition, this study extends the concept of the discoursal

self by showing how refugees' discoursal identities are shaped by the in-group dynamics of creative writing groups and their relations with the out-group. By combining the Writer Identity Theory and SIA to Health and Well-being, this study asserts that the discoursal self is influenced by the social identities refugees lose, maintain, or gain in the context of their social groups. This study also provides insights into the development of the authorial self. In the refugee context, creative writing becomes a space where participants gradually build their authorial identity, reclaiming the authority of their stories and expressing them to the broader society. By demonstrating how the authorial self can be gained in marginalised communities, this research offers a new dimension to understanding the writer's identity as a tool for empowerment and resistance to stigma.

8.4.2. Contribution to Methodology

In addition to its theoretical contribution, this study offers important methodological contributions to refugee studies by adopting the narrative inquiry approach, as outlined by Clandinin (2006). This thesis provides a practical example of adapting narrative inquiry in refugee contexts by integrating principles from the social cure perspective in the interview questions. As outlined in Chapter 4, the data generation methods for this research project involved three stages: First interviews, poetic inquiry (creative writing samples), and Second interviews (stimulated recall). The power of voice when one feels voiceless due to language and loss of cultural meaning can be extremely challenging for refugees. Finding the voice of refugees through poetry and short stories is a significant methodological contribution that this research adds to refugees' studies concerning art groups.

By using creative writing samples as part of poetic inquiry (Prendergast 2009), this research demonstrates how narrative inquiry can empower refugees by offering them ways to express their experiences. The study design can provide practitioners, such as educators, and social workers in refugee community organisations with an adaptable method to help refugees express themselves in a supportive environment. It highlights the value of incorporating creative methods into refugee support programmes, as these can facilitate emotional healing and empowerment. Besides poetic inquiry, using stimulated recall interviews as outlined in Ortju et al. (2024), the second interview serves as a powerful tool for reflection, enabling participants to revisit their creative writing and examine how their sense of self and social identities have shifted over time. This has practical implications for practitioners who seek to engage refugees in reflective practices to assess their social and psychological integration into their host societies. Furthermore, the reflection on three time

points in narrative inquiry provides practitioners with valuable guidance on how track changes in refugee social identities and social integration. This methodological study design I adapted in this thesis can be applied to other settings involving vulnerable populations and second-language writers.

8.4.3. Contribution to Practice

On a practical level, this thesis makes important contributions to refugee support programmes in refugee community organisations, non-formal educational strategies, and policy interventions. I have mentioned these implications throughout the general discussion section, which included practical guidance for workshop leaders and refugee community RCOs in designing creative writing prompts to avoid evoking traumatic memories, encouraging a balanced feedback environment, and promoting educational opportunities by giving refugees access to educational institutions (schools, universities, public libraries).

In addition, this research emphasises the role of non-formal education in the social integration of refugees and their well-being. As introduced in Chapter 1, non-formal educational settings, such as ESL classes and art-based initiatives, offer refugees a less structured but supportive environment in which to express themselves, develop new skills and engage with their host communities (Williams 2018). Bouttell (2023:12) argues that "England only acknowledges the importance of English language education for adults, which is admittedly a crucial area, but neglects the life-wide and life-long elements of adult education". Bouttell (2023) calls for the development of a policy specifically focused on adult education for refugees and asylum seekers. This underscores the significance of including informal learning in policy discussions and highlights areas of adult learning and migration that require additional research. Hence, this thesis emphasised the significance of non-formal education initiatives for refugees. It encourages that non-formal education programmes be tailored to address the specific needs of refugees to enhance social integration, emotional resilience, and personal growth.

Furthermore, this thesis has implications for policy interventions that support the integration of creative arts and non-formal education into refugee resettlement schemes and programmes designed for refugees and asylum seekers in general. The refugee resettlement scheme offers resettled refugees housing, healthcare, ESOL classes and employment support to help them integrate into British society (Wilkins and Sturge 2020). By recognising the therapeutic, educational, and social value of non-formal learning

groups, policymakers can promote initiatives that use creative arts to improve refugee well-being and create more decisive social connections with the host society.

In addition, as I have a Master's degree in Creative Writing from the UK, I am aware that MA in writing modules across England do not have a module for teaching creative writing for refugees. For instance, the University of Warwick had a module titled Writing for Schools in which MA students designed workshops for children and delivered them to local schools. I encourage higher education programme leaders in Schools of Art to consider adding modules about writing with refugees that include aspects of awareness of the social cure and curse process involved in writing. They also had a module titled Writing Wrongs in which students wrote about any injustice they faced or the world is facing, and they wrote to call for a change in the policy or perspective of the public. This module was aimed at creative writers, academics, lawyers, historians, and journalists, and recently, it was offered as a 3-day course to high school students. I recommend that this module be extended to refugees and asylum seekers. Writing with Refugees can also be added to the Arts Based Practices in Health and Well-being module at the University of Leeds Creative Writing MA. Also, writing for refugee communities can add depth to the Creative Writing in the Community Module at Nottingham Trent University BA studies in Creative Writing. These interventions can lead to more comprehensive support strategies that combine emotional well-being, skill-building, and social integration to enhance the long-term prospects of refugees in their host societies.

8.5. Limitations of this research and suggestions for future studies

Although this study offers significant insights into the role of creative writing groups in supporting social integration in refugee communities, I acknowledge some limitations.

1. My Positionality: Given my background as a descendant of Palestinian refugees, as discussed in Chapter 1, I am aware that I bring a unique perspective to the research. While this has enriched my understanding of refugee narratives, it may also introduce biases, such as interpretive bias, where my personal connection to refugee experiences might shape how I perceive and emphasise certain themes, and confirmation bias, where I might be more inclined to seek findings that align with my own understanding of refugee narratives. Nevertheless, this positionality also provided a valuable empathetic lens, which helped me break the ice with the participants and encourage them to share their stories.

