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Article:

Refugees' Stories: Empathy, Agency, Solidarity
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Abstract
Story-telling is a significant practice for refugees. Stories of persecution are a crucial component of the evidence on which claims for asylum are based. They are also deployed by those who seek to foster greater solidarity with refugees – journalists, activists, refugees themselves. But what kind of solidarity is involved in 'solidarity with refugees'? I answer this with reference to two models: political and expressional solidarity, and draw out the understudied relationships between stories and empathy, and empathy and solidarity. While there is evident value in stories, I argue that storytelling as a practice of solidarity faces both a practical and a normative tension. Furthermore, to the extent that these have the potential to undermine the agency of refugees, they raise important issues for solidarity movements.

1. Introduction

In 2016, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon responded to the unfolding refugee crisis[2] by declaring it 'is not a crisis of numbers, it is a crisis of solidarity'. He went on:

> With equitable responsibility sharing, there would be no crisis for host countries. […]
> we let fear and ignorance get in the way. Human needs end up being overshadowed,
> and xenophobia speaks louder than reason. (Moon, 2016)

By implication, it is the absence or failure of solidarity that allows xenophobia to speak louder than reason. If we are to solve the crisis, i.e., if we are to respond adequately to the human need that is urgently manifest, we need not just political institutions and agreements about burden-sharing, but also more solidarity.[3] , Thus, as well as asking what practical actions must be taken, and by whom, we must also ask how we can foster and sustain solidaristic attitudes. One answer is to tell stories, or better, to facilitate the means and the space for refugees to tell their own stories, and to amplify their voices. As, Diane T Meyers (2016, 23) argues, 'By dispelling ignorance of or confusion about victims' moral claims, empathy with victims' stories can erode indifference to them'. Activists deploy refugees' stories to engage the wider public and garner support for their cause. Mainstream news reports focus on specific stories to illustrate widespread injustices. Scholars use refugees' stories (some fact, some fiction) in academic writing on refugee or migration issues (e.g., Miller 2016).

This suggests some consensus around the thought that through the telling of refugees' stories, understanding is enlarged, and empathy is engaged. I do not claim that hearing stories is, on its own, sufficient to generate solidarity, only that it has a valuable role to play. While this role is assumed in everyday practice by media editors, activists and others, and is invoked by some theorists of solidarity and cosmopolitan norms,[4] it is currently under-theorised. There has been some recent philosophical discussion of the ethics storytelling (Meyers 2016; Meretoja and Davies 2018), and, separately, a resurgence of philosophical interest in solidarity (Scholz 2007, 2008; Taylor 2015; Kolers 2016), but no sustained discussion of storytelling as a practice of solidarity. In this article I draw these literatures into dialogue to consider whether and how storytelling can foster solidarity between citizens of host states and refugees. Feminist theorists have previously highlighted the danger that solidarities across inequalities of power and experience may be fraught with misunderstanding or engender further harm. I assess the extent to which storytelling as a practice of solidarity with refugees can mitigate these risks. This is important if today's solidarity movements are to avoid perpetuating past injustices.

My first task is to define solidarity (section 2). I draw on Sally Scholz (2008) and Ashley Taylor (2015) to propose that solidarity with refugees be understood as combining elements of political and expressional solidarity. In section 3 I begin to unpack storytelling, examining the link between stories and empathy, and between empathy and solidarity. In section 4 I go on to explore some complications that arise from public narratives of refugees' stories. One is already familiar in the literature on refugees and relates to tropes of victimhood. My focus here is on the ways in which such tropes undermine perceptions of agency, which in turn undermines the very solidarity that stories are intended to foster and sustain. This analysis ultimately exposes both a practical and a normative tension within storytelling as a practice of solidarity. Finally, the connection between agents and their stories raises a further issue: the question of ownership of refugees' stories. In conclusion, I offer a qualified defence of storytelling as a practice of solidarity.

2. What is solidarity?

As sketched above, solidarity is related to empathy, and stands in opposition to xenophobia and fear. I assume that, within liberal democracies, formal, government-led practices of solidarity, such as admitting large numbers of refugees for resettlement, require a reasonably solidaristic attitude amongst citizens.[5] If we can foster and sustain public solidarity, we have more hope of influencing political leaders to pursue more just institutions.

One might think of 'fostering and sustaining' solidarity as separate tasks. I find this view puzzling. The task of fostering or creating solidarity from literally nothing would be challenging, but that is not the situation we face. Rather, we have to work within the relations bequeathed to us by our histories, which have often been fraught and exploitative, but nevertheless contain contacts and conversations. So, the starting point might be one where the first task is 'moral repair' (Walker 2007), or it might be one where agents are building on different kinds of contacts or shared understandings. But even here there will be something to build upon, so practices that hope to or have the effect of building solidarity will both be creating new solidarity (bringing more agents into solidary relations) at the same time as sustaining bonds between those already engaged in some shared project or shared understanding. Clearly, such a practice may face setbacks and reversals, but this will again entail building on what is there, not beginning from a blank slate. Seen in this light, fostering and sustaining solidarity is an iterative process, not a linear one.

Having set aside this worry about process, we can turn to the task of identifying more precisely what solidarity means. Most commentators take solidarity to be a relation between members of a community of some kind (Bayertz 1999), but there is scope for considerable debate within that general definition. The literature identifies various senses of solidarity, including political solidarity (Scholz 2007, 2008), moral solidarity (Kolers 2016), transnational solidarity (Brunkhorst 2005, Gould 2007), cosmopolitan solidarity (Derpmann 2009, Pensky 2007), social solidarity (Durkheim 1984), expressional and robust solidarity (Taylor 2015), and ironic solidarity (Rorty 1993, 1989). I cannot undertake a comprehensive review of all possible definitions here. Rather, I am interested in the kind of relation envisaged in calls for solidarity with refugees.