In addition, as a bilingual researcher of Arabic and English, my ability to work across languages helped me understand the complexities of second-language writing among refugees. However, I was limited in understanding some cultural references that could have enriched the flow of the interviews. For example, I struggled to fully understand certain cultural nuances, such as the specific social dynamics and historical factors that contribute to the stigma surrounding English use in Maurice, which could have provided deeper context to his experience with language and identity. Maurice discussed the stigma of speaking English in his original country and how this stigma that he constantly faced affected embracing the writer's identity of English. Maha also addressed the effect of her mother tongue's illiteracy on her English writing identity. Future researchers can consider cultural and linguistic background as a significant variable for understanding the social identity and writer identity of refugees in creative writing groups.

2. Group Leader Perspectives: Another limitation of this study is that it did not fully explore the perspectives of group leaders or facilitators in creative writing groups. Including their perspectives could provide valuable insights into how the groups are structured, the strategies used to encourage inclusivity and empowerment and the challenges faced in supporting refugees' social integration and well-being. Although I had informal conversations with the *Our Stories* group leader, my focus was on the participants' experiences. Future research can consider how group leaders manage group dynamics, workshop designs, perspectives on individuals who may have withdrawn from the workshops, and how non-formal education initiatives receive support from the government.

3. Host Society Perspectives: Another limitation is the absence of perspectives from the host society on how art initiatives, such as creative writing workshops, help bridge the gap between refugees and their host society. While the research offers valuable insights into how refugees experience their outreach to the public, including views from host communities could have helped examine their broader societal impacts. Hence, I invite future researchers to consider conducting studies from the perspective of people in the host society who refugees have approached. For example, how do teachers and students perceive the outreach of refugees to their schools? Does it have a measurable effect?

Lastly, I conducted the study within a specific context and time (post-COVID-19 pandemic) with a focus on 11 refugees as participants in the *Our Stories* group in (England). While these findings are significant, I cannot generalise it to all refugees in creative writing groups. Outcomes may change based on country, group diversity, or group dynamics and

the socio-political situation in the host country. Furthermore, the findings from this study, while significant, are contextualised within a specific WEIRD society—England—where social norms, policies and cultural expectations may shape the experiences of refugees in unique ways. The concept of WEIRD societies was introduced by Henrich et al. (2010) to refer to Western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic societies. Consequently, the insights gained from *Our Stories* creative writing group underscore the need for caution in generalising these findings to other refugee groups worldwide, as country-specific dynamics and the socio-political environment significantly influence group identity and agency. However, the combination of creative writing samples and interviews enabled a more in-depth understanding of a smaller group of participants. In fact, the analysis illustrated the importance of paying attention to the complexity of experiences while identifying many communities across the accounts.

The Limits of Creative Interventions in refugee integration

Integration of refugees is not a singular or uniform process as it encompasses legal-political, socio-economic, and cultural-religious dimensions (Apostol 2018). Hence, success in one domain, such as learning the English language or writing creatively, may not translate into social integration by itself. A recent report on refugee integration shows that even after years in the UK, many refugees continue to feel excluded, facing systemic barriers such as underemployment, long waiting lists for language classes, and limited social networks (neighbourly lab 2024). These findings point to the need for a more holistic and structural understanding of integration that involves governmental institutions, host communities, and policy frameworks (Apostol 2018). Creative arts and writing interventions present powerful tools for expression and starting dialogue with the host communities and offer a space for sharing refugee narrative (O'Neill 2008). Additionally, Mark (2019) asserts that arts can contribute to local integration and refugee settlements by encouraging interaction and connection between refugees and host communities.

However, O'Neill (2008) argues that considering the wider context in art-based initiatives and refugee context is essential as they operate within political and governmental constraints. Aligning with that, in hostile political environments, participatory art projects offer refugees a vital space for self-expression and confidence-building as these projects empower marginalized communities and support social inclusion (Pinto and Pinto 2022). Furthermore, integration for refugees requires sustained efforts across multiple levels of governance—including reforms in employment, housing, education, and citizenship policies (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx 2016). Without

governmental support for art project, the benefits of creative interventions may remain limited and unable to shift the stigma and discrimination of refugees in the host society. inequality and misrecognition

While such initiatives may succeed in individual empowerment or local community bonding, they rarely address the legal and economic inequalities that causes exclusion (Moreira and Jakobi 2021). Therefore, as creative writing and other art-based initiatives are valuable for refugee integration, they must be situated within a wider strategy that includes advocacy for systemic change. Sustained integration depends on giving refugees the tools to tell their stories, and creating a society that is capable of hearing the needs of refugees and responding to them.

8.6. Final Remarks

This thesis argues that creative writing groups provide a vital, non-formal educational platform for refugees in England to enable their social integration into British society. Through creative writing, refugees can articulate their personal and collective narratives and gain agency to challenge societal perceptions and advocate for social change. Grounded in the Social Identity Approach to Health and Well-being and the Writer Identity Theory, this study investigates how participation in these groups influences refugees' sense of self, community, and agency within the host society.

These groups offer refugees a structured space to connect their past with their present as a form of continuity in their sense of identity post-migration, which contributes to their psychological well-being. Additionally, refugees find essential social support within these groups, forming strong, family-like bonds through shared experiences that provide empathy, understanding, and resilience. Furthermore, participation in creative writing empowers refugees to resist stigma by reframing their identities and challenging public perceptions through group performances and outreach. These findings highlight the considerable impact of creative writing groups on enhancing refugees' well-being and enabling meaningful engagement with their host communities.