While refugees at least share a defined legal status, and may share some of the same experiences, refugees and asylum seekers have diverse cultural, religious and political affinities; there is no reason to assume homogeneity within refugee populations (Sigona 2014).[6] Yet the idea of 'solidarity *with refugees*', taken as a single entity, is a popular trope among those campaigning for better conditions for refugees, and/or for states to accept more refugees. In practice, sometimes this means solidarity with *these specific refugees*, as in the actions of volunteer-led efforts to provide immediate practical support such as food, shelter, medical assistance. In this case, when activists profess solidarity with refugees, they implicitly recognise refugees as people in need of material assistance. More often, calls

for solidarity with refugees are directed towards a broader group of people seeking asylum. Indeed, expressions of solidarity with refugees, and the very idea of a refugee regime, also denotes that people are entitled to be recognised as political agents as well as having material needs met, that is, as entitled to exercise their civil and political rights, even (especially) when this status is denied or abused by the government of their country of origin. Thus, to express solidarity with refugees is to recognise refugees as vulnerable (hence having material needs), but also as agents (hence having political needs).

Pace Kolers (2016), if solidarity stands in opposition to xenophobia and fear, then it cannot simply be reduced to relations of justice, it has an affective dimension too. To be in solidarity with another person or group of persons is not simply to provide what is due to them,[7] it is to care about what happens to them to at least some minimal degree, or to care about shared goals.[8] The paradigmatic solidary relation is often thought to be the trade union, where members are engaged in a shared struggle for the collective good of members. Sally Scholz's conception of political solidarity detaches shared struggle from mutual benefit:

> Political solidarity involves the efforts and sacrifices of individuals who commit to a cause with those who suffer. A collective movement that simultaneously serves those in need while it challenges the social structure that created that need, political solidarity is a social movement that unites individuals because of their shared commitment to a cause or goal. (Scholz 2007, 40)

Solidarity understood in this way involves commitment to a cause *with* those suffering, addressing the underlying injustice. This can be contrasted with Richard Rorty's (1993) well-known account of solidarity in which hearing 'sad and sentimental stories' prompts pity for the sufferer. The overtly political character of Scholz's conception of solidarity sees parties to the solidary relation as equally agents, and also entails a different purpose for the solidaristic movement: the aim is not simply to alleviate need and suffering (as in Rorty), nor to secure collective benefits (as in trade unions), but to 'challenge the social structure' causing injustice to specific others. This normative conception of political solidarity seems apt to capture what activists demand in calls for 'solidarity with refugees'.

What Scholz shares with Rorty and many other theorists of solidarity is the conviction that solidarity involves 'unity'.[9] For Scholz, the shared political goal provides a unity which binds members of the solidary group to one another. Solidary implies an affirmation of togetherness: to say that I stand in solidarity with you is to proclaim that we are a 'we'.[10] But if I say that I stand in solidarity with refugees, I am claiming to stand in solidarity with a groups of persons with whom I may share very little. As a native-born European citizen with a comfortable life and a given political outlook, I will not necessarily share an overt political project with refugees trying to obtain asylum in Europe, in the way that Scholz's political solidarity suggests. Of course, citizens share with refugees the objective of securing for refugees the protection to which they are legally entitled. Yet, this objective has very different salience for citizens (who enjoy the protection of their government) and refugees (whose very survival may be at stake). Disparities arise in other solidary movements; e.g., for members of an academic trade union the salience of better working conditions will be felt more keenly by junior academics on insecure contracts than it will be by tenured professors. But the mutuality of belonging to the academic community helps bridge this divide. In Scholz's sense, solidarity involves a shared commitment that is underpinned by understanding of the suffering to which the solidaristic partner responds. As I develop further below, this may be difficult to achieve where participants have radically different standing. Should we then conclude that I cannot really be in solidarity with refugees?

Here it is helpful to introduce the distinction Ashley Taylor (2015) draws between expressional and robust solidarity. Robust solidarity is experienced within in-groups, e.g., amongst African Americans,

there is, on Tommie Shelby's (2005) account, a plausible shared understanding and/or a shared context of experience, together with a shared interest in addressing injustice, which can lead to mutual trust and a shared sense of identity. Robust solidarity is solidified by shared interests held by the group, and by members having some identification with the group, either spontaneously, or in terms of how they are seen by others (Taylor 2015, 131-134). Plausibly, refugees from different countries of origin who do not otherwise have much in common could come to develop a sense of robust solidarity vis-à-vis fellow refugees in virtue of their shared experience of refugeehood, though they would not inevitably do so.