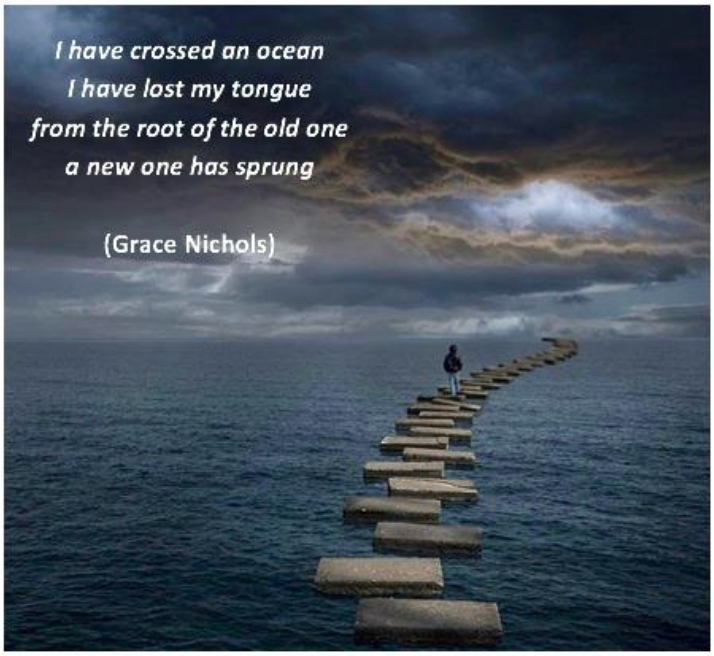
Lastly, refugee stigma and discrimination remain persistent challenges in the UK and other countries. Several events in the UK, such as the anti-immigration riots that spread across the country during the summer of 2024, have caused hostility and fear, which threatened the social cohesion of British society. In such circumstances, refugees may feel more marginalised, their voices silenced, and their narratives are overlooked. It is crucial that refugees have spaces where their stories can be heard and understood so as to strengthen

their sense of agency and belonging. With social support and opportunities to express themselves, refugees may find meaning in their migration journey and rebuild their post-migration lives.

Creating a supportive environment that encourages listening to refugee narratives is essential to diminishing refugees' stigma and promoting social integration. This approach helps build stronger connections between refugees and host communities. These connections can contribute to social harmony and understanding and reduce tensions. By embracing the experiences of refugees as individuals who faced challenges with strength and resilience, British society can enrich its cultural diversity and work towards a more inclusive future of supporting vulnerable populations.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Invitations sent to participants



"How to feel like myself in a language I do not quite feel at home in?"

"How are home and belonging articulated through my use of language?"

"How do I express my identity through creative writing?"

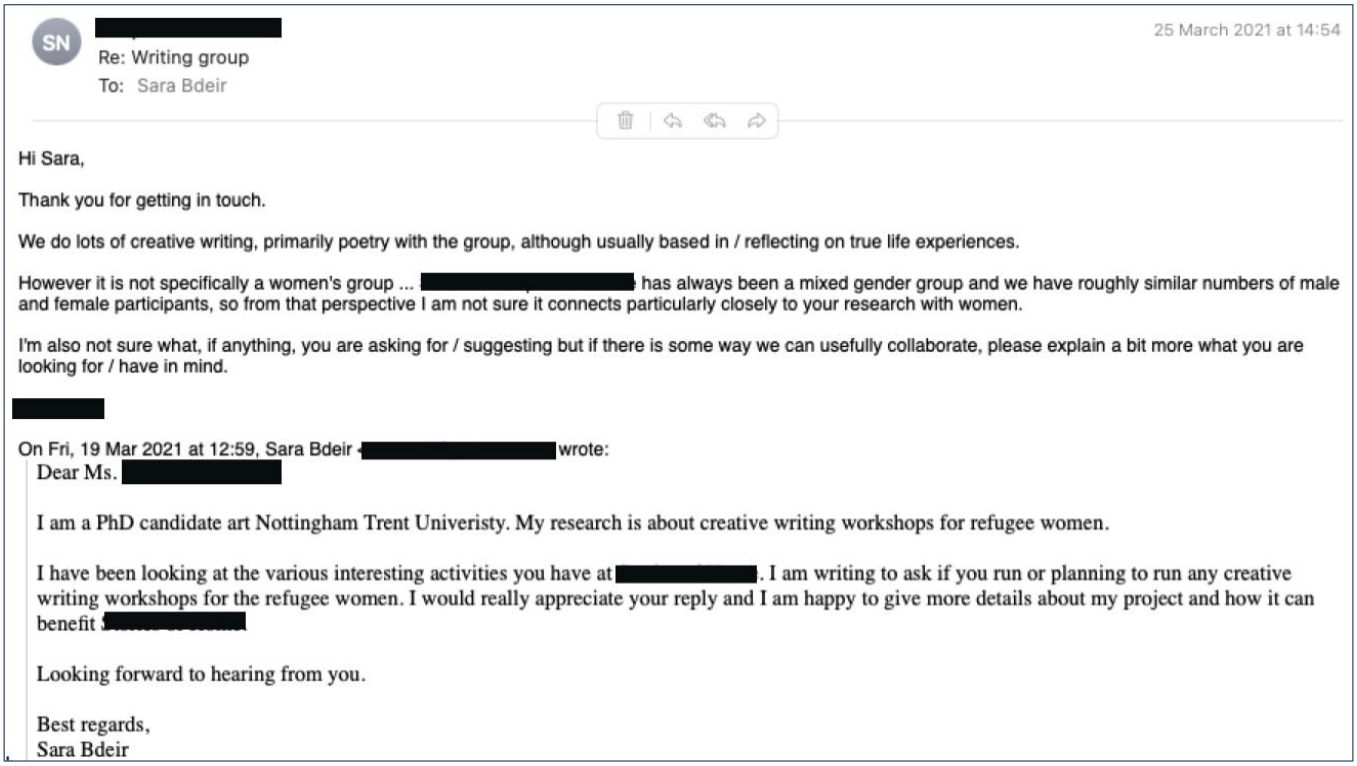
"What role does language play in my integration in the British society?"

These questions and more are the concern of Sara's research project on the linguistic identity of refugee women who are members of a creative writing group.

Sara will reflect with you on these questions via one to one interviews and sharing your own writing. Throughout the way, she will take your hands to explore the beauty of languages and the power you have as a bilingual speaker. She will also encourage you to reflect on your perception of social integration as a women in the UK.

Sara Bdeir is a second year PhD candidate in Education at Nottingham Trent University. She is interested in non-formal education for refugees especially creative art projects. Her doctoral work explores the role of the linguistics identities of refugee women in their social integration within creative writing groups. Sara holds an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Warwick (Distinction), and a BA in Applied Linguistics (first Hons.). Her research is supported by the Vice Chancellor scholarship scheme. She can be contacted at: sara.bdeir2019@my.ntu.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Approaching the Creative Writing group leader via Email



SN [redacted]

25 March 2021 at 14:54

Re: Writing group

To: Sara Bdeir

Hi Sara,

Thank you for getting in touch.