Given the distinctiveness of the experience of being a refugee (Sigona 2014), most non-refugees will be excluded from this robust sense of solidarity. But it need not follow that the lack of shared experience renders solidarity impossible. a Taylor's expressional solidarity is based not on shared experience but on empathy, on an imaginative capacity to understand the situation and needs of others to at least some meaningful degree:

> Mutual trust […will be] a demonstration of oneself as trustworthy in the eyes of the group toward which one has solidarity. The disposition to empathy, though not returned, will involve the same commitment by the individual in both forms of solidarity as will identification with the group. (Taylor 2015, 140)

Seen in these terms, solidarity is largely unidirectional. It is a disposition on the part of one set of people to help another, and, implicitly at least, it is also a commitment to actively provide help. The mutuality that is generally understood to underpin solidary relations is not provided by a shared context or experience, nor is it provided exclusively by the mutual commitment found in Scholz's political solidarity, which has unequal importance for the parties concerned: the action undertaken here is on the part of citizens of receiving states on behalf of refugees. Of course, refugees can and do campaign on their own behalf, and can and do contribute to defining practical needs that are met by solidarity campaign groups, and to shaping responses to policy articulated by activist and NGO networks. But the point to note is that, unlike in cases of robust solidarity, and unlike in Scholz's political solidarity or in many accounts of social solidarity, in Taylor's definition of expressional solidarity there is no established set of practices and experiences that would engender mutual trust, rather expressions of solidarity towards another group serve as a 'demonstration of oneself as trustworthy in the eyes of the group toward which one has solidarity' (Taylor 2015, 140). Key to this, on Taylor's account, is an empathetic disposition.

3. Empathy and Solidarity
If expressional solidarity is largely unidirectional, then there is a danger that when I express solidarity with you, I project my own vision of you into the solidaristic relationship, and thus my solidarity is not with you as you, but with you as my idea of you. It is prudent to be wary of such solidarity; there is a long history of sincere and well-intentioned action to 'help' the less fortunate that was predicated on at best a deeply flawed understanding of the people being helped, and that was in fact deeply damaging. Although she does not discuss the case of refugees, Scholz is alert to the difficulties of developing solidarity between persons and groups who have different life experiences and where there is an imbalance of power. She defines political solidarity as 'a personal commitment, and in making that commitment, one also commits to an epistemological project to continually seek a variety of perspectives in attempts to understand an unjust situation' (2008: 187).[11] Like Gould's (2007) transnational solidarity, and consistent with earlier feminist work on the potential for harm in the privileged presuming to speak for the disadvantaged (e.g., Spelman 2000), we find in Scholz's political solidarity an attitude of deference towards the knowledge and claims of people with whom more

privileged agents profess solidarity as a corrective to the potential for undermining the agency of those suffering injustice.

But what isn't clear in the scholarship is how, practically, the requisite knowledge and understanding of the lives of marginalised people, and their needs and desires, is to be acquired, such that this deference can practically be achieved.[12] Mihaela Mihai (2017) helpfully proposes a role for literature in 'seducing' the privileged to become aware of epistemic processes of marginalisation, but this still leaves unanswered and indeed unasked some relevant questions about the work that stories might do here. In the absence of direct engagement between citizens and people who are refugees, storytelling in various media would seem to have   potential to introduce mutuality into expressional solidarity and be an important avenue towards Scholz's epistemological project, thus guarding against a solidarity moved by pity rather than empathy. Hearing and reading refugees' stories can develop empathy in citizens of receiving states and increase their knowledge and understanding of the lives, needs and desires of refugees. Refugees' stories thus function as a form of second-order engagement with refugees themselves, and as a gesture towards demonstrating the trustworthiness to which Taylor alludes.[13]

However, there is a protracted debate about whether empathy (i) is even possible, (ii) is desirable, and (iii) has any role to play in moral reasoning. Perfect empathy, in the sense of generating complete understanding, is unlikely even between people who know each other well. Across divergent cultural backgrounds and experiences, it seems utterly implausible. Hence, Peter Goldie (2011) doubts whether full empathy is really achievable. He distinguishes between my taking your perspective as you, and my taking your perspective as I imagine I would be, were I in your shoes. This matters if we are to have a meaningful empathy based on you as you are, and not on my idea of you, so I see the force of the worry that Goldie's argument raises. However, the difference between these perspectives looks more like a sliding scale than a binary; there are better and worse versions of the latter perspective. We are neither completely comprehensible to each other, nor completely alien. I therefore contend that empathy is certainly possible, and that those who reject the possibility of empathy either set too high the bar for the conditions of imaginatively understanding others that empathy entails, or work with so specific a definition of empathy that it is divorced from everyday usage (e.g., Bloom 2017). Empathy is valuable for the kinds of reasons that Meyers (2016), Nussbaum (1998), Oxley (2011), Scholz (2008) and others accept, namely, that in imaginatively understanding, to at least some meaningful degree, the experiences of others, especially but not only those who have experienced profound suffering or disadvantage, 'people can extend their understanding of the scope of human rights norms as well as their understanding of the urgency of protecting people from human rights abuse.' (Meyers 2016: 145). I do not pretend that this happens immediately nor automatically, yet, by attending to the stories of others, people can be moved to think more deeply about these experiences. By reflecting on specific stories of one refugee, people may be moved to think more generally about the situation of others in need of asylum. Empathy with particular stories can motivate a generalisable moral reflection (Oxley 2011).[14]

To be clear, empathy is not itself a moral judgement; empathy as a motivating experience that informs solidarity is mediated by values (Tappolet 2016), and while empathy may prompt an affective response, a reasoned judgment is needed to distinguish whether someone who suffers has been wronged, and this will generally make a difference to the kinds of response, the kinds of solidarities, that are appropriate. But, unless we are motivated by pure reason, empathy will often underpin whether we bother to make these assessments at all:

> empathy makes salient another's particular emotions, concerns, reasons, interests, and considerations in such a way that they are relevant and important to the empathizer, so that she is motivated to respond to these concerns. (Oxley 2011, 80)

Oxley is clear that empathetic deliberation is distinct from moral deliberation, but for her the former is a prompt for the latter, a view supported by neuroscientists as well as moral psychologists (Oxley 2011). No doubt there will be failures of empathy – there will be cases where people are not moved at all, or where people close their imaginations to the experience of others.[15] Yet many social movements have succeeded in gaining attention for their claims of justice by telling their stories.

Drawing on this picture of empathy, we may build on Scholz's and Taylor's work and say that in learning from refugees' stories in an empathetic way, citizens who profess solidarity with refugees may fulfil their obligations to engage in an epistemological project, fostering greater equality within the political solidarity group. Direct engagement with people who are refugees would also serve this function. But I am proceeding from the assumption that there are reasons of efficiency (storytelling in the media, e.g., will reach many more people) and demandingness (as we will see below, some refugees may not wish to share their stories), for evaluating storytelling as a proxy for this. Moreover, direct engagement seems more likely to occur where people are already somewhat solidaristically inclined. The iterative process of building solidarity with which I began must include space for drawing people into thinking about refugee issues, and encountering refugees' stories in the media, arts, and other public forums offers potential for this. The dissemination of refugees' stories is therefore beneficial to refugees, in that it can serve to foster and then develop the expressional-political sense of solidarity.

As already noted, this project of building solidarity does not begin from a blank slate. On the contrary, many of those currently seeking refuge in Europe and North America are migrating from either post-colonial states or from conflicts in which Western influence is palpable. It seems to me that professing solidarity with refugees is expressional (in Taylor's sense) not only toward refugees, but also, perhaps more importantly, towards fellow citizens and governments in receiving states. The solidarity claim putatively expresses values regarding the nature of the political community and relations between strangers in a world of sovereign states.[16] It is a predictable outcome of there being (imperfect) institutions of sovereign responsibility for citizens that there will be refugees (Owen 2016). I suggest that what is being expressed in claims of solidarity with refugees is a commitment to a vision of a shared political community, one that will be open to persons fleeing persecution and welcoming to those who need protection, wherever they come from, and whoever they happen to be. In this sense, the affirmation of solidarity with refugees is about the kind of political community campaigners consider themselves to belong to, or want to belong to, as well as about specific relations to distinct refugees.[17] The actions undertaken in support of these campaigns will impact on the lives of particular refugees, but they have a wider impact in terms of expressing a solidaristic vision of the community.

4. Refugees' stories

There are several domains within which refugees' stories are publicly told,[18] either by refugees themselves or mediators of one kind or another: in asylum hearings, in the media, academic discourse and NGO reports, and in the arts, e.g., in plays, novels, etc. In each of these domains, mediation may play a significant role: Translators may give the testimony of speakers a different tone or emphasis, and the presence of lawyers, journalists and other professionals will also shape how stories are told, both by the directions given by questions that fit the stories to a purpose, and by the formality of roles and power relations within the dialogue.

In asylum hearings and in media and NGO reports, there is also a sense of what kinds of stories are likely to be well received, and to win the hearing or engage the attention of the NGO staff (Powell 2015, Souter 2016). There are, in this sense, paradigmatic stories of refugeehood, and, implicitly paradigmatic characterisations of the refugee. In the arts, mediation will also occur where stories are

written by persons other than the refugee themselves, and in memoirs and fiction or drama produced by or in collaboration with refugees, the process of translating a set of experiences into some kind of narrative for an audience is another form of mediation, albeit one over which the authoring refugee retains control. Here too, paradigmatic expectations of stories will shape the contexts in which stories are received.

The character of asylum tribunals is typically prosecutorial and focuses on the applicant's credibility.[19] Asylum tribunals are backward looking: they probe an applicant's story and ask whether the applicant has been truthful. But the test of whether or not their application is legitimate is forward looking: the relevant question is whether it is 'reasonably likely'[20] t the applicant would face persecution if returned to their country of origin (Goodwin-Gill and McAdam 2007). Nevertheless, the perceived truthfulness of the asylum seeker plays a crucial role in their being accepted as refugees (Sigona 2014).[21]

> At UNHCR, in the wake of 9/11, the refugees said that the emphasis during interviews was on lies, how best to catch out the asylum-seekers, find holes in their testimonies so that they could be turned down ... a new stamp had been devised - LOC, 'lack of credibility' - and it was now stamped on to most of the files as a reason for rejection. (Moorehead, 2005, 23)

This sceptical orientation of tribunals is not arbitrary, nor is it unique to the UNHCR. The UK government created an avowedly 'hostile environment' for migrants, aiming to make life so unpleasant for illegal immigrants that they would leave voluntarily. However, lawful residents, including refugees, have been targeted under the policy. These examples of institutional hostility are symptomatic of a wider political climate in which refugees suffer what Miranda Fricker (2007) calls a 'credibility deficit'. In this climate, refugees as a group are subject to 'testimonial injustice': Fricker understands 'conveying knowledge to others by telling them' (2007, 1), to be a basic epistemic practice, and she argues that prejudice on the part of hearers leads to a 'credibility deficit' in members of marginalised groups, and conversely a credibility surplus in the advantaged. For Fricker, to be recognised as someone capable of 'conveying knowledge to others by telling them' is a basic and important marker of our standing in an equal relation to one another, in other words, as agents. Crucially, even the attentive listener is likely to be affected by prevailing credibility deficits and surpluses. It is vain to imagine that we can wholly escape prevailing prejudices. This is the context in which Scholz's epistemological project must be pursued, and stories might be deployed, to foster solidarity with refugees.