We do lots of creative writing, primarily poetry with the group, although usually based in / reflecting on true life experiences.

However it is not specifically a women's group ... [redacted] has always been a mixed gender group and we have roughly similar numbers of male and female participants, so from that perspective I am not sure it connects particularly closely to your research with women.

I'm also not sure what, if anything, you are asking for / suggesting but if there is some way we can usefully collaborate, please explain a bit more what you are looking for / have in mind.

[redacted]

On Fri, 19 Mar 2021 at 12:59, Sara Bdeir [redacted] wrote:

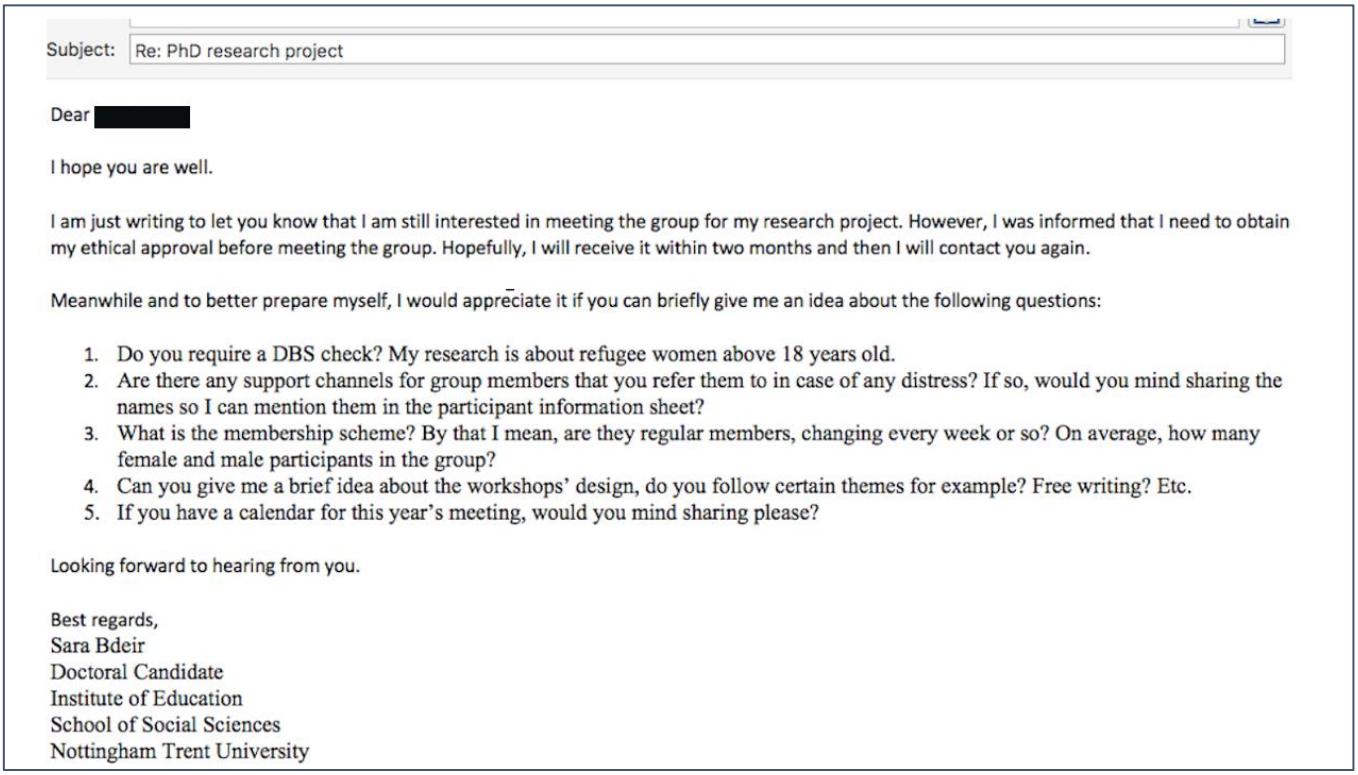
Dear Ms. [redacted]

I am a PhD candidate art Nottingham Trent Univeristy. My research is about creative writing workshops for refugee women.

I have been looking at the various interesting activities you have at [redacted]. I am writing to ask if you run or planning to run any creative writing workshops for the refugee women. I would really appreciate your reply and I am happy to give more details about my project and how it can benefit [redacted]

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,
Sara Bdeir



Subject: Re: PhD research project

Dear [redacted]

I hope you are well.

I am just writing to let you know that I am still interested in meeting the group for my research project. However, I was informed that I need to obtain my ethical approval before meeting the group. Hopefully, I will receive it within two months and then I will contact you again.

Meanwhile and to better prepare myself, I would appreciate it if you can briefly give me an idea about the following questions:

1. Do you require a DBS check? My research is about refugee women above 18 years old.
2. Are there any support channels for group members that you refer them to in case of any distress? If so, would you mind sharing the names so I can mention them in the participant information sheet?
3. What is the membership scheme? By that I mean, are they regular members, changing every week or so? On average, how many female and male participants in the group?
4. Can you give me a brief idea about the workshops' design, do you follow certain themes for example? Free writing? Etc.
5. If you have a calendar for this year's meeting, would you mind sharing please?

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,
Sara Bdeir
Doctoral Candidate
Institute of Education
School of Social Sciences
Nottingham Trent University

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet

Participation information sheet

The Development of Refugees as Writers in Creative Writing Groups in the UK

Thank you for your interest in my research project commenced on March 2022. Before you take part in the study, it is important to understand the aim of the research, and what your participation involves. Please take time to read the following information and discuss it with me, Sara Bdeir, a PhD candidate or your workshop leader [redacted] before you decide whether or not to take part.

1-What is the purpose of the study?
This study is about your valuable experience as a second language creative writer. I will ask about your experience in the writing group and your creative writing pieces.

2-Who is running this study?
The study is run by Sara Bdeir, a PhD candidate at Nottingham Trent University and funded by the university studentship programme. My director of studies is Dr Iryna Kushnir.

3-What is the legal basis for this study?
The university undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. All University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately and their rights respected. This project has been considered by Nottingham Trent University's Schools of Business, Law and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and has met with a favourable ethics opinion

4-Why have I been chosen to take part?
Refugees as participants in creative writing groups will add valuable input to our understanding of their development as writers. You will be one of ten members interviewed in your group.