4.1 Media, NGO reports and tropes of victimhood
Consider the most widely circulated refugees' stories: these will be principally in the media. In section 2, I argued that hearing refugees' stories can raise awareness and foster empathetic understanding. Such stories serve as 'a call to care' (Westlund 2018). However, there are at least two sets of concerns here. One relates to the practice of gathering refugees' stories by journalists, academics, and NGO staff for the purposes of either research or for transmitting in media and campaigns. All these groups are professionals and are, in principle, bound by codes of ethics, which should require that due consideration be given to the impact of asking people to tell their stories when they have experienced trauma. But in practice, such codes are not always be fully observed. The pressures on journalists to get a story, inadequate training and supervision for researchers, resource constraints in NGOs, or similar factors, may lead to practices of collecting stories, however well-intentioned, having a damaging effect on refugees. Here is an example recounted in Meyers (2016, 180):

> They asked us to lead them to women who had been raped so they could record our stories. "Tell us what happened – how did you feel?" Women were so upset after the

interviews, we did not know what to do. We never heard from them [the researchers] again – we decided then that we would never work with researchers again. *They stole our stories*. (Women's Group, Thailand, 2003; in Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman, 2010, 236; Meyers' emphasis)

Here the role of intermediaries (journalists, academics) in a putative relation of solidarity between those who consume news and other reports, and those who are the subjects of these reports, is potentially corrosive of the very solidarity that is (presumably) hoped for, as well as directly damaging to the people who told their stories. The conduct of the researchers in this case undermined the putative claim to trustworthiness that Taylor identifies in expressional solidarity. Moreover, the agency of the individual story-teller is undermined by this process, rather than respected. This will not always be the case, nor do I necessarily claim that poor practice is widespread, I simply stress that story-collecting and transmitting have an ethical dimension that must be considered whilst weighing the instrumental value of stories for fostering solidarity.[22] .

The kind of narrative sought in the example above – one of trauma and victimhood – is familiar in accounts of refugees, particularly in mainstream media. Images of women and children are over-represented in news reports of refugees, particularly given that greater numbers of refugees are often young men. The reverse is true in reports of economic migrants and in reports that emphasise security concerns (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017). The presentation of refugees as victims feeds into notions of deservingness and credibility in the context of a public discourse that is generally hostile to the rights of refugees: If the baseline assumption is that many refugees are undeserving – that they seek economic opportunities and are not really fleeing persecution – then to pierce that hostility and make space for empathy and solidarity to develop, it is necessary to present the most compelling and uncomplicated stories. Refugees must be innocent and helpless. Presenting refugees as agents is disruptive of that narrative, so the paradigmatic refugee is the helpless child.[23] Those who do not fit the paradigm will find it harder to have their stories heard (Harsh 2018).

In recent years the most discussed and perhaps the most arresting image of the European refugee crisis was the Syrian infant Alan Kurdi, who drowned in the Mediterranean, just off the coast of Turkey, in 2015. His image was widely circulated in both mainstream media and social media. While the public response to this and other tragedies prompted greater political engagement for a time, the heightened attention has not led to a durable solution to the issue of burden-sharing within Europe, nor to reliably safer access routes for refugees. What interests me here is the ways that the response to his death confirmed the archetype of the refugee as voiceless and innocent.

Twenty years ago, Lisa Malkki wrote:

Refugees stop being specific persons and become pure victims in general: universal man, universal woman, universal child, and, taken together, universal family. […] This dehistoricizing universalism creates a context in which it is difficult for people in the refugee category to be approached as historical actors rather than simply as mute victims. It can strip from them the authority to give credible narrative evidence or testimony about their own condition in politically and institutionally consequential forums. (Malkki 1996, 378)

The photographer who took the iconic images of Kurdi's body, Nilüfer Demir, initially tweeted a photo of Kurdi with the hashtag (in Turkish) 'humanity washed ashore'. She could hardly have known his name at the time, but the reference to the universal 'humanity' is significant. It can be read as a solidaristic gesture, insofar as it locates this particular dead child as belonging in the same family ('humanity') as the photographer and those with whom the photographer shared the image, which,

on social media, is potentially a very expansive group. Indeed, some scholars observed an increase in empathy and solidarity prompted by the coverage of Kurdi's death.[24]

However, the difficulty here is that the dominance of such paradigmatic images of refugeehood reinforces the kinds of narrative hierarchies referred to in the previous section, where some stories have greater currency in claims for asylum than others. Moreover, the archetype of refugees as voiceless victims, dehistoricized and passive, awaiting the agency of journalists and others to tell their stories and implore Western states to grant them asylum, diminishes the perceived agency of people who are refugees at the same time as contributing to a picture of refugees as a homogenized other (Rajaram 2002, Sigona 2014). In other words, the passivity of the paradigmatic refugee reinforces the problem of testimonial injustice: if to be an agent is to be a person who can 'convey knowledge to others by telling them', then to be incapable of telling one's story is to fail as an agent. To be denied space to tell a more complicated story than one that fits neatly within tropes of victimhood is another form of exclusion. Hence Scholz enjoins solidary partners to seek 'a *variety* of perspectives' (2008: 187, emphasis added), but, as is becoming clear, this is both demanding in and of itself, and practically difficult given the pressures in public discourse that inhibit the dissemination of a variety of stories that disrupt dominant narratives.

Chouliaraki and Zaborowski also note

> the diffusion of the moral and legal scandal involved in [Kurdi's] death through a plethora of emotional calls for solidarity. What was lost in the process was the confrontation with key failures of 'our' security priorities, which, in Basaran's words, 'dilutes the legal duty to rescue' and classifies people in terms of 'worthy lives' that fall within the duty to rescue and 'charitable lives' becoming a question of benevolence. (2017, 624).

In the shadow of international terrorism, a further characterisation emerges in the securitisation of refugee crises: that of the threatening life or body, who takes advantage of refugee regimes to visit harm upon receiving states. Meyers suggests that individuals whose stories do not fit within tropes of innocence are disadvantaged by the very thing that should render them equals: their agency. The narrowness of the space for telling refugees' stories in a context where paradigms of victimhood dominate is a further dimension of the epistemic injustice visited upon individual refugees.

Meyers sees in the characterisation of some as 'worthy (innocent) lives', and others as threats, the operation of a standard of innocence that is incompatible with norms of agency and is simply divorced from the experience of many who have escaped persecution. If one thinks of the obstacles refugees face, one might expect bribery of corrupt officials, buying passage from people smugglers, disregard for laws of trespass. It is difficult for refugees to present stories of innocent suffering at the same time as giving an account of how they resourcefully crossed borders, seas and deserts (Powell 2015). In these circumstances, one cannot but fail the innocence test. To that extent, we may say that refugees suffer a specific form of testimonial injustice.

However, Serene Khader reads this situation in a different way:
> Meyers is undoubtedly correct that some people are denied victim status because they have used their agency in morally murky ways. But I worry that the attribution of innocence does not track actual features of the exercise of agency with much reliability in our social world. Instead, the claim that a person is not really innocent seems often to be a post hoc rationalization of the sorting of people into victim and nonvictim groups based on social group membership. (Khader 2018, 19)

The thought that the denial of innocence is at least sometimes a post hoc rationalisation of sorting people into the 'worthy lives' *vs.* threat group seems to me to be spot on. This returns us to a point raised in the previous section: If solidarity with refugees engenders concerns not only for the well-being of refugees who may come to receiving states, but also for the kind of political community that one inhabits, and, as part of that, its general welcoming-ness towards refugees, then it matters very much how citizens proclaiming solidarity construct their identities, the identities of refugees, and the relation between their identities as putative solidary partner and the neediness of others. This takes us beyond Taylor's sense of the expression of solidarity as means of attesting to trustworthiness. To really be trustworthy of solidarity, the privileged would have to cultivate an understanding of self that did not perpetuate divisive categorisations of persons. Indeed, that understanding is itself an obstacle to empathy.

This raises problems for the expressional-political sense of solidarity I have been developing. I have argued that attending to the stories of refugees has the potential to answer Scholz's demand that citizens professing solidarity commit to an epistemological project to better understand the injustice and practice deference to those affected. But, *pace* Scholz (2008), the idea of the advantaged engaging with stories *in order to better save those suffering* constructs the citizen as 'always already' interpellated as saviour, as Khader would put it. Scholz would certainly be sympathetic to these concerns (if not to the Althusserian framing of them), but this challenge does expose the privilege of the epistemological project she proposes as corrective to the imbalance of power.

Khader (2018) argues against empathy, holding that a detailed political engagement with the facts of colonial and neo-colonial relations between the developed and the developing world and their impact on the current prevalence of human rights abuses is more valuable than the telling of victims' stories. This speaks to Chouliaraki and Zaborowski's point above, that in the response to the tragedy of Kurdi's death, attention was deflected from the 'security priorities' that had a direct impact on the safety of migrants crossing the Mediterranean. I see this criticism, but, for the reasons already adduced in their favour, it strikes me as mistaken to reject altogether the value of stories. No-one is suggesting that stories on their own can do all the normative work required to bring about meaningful solidarity with refugees. Rather, the practice of telling and hearing stories is part of a larger whole, in which close political analysis will also be crucial.

Yet, despite this endorsement, the tensions identified remain. Deploying refugees' stories to call attention to their cause generates a dilemma – stories most successful in prompting engagement may be the most paradigmatic, and problematic. Moreover, however careful the engagement with a variety of refugees' stories, one cannot entirely mitigate the construction of the identity of the citzen-qua-solidarity partner as interpellated as saviour in the normative conceptualisation of solidarity. To the extent that expressional-political solidarity also discloses a civic attitude directed to fellow citizens and one's government, as I argued in section 3, then the identity constructed in the solidarity project is not only one of saviour. Yet, even if only part of the identity constructed in the solidary relation, the interpellation as saviour undermines the 'trustworthiness' on which expressional solidarity rests.

4.2 Who owns stories?
Finally, there is a further issue that is not adequately addressed in any accounts I have found that posit normative value in the telling and hearing of refugees' (or other victims') stories, namely, the question of ownership. In the striking passage quoted above, members of a women's support group recount how NGO researchers 'stole' their stories. In the various configurations of mediation alluded to above, refugees lose degrees of control over their own stories: who gets to choose how and when they are told, in what words, and in what voice. Meyers rightly insists that victims themselves retain ownership rights over their own stories, because 'narration is central to human agency and self-reflection' (Meyers 2018, 44; cf. Bufacchi 2018). Further to Fricker's conception of the human as an agent with

the capacity to transmit knowledge, the picture of the refugee-as-storyteller I am proposing ultimately implies an image of the refugee as an agent with a sense of self deeply connected to their own story. This is not just instrumentally the case in that the refugees' story is an important piece of evidence in asylum hearings, but also in view of the 'the vital part that autobiographical narration plays in individuals' self-understanding and engagement with the world' (Meyers 2018, 44). If this is right, then respecting refugees as agents (which the putative solidary partner should want to do) will entail respecting their story in certain ways. I do not have space to fully elaborate this here, but I will sketch some preliminary implications.