5- Do I have to take part?
Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part, I will ask you to sign a consent form before the interview.
You are free to withdraw from the study, without giving any reason, up to one month from each interview date. All information related to you will be removed. If you withdraw after this point, anonymised information may be kept as part of the study, or may have already been published, but all of your personal information, which could identify you will be deleted and your data will not be used in future research. I kindly ask you to inform me if you want to withdraw.
Please be assured that there will be no negative consequences if you decided to withdraw in relation to your access to the writing group or any other aspects of your life.

6-What do you want me to do?
The study involves two interviews lasting 30 to 45 minutes each, and a selection of three pieces of your writing samples. The interviews will take place either in your regular writing group

meeting place or online using Microsoft Team virtual meeting room depending on your preference and government regulations.

7-How will you protect my confidentiality and anonymity?
Your participation in this study and your personal information will be treated confidentially. Confidentiality will only be broken in circumstances where there is a risk of harm to you or someone else, or you talk about criminal activities. In these instances, I must report this information to the relevant agencies that can provide assistance.

You will be asked to provide a pseudonym (a name of your choice to replace your original name) to anonymise your responses and link the information you supply in the interview with your samples of creative writing. Data will be stored on NTU secure servers and only accessed by myself and director of studies.

8-How will the interviews and writing samples be used?
As a PhD candidate, I am responsible for all the data collected during the study. Data will be used to write up my PhD thesis and related publications (such as, academic articles, blogs). Any quotes from your interviews and writing samples that I use will be anonymised, so it is extremely unlikely data is linked to you. This can happen if other group member noticed your style of writing or speaking but the risk is minimum.
Once the study is completed, personal information will be destroyed**.** With your permission, I would like to preserve your interview responses and writing samples to allow others to check and verify my findings. Therefore, the NTU archive of research data will safeguard data. Only approved researchers will have access to this information for research purposes.

9-What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?
The main disadvantage is that you might share memories that makes you uncomfortable. Interview questions will be provided to you to ensure you are fully comfortable with the study. You can stop the interview, skip questions and take a break during the interview. Each participant is given a support helpline sheet with the participant information sheet in which you can seek help and support in your area.

10-What are the possible benefits?
I hope that you will find the interviews interesting. You will have a chance to share pieces of your writing with me, discuss and reflect on your own journey in writing in a second language.

11-How can I find out about the results of this project?
I will return to the creative writing group to discuss my overall findings with the participants. I will provide a document summarising the findings.

12-What measurements are you taking to ensure safety from COVID-19?
Precautions and sensible controls will be taken to keep both the participants and myself at a low risk of COVID-19 infection. I will arrange with the group leader to ensure practicing good hand hygiene, keeping the area well ventilated, keeping a safe distance and wearing face mask during interviews.

13-Who can I contact if I have any questions or concerns about the study?

For more information about the project, please contact Sara Bdeir, the PhD candidate (sara.bdeir2019@my.ntu.ac.uk) or her director of studies Dr. Iryna Kushnir (iryna.kushnir@ntu.ac.uk).

You should contact the NTU Data Protection Officer, Tracy Landon (DPO@ntu.ac.uk), if you would like to report a data security breach (e.g. if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately), or you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data.

Appendix 4: Consent form

The Development of Refugees as Writers in Creative Writing Groups in the UK

Consent Form

Please read and confirm your consent to participate in this project by initialling the appropriate boxes and signing and dating this form

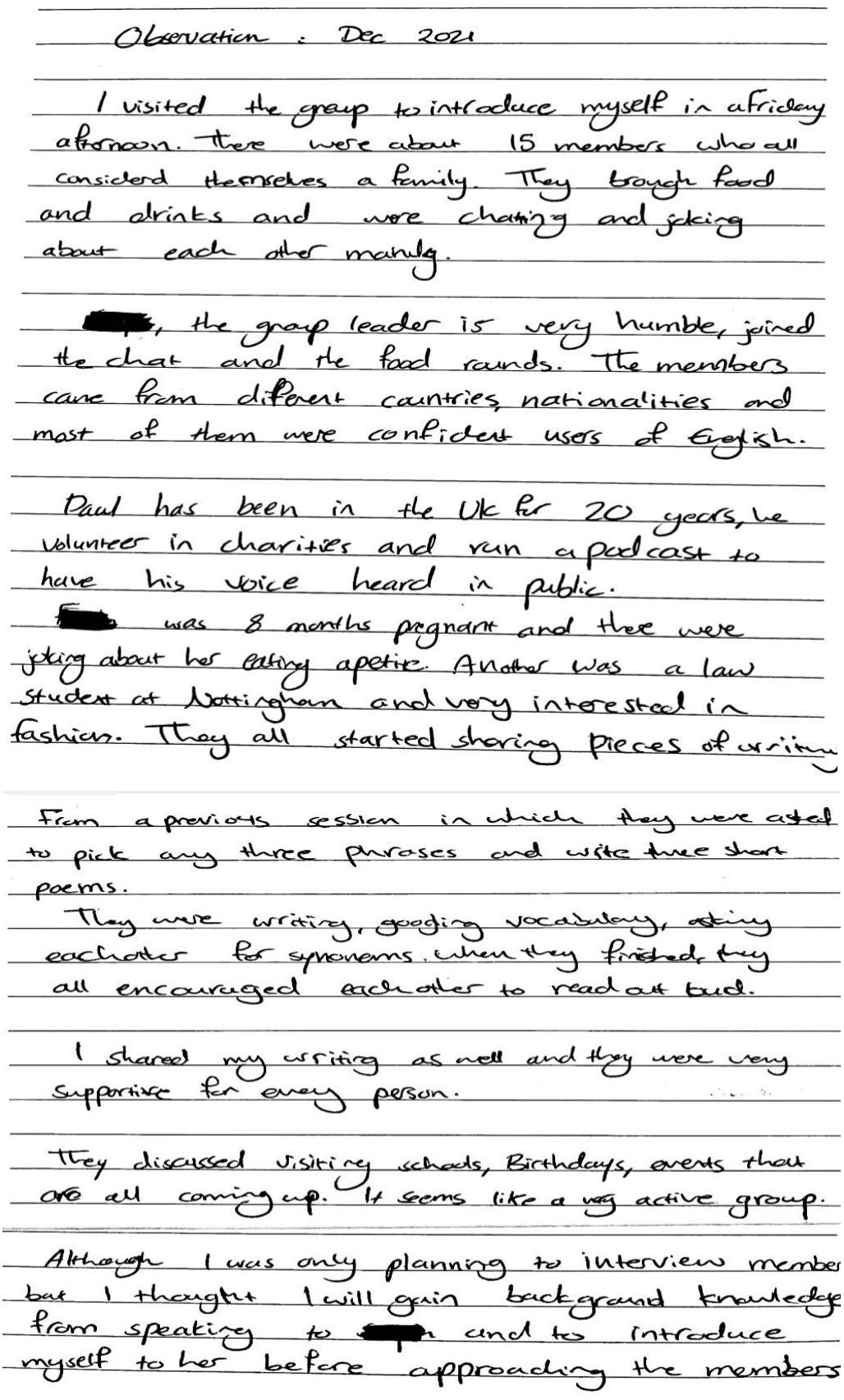
1. I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I agree to take part. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary. ☐
3. I confirm that I am over 18 years old. ☐
4. I agree to be interviewed. ☐
5. I consent for my interview to be audio recorded. ☐
6. I understand that I am free to withdraw up to one month from each interview date without giving any reason. ☐
7. I give my permission for my anonymised selected writing materials to be used in the PhD candidate's thesis and related publications. ☐
8. I give my permission to be anonymously quoted from my interview transcripts in the PhD candidate's thesis and related publications. ☐
9. I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, my personal data will not be shared and will be deleted at the end of the study. ☐
10. I understand there is a very slight risk that my writing or interview quotes might be recognised by other group member. ☐
11. I give my consent for anonymised interview transcripts and my writing materials to be retained in the NTU Data Archive and shared for the purposes of future research. ☐