Firstly, processes of mediation, in both asylum hearings and in other contexts such as the media or the arts, can and do have disenfranchising effects on the sense of an individuals' ownership of their story. This might happen by inaccuracies or distortions creeping into the retelling, but it might less obviously happen by the vocabulary and tone or register of voice of the mediator or translator being alien to the story owner. One might object that all storytellers will experience mediation, including, for example, an academic whose argument is relayed to them in unfamiliar terms by a critic. If mediation is mundane, why should any special obligations follow from it? Well, it seems plausible to think that we owe special duties to victims of profound injustice (including but not limited to refugees) to be especially respectful of their stories of their experiences. It would seem to compound the injustice if, in the recounting of their story, it was treated with contempt, exploited, or if the agents' own authority over their story were not appropriately recognised.

If this is right, then it follows that the telling of refugees' stories for the purposes of fostering solidarity is one fraught with ethical questions. It also follows that storytelling and hearing as a practice of solidarity will be demanding in ways not generally recognised. Meyers (2016) proposes a new code of ethics for journalists and others in the collection and dissemination of the stories of victims of human rights abuses.[25] A similar code of ethics might be proposed to govern the solidarity-oriented practices of storytelling engaged in by activists, artists and community organisations who aim to support refugees.

Yet, questions remain: Few refugees' stories will be exclusively their own story, they will touch on the lives of others who also suffered injustice and may continue to do so. What duties are owed to secondary victims (Bufacchi 2018), and who has the right to tell an interwoven story?[26] Does one party have the right to request (or demand) another's silence? To what extent does the right of privacy of one party, or security of one party, weigh against the right of another party to speak the truth and call attention to a grave injustice? I cannot adequately address these questions here, nor do I suggest that they comprehensively defeat the argument the telling of refugees' stories as a means of fostering solidarity with refugees. I raise them as indicative of the complicated ethical issues that remain for anyone committed to a sense of solidarity that is respectful of refugees, their agency, and because of it, their ownership over their own stories.

5. Concluding remarks

My aim in this article is to reflect on the ways in which the telling of refugees' stories is salient for developing solidarity between refugees and citizens in receiving or potentially receiving states. It might be charged that I have made the case for story-telling as problematic, but somewhat neglected the case for the value of story-telling. I agree that there is significant value in the telling of refugees' stories, either by refugees themselves, or by others with knowledge and understanding of refugees' lived experiences, for the purposes of increasing knowledge and empathy amongst those hearing the stories (for want of a better way of putting it), as well as for refugees themselves. I further accept the claim that knowledge and empathy are generally preconditions for effective solidarity. Thus, I take it

that, all other things being equal (which, of course, they never are), it is plausible to expect that increased knowledge and empathy foster greater solidarity.

Nevertheless, my aim here is to consider some complications of this rosy picture, which emerge particularly if one understands the members of the solidary group as equally agents, which, I have argued, one must do on an expressional-political account of solidarity. I have highlighted two tensions, one practical, one normative. The latter arises from the normative conception of solidarity that I have endorsed, bringing together Scholz's and Taylor's work: if one is to respect the agency of those who are suffering and with whom one would express solidarity, one must engage in something like the 'epistemological project' that Scholz demands, and which, I have argued, attending to the stories of refugees might form a part. This project also informs the demonstration of 'trustworthiness' in Taylor's expressional solidarity insofar as it is an empathetic exercise. But the demand itself interpellates the would-be solidarist as saviour, not equal partner, as Khader's analysis of Meyers reveals.

Nevertheless, I have followed Meyers in seeing value in stories, and in endorsing a more diverse picture of the group 'refugees', disrupting the tropes that fit comfortably (or at least more comfortably) with narratives of deservingness and voiceless innocence, which in turn feed into a political context that is overwhelmingly, at times, a 'hostile environment'. That hostile environment also directly impacts upon the testimonial injustice refugees face when telling their stories in tribunals. I have also argued that refugees' ownership over their own story is important to their sense of themselves as agents. Respect for refugees' agency, and recognition of this in both the practices of story-collecting and -telling, and in the content of the stories that are told, are both intrinsically valuable for refugees themselves, and instrumentally valuable for the prospects of fostering and sustaining solidarity. There is, however, a practical tension between the project of engaging sympathy to call attention to the needs of refugees in a crowded media and political context, and giving space to the more nuanced, complicated and potentially unappealing stories of the diverse group of people who are refugees.

Story-telling is a significant practice for refugees. It is a practice demanded of refugees by institutions by whom the status of refugeehood can be granted or withheld. It is also, potentially, an important tool with which to address the 'crisis of solidarity' identified by Ban Ki Moon. Certainly, there have been specific refugees' stories that have cut through the ambient noise of numbers and political failings around refugee protection and have seemed to command public attention, at least for a time. But we should look at the ways in which stories have been told – the identities and paradigms that they affirm or disrupt – as part of the diagnosis of how that crisis came into being, if we are to successfully and ethically engage in storytelling as a practice of solidarity.

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[1] This research was supported by a Research Network Grant from the White Rose Collaboration Fund. I am grateful for this generous funding. I am also grateful to colleagues and partners who attended workshops associated with the 'Understanding Solidarity amid Refugee Crises' network at the universities of Leeds and York. Finally, I am deeply indebted to the following people who read and/or commented on the work that eventually became this article: Sam Durrant, Derek Edyvane, Matthew Festenstein, Joshua Forstenzer, Mollie Gerver, Josh Hobbs, Simon Hope, Cristina Johnston, Dario Mazzola, Sue Mendus, Mihaela Mihai, Violeta Moreno-Lax, Alice Nah, Maggie O'Neill, David Owen, Clara Sandelind, Christine Straehle, James Souter, Madeleine Thorne, Marcia Vera Espinoza, and two anonymous reviewers for JSP.