Name of participant (pseudonym)_____ Date _____ Signature _____

Name of PhD candidate taking consent _____ Date _____ Signature _____

Contact details: PhD candidate: Sara Bdeir (sara.bdeir19@my.ntu.ac.uk)

Appendix 5: Example of hand-written observational note-taking for data familiarisation



Observation : Dec 2021

I visited the group to introduce myself in a friday afternoon. There were about 15 members who all considerd themselves a family. They brought food and drinks and were chatting and joking about each other mainly.

[redacted], the group leader is very humble, joined the chat and the food rounds. The members came from different countries, nationalities and most of them were confident users of English.

Paul has been in the Uk for 20 years, he volunteer in charities and run a podcast to have his voice heard in public.

[redacted] was 8 months pregnant and there were joking about her eating apetite. Another was a law student at Nottingham and very interested in fashion. They all started sharing pieces of writing

From a previous session in which they were asked to pick any three phrases and write three short poems.

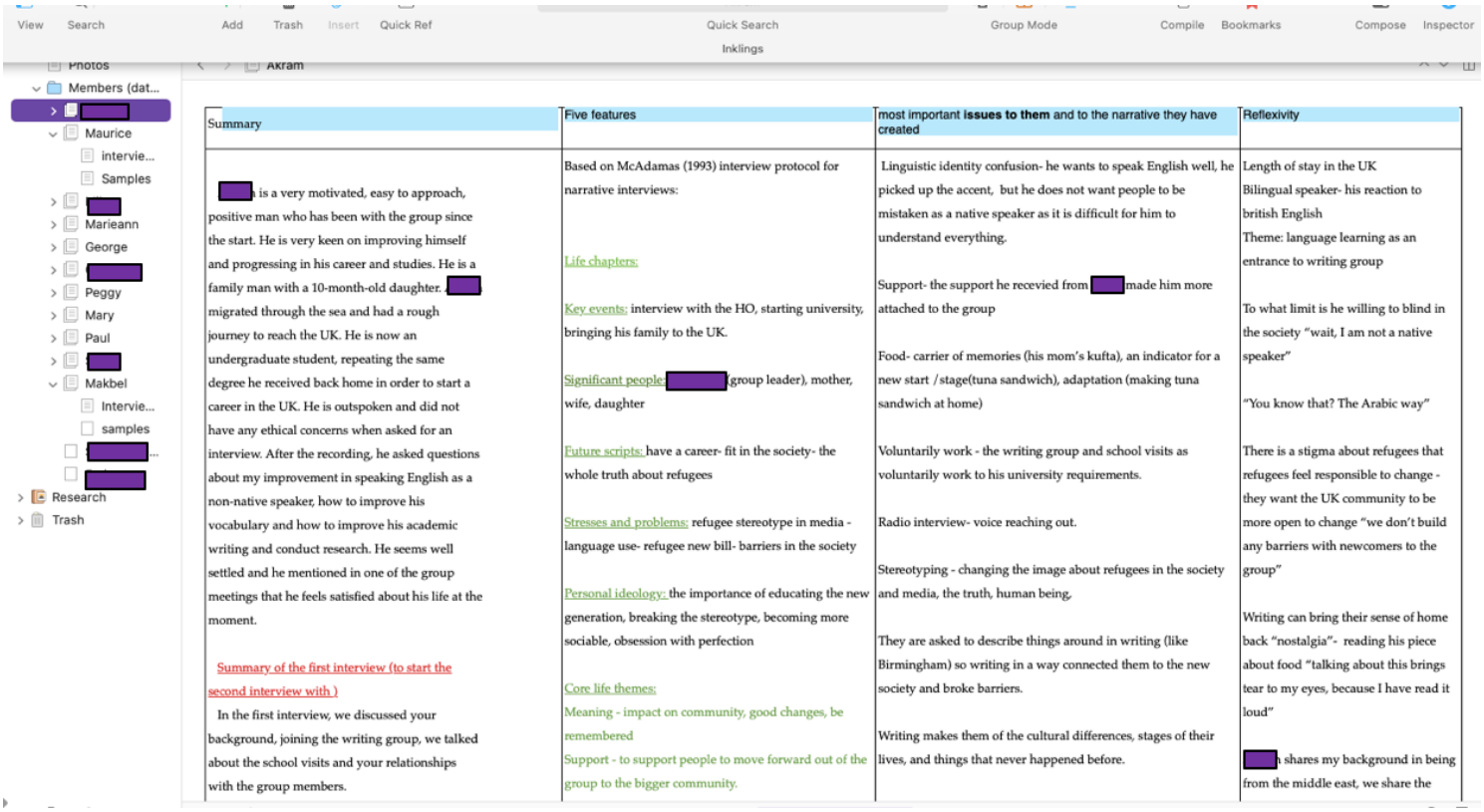
They were writing, googling vocabulary, asking eachother for synonems. When they finished they all encouraged each other to read out loud.

I shared my writing as well and they were very supportive for every person.

They discussed visiting schools, Birthdays, events that are all coming up. It seems like a very active group.

Although I was only planning to interview member but I thought I will gain background knowledge from speaking to [redacted] and to introduce myself to her before approaching the members

Appendix 6: Sample of Reflexive Journal Notes Using Scrivener (Written the day following each interview)



View Search Add Trash Insert Quick Ref Quick Search Inklings Group Mode Compile Bookmarks Compose Inspector

Photos
Members (dat...
[redacted]
Maurice
intervie...
Samples
[redacted]
Marieann
George
[redacted]
Peggy
Mary
Paul
[redacted]
Makbel
Intervie...
samples
[redacted]
[redacted]
Research
Trash

Akram

Summary	Five features	most important **issues to them** and to the narrative they have created	Reflexivity
[redacted] is a very motivated, easy to approach, positive man who has been with the group since the start. He is very keen on improving himself and progressing in his career and studies. He is a family man with a 10-month-old daughter. [redacted] migrated through the sea and had a rough journey to reach the UK. He is now an undergraduate student, repeating the same degree he received back home in order to start a career in the UK. He is outspoken and did not have any ethical concerns when asked for an interview. After the recording, he asked questions about my improvement in speaking English as a non-native speaker, how to improve his vocabulary and how to improve his academic writing and conduct research. He seems well settled and he mentioned in one of the group meetings that he feels satisfied about his life at the moment. Summary of the first interview (to start the second interview with) In the first interview, we discussed your background, joining the writing group, we talked about the school visits and your relationships with the group members.	Based on McAdamas (1993) interview protocol for narrative interviews: Life chapters: Key events: interview with the HO, starting university, bringing his family to the UK. Significant people: [redacted] (group leader), mother, wife, daughter Future scripts: have a career- fit in the society- the whole truth about refugees Stresses and problems: refugee stereotype in media - language use- refugee new bill- barriers in the society Personal ideology: the importance of educating the new generation, breaking the stereotype, becoming more sociable, obsession with perfection Core life themes: Meaning - impact on community, good changes, be remembered Support - to support people to move forward out of the group to the bigger community.	Linguistic identity confusion- he wants to speak English well, he picked up the accent, but he does not want people to be mistaken as a native speaker as it is difficult for him to understand everything. Support- the support he recevied from [redacted] made him more attached to the group Food- carrier of memories (his mom's kufta), an indicator for a new start /stage(tuna sandwich), adaptation (making tuna sandwich at home) Voluntarily work - the writing group and school visits as voluntarily work to his university requirements. Radio interview- voice reaching out. Stereotyping - changing the image about refugees in the society and media, the truth, human being, They are asked to describe things around in writing (like Birmingham) so writing in a way connected them to the new society and broke barriers. Writing makes them of the cultural differences, stages of their lives, and things that never happened before.	Length of stay in the UK Bilingual speaker- his reaction to british English Theme: language learning as an entrance to writing group To what limit is he willing to blind in the society "wait, I am not a native speaker" "You know that? The Arabic way" There is a stigma about refugees that refugees feel responsible to change - they want the UK community to be more open to change "we don't build any barriers with newcomers to the group" Writing can bring their sense of home back "nostalgia"- reading his piece about food "talking about this brings tear to my eyes, because I have read it loud" [redacted] shares my background in being from the middle east, we share the

Appendix 7: Example of Translated interview to Arabic (used for one participant)

1. هل يمكن أن تخبرني قليلاً عن نفسك؟ العمر والتعليم والمهنة والحياة الاجتماعية.
2. منذ متى وأنت في المملكة المتحدة؟
3. كم لغة تتحدث؟
4. متى تعلمت اللغة الإنجليزية؟
5. كيف تعرف نفسك كمستخدم للغة الإنجليزية؟ (متحدث أصلي، متحدث بطلاقة ، متعلم للغة الإنجليزية .. إلخ)
6. هل انضممت إلى أي مجموعات للكتابة الإبداعية في بلدك؟
7. منذ متى وأنت عضو في مجموعة الكتابة الإبداعية هذه؟

المجموعة الأولى:

8. هل كتبت بشكل ابداعي قبل الانضمام للمجموعة؟

- إذا كان الأمر كذلك، ما هي تجربتك في الكتابة الإبداعية؟ هل نشرت؟
- إذا لم يكن كذلك، (الانتقال إلى Q9)

9. ما الذي يدفعك لتكون عضوا في هذه المجموعة؟
10. كيف تساهم جوانب حياتك في كتاباتك؟ (ذكريات، أحداث ، ..)
11. كيف تشعر كونك كاتب؟
12. هل غيرتك الكتابة بشكل ابداعي بأي شكل من الأشكال؟

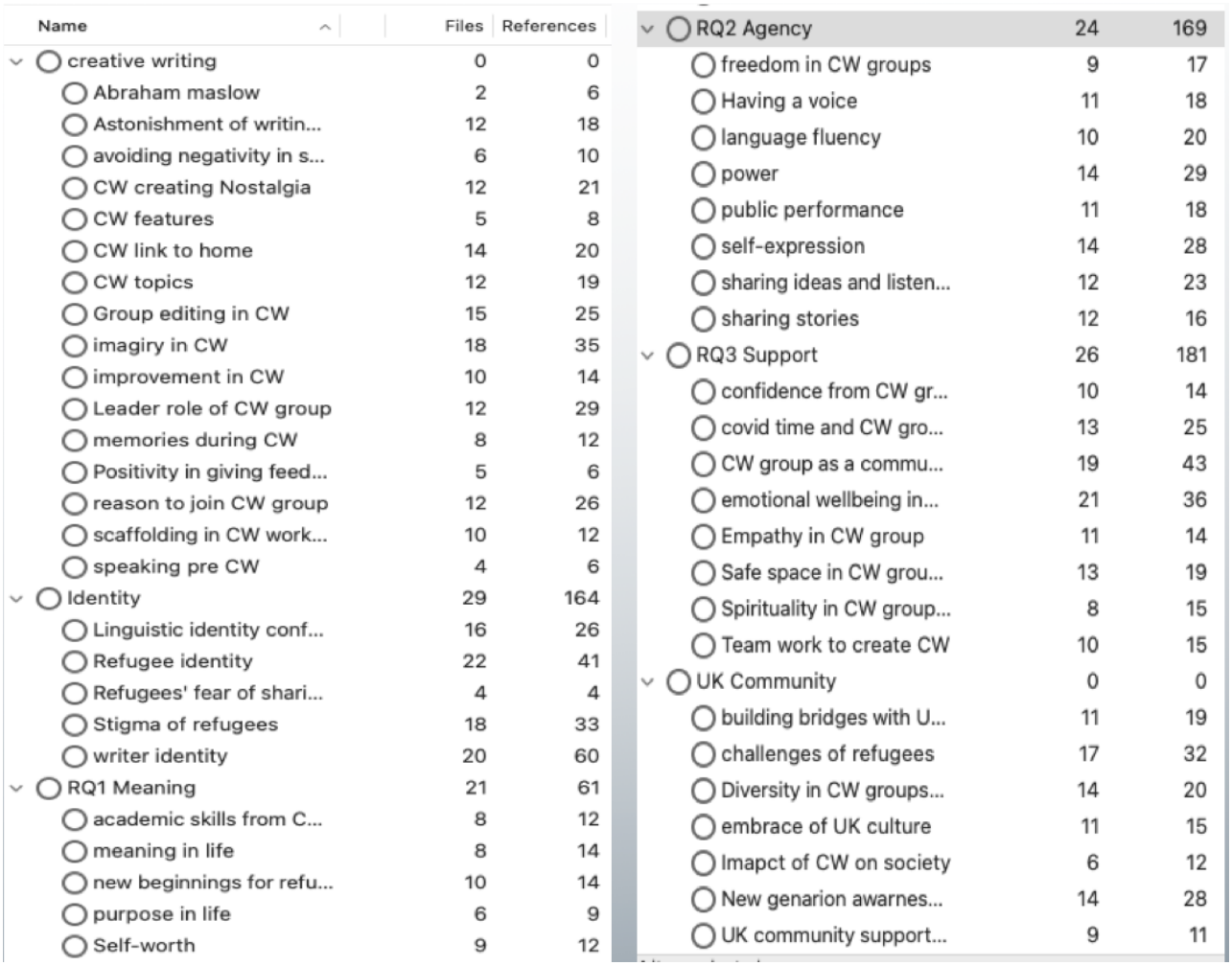
المجموعة الثانية:

13. ككاتب، كيف تستفيد من ارتباطك بالمجموعة؟
14. كيف يتطور صوتك في هذه المجموعة؟ هل تشعر أن صوتك ورأيك مسموع؟
15. هل تشعر بأنك أكثر قدرة على الاستجابة للأحداث من حولك أو الأشياء التي تلاحظها بعد أن بدأت الكتابة بشكل إبداعي؟
16. ما الذي مكنك الانتماء إلى هذه المجموعة من تحقيقه وربما لم تكن قادرًا على القيام به بطريقة أخرى؟
17. إلى أي مدى تمثل نفسك في كتاباتك؟

المجموعة الثالثة:

18. بأي طرق ترتبط بأعضاء آخرين في المجموعة؟
19. كيف تشعر تجاه الانتماء إلى هذه المجموعة؟
20. هل يدعم الأعضاء بعضهم البعض في هذه المجموعة؟ نعم) كيف)؟ لا (هل يمكنك التفكير في أسباب ذلك؟ الافتقار إلى الثقة، لا يوجد الكثير من القواسم المشتركة).
21. أخبرني عن وقت انتشار كوفيد 19، كيف استفدت من عضويتك في المجموعة؟
22. هل تشعر أن هذه المجموعة تدعم تطورك ككاتب؟

Appendix 8: Coding screenshot from NVivo, (Abductive Coding)



Name	Files	References
creative writing	0	0
Abraham maslow	2	6
Astonishment of writin...	12	18
avoiding negativity in s...	6	10
CW creating Nostalgia	12	21
CW features	5	8
CW link to home	14	20
CW topics	12	19
Group editing in CW	15	25
imagiry in CW	18	35
improvement in CW	10	14
Leader role of CW group	12	29
memories during CW	8	12
Positivity in giving feed...	5	6
reason to join CW group	12	26
scaffolding in CW work...	10	12
speaking pre CW	4	6
Identity	29	164
Linguistic identity conf...	16	26
Refugee identity	22	41
Refugees' fear of shari...	4	4
Stigma of refugees	18	33
writer identity	20	60
RQ1 Meaning	21	61
academic skills from C...	8	12
meaning in life	8	14
new beginnings for refu...	10	14
purpose in life	6	9
Self-worth	9	12
RQ2 Agency	24	169
freedom in CW groups	9	17
Having a voice	11	18
language fluency	10	20
power	14	29
public performance	11	18
self-expression	14	28
sharing ideas and listen...	12	23
sharing stories	12	16
RQ3 Support	26	181
confidence from CW gr...	10	14
covid time and CW gro...	13	25
CW group as a commu...	19	43
emotional wellbeing in...	21	36
Empathy in CW group	11	14
Safe space in CW grou...	13	19
Spirituality in CW group...	8	15
Team work to create CW	10	15
UK Community	0	0
building bridges with U...	11	19
challenges of refugees	17	32
Diversity in CW groups...	14	20
embrace of UK culture	11	15
Imapct of CW on society	6	12
New genarion awarnes...	14	28
UK community support...	9	11

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