[2] Some clarifications: The issues discussed here might apply to other migrants, but I focus on refugees. As per the 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee is a person who has fled their country of origin owing to a 'well-founded fear of persecution'. I will not discuss the justice of this definition (cf. Shacknove 1985). I note that it is a political choice to refer to a 'refugee crisis', and doing so uncritically is problematic. Yet, for reasons of space and efficiency, I use this term.

[3] Much public discussion of refugee issues has been framed in terms of solidarity: at a trivial level, e.g., note the popularity of the social media hashtags #solidaritywithrefugees and #istandwithrefugees.

[4] For example, Richard Rorty (1993) invokes the telling of 'sad and sentimental stories' as a means of fostering solidarity, while Martha Nussbaum (1998) grounds support for cosmopolitan norms in a rich and somewhat sentimental education where exposure to a variety of literatures is held to generate a sense of others as fellow humans. In a different mode, Carol Gould (2007) defends the practice of deferring to the solidaristic partner in the practice of generating norms – which would in turn depend upon hearing from the solidary partner their stories concerning their needs and aspirations.

[5] In the context of the European Union, 'solidarity' refers to the practice of burden-sharing between states and the legal and institutional mechanisms which support this. I will not discuss this form of solidarity (see Moreno-Lax 2018).

[6] I will continue in this article to speak about 'refugees' – it would be difficult to avoid doing so – but I recognise that this perpetuates the homogenisation to which Nando Sigona (2014) and others rightly call attention.

[7] Though we may want to insist that the person who professes solidarity but offers no practical assistance within their power, is not really engaged in solidarity.

[8] In contrast, one could (in theory, at least) be moved by a sense of justice to deliver what is due to a person without caring about them.

[9] Rorty, of course, denies that there is any deep metaphysical unity, as he rejects the idea of human nature, but, as has been argued elsewhere, his account of humiliation as a uniquely human (and particularly bad) form of suffering ultimately presumes a unity at the heart of human solidarity (Berry 1986).

[10] The very notion of a 'we' might be controversial for several reasons (Spelman 2000), so I do not claim here that I (as putative solidarity-proclaiming agent) am successful in creating a 'we', rather, that this is a plausible reading of what attestations of solidarity are aiming for.

[11] As a statement of what solidarity entails, this might prompt demandingness worries, insofar as people have limited time and resources, and are already giving up time to be activists. Now, it seems that in order to be adequately respectful activists, they must engage in an ongoing epistemological project as well. Scholz might reasonably reply that on her normative account of solidarity, solidarity just *is* demanding.

[12] Earlier feminist thinkers focused on building a more inclusive feminist movement, but that seems to presuppose direct engagement, which faces practical hurdles in the case of solidarity with refugees who are located in other countries. Scholz (2008: 231-264) discusses the potential for solidarity across continents, e.g., in responding to rape as a war crime, but it is clear that the absence of direct interaction matters for solidarity.

[13] In a similar vein, Joshua Hobbs (2018) proposes engagement with media reports and literature as a form of 'second-order inclusion' in sentimental cosmopolitanism.

[14] It is possible for people to be overwhelmed by emotional responses to the stories, and thus fail to attend to the issues raised. Indeed, Jesse Prinz argues that empathetic distress is likely to be de-motivating, although the studies on which this claim rests seem to rely on participants' reactions to one-off situations rather than political campaigns pursued by diverse agents in various media over time. Moreover, as Meyers (2016: 108-10) notes, epistemic failures and disengagement are not unique to the reception of distressing stories; e.g., I could equally get lost in the figures around migration flows and fail to discern the human experiences behind them.

[15] Note, as well, there is philosophical scepticism about the presumption that empathy is necessary for morality (Prinz 2011). The distinct claim that I make here is not that empathy is a precondition for moral judgment, only that, for most people, empathetic reception of refugees' stories can serve as a prompt for moral deliberation and engagement by making refugees as persons and the injustices they face salient for others who are more privileged. I defend a more general view of this claim in Woods (2012).

[16] These values might entail opposition to competing solidarities, such as the 'robust' solidarities of populist versions of nationhood where these present refugees and migrants in general as a threat to the host culture.

[17] For example, 'Citizens for Sanctuary' is a network of citizen-led initiatives across a growing list of cities that, while having practical implications for how refugees within those cities are received and supported, is also quite obviously expressive of a self-conscious civic attitude.

[18] They are also told in private settings to friends and family, and also to doctors and therapists. My concern here is with storytelling as a public and self-conscious practice.

[19] Testing the veracity of appeals for asylum is legitimate, but, as with victims of domestic violence or sexual assault, best practice should seek to avoid retraumatising those being questioned. The UK government's guidelines require respectful and sensitive treatment of asylum applicants who may have endured trauma, however it is clear that actual practice often fall short of this (Lyons 2018, Schock, Rosner and Knaevelsrud 2015).

[20] This is the standard of proof required in UK law. It may differ in other countries.

[21] There can be good reasons for asylum seekers to be untruthful (Powell 2015, Souter 2016). In another paper I discuss norms of truth and truthfulness in refugees' stories, so I will forbear from further comment here.

[22] Relatedly, journalists and activists must be aware of reasons for reticence on the part of refugees with regard to their stories, not just because of the personal difficulty of recounting trauma, but because of well-founded fears for the safety of friends and family still at risk.

[23] Meyers also mentioned the 'pure' heroic victim, whose exceptional exercise of agency renders him (and it is usually him, not her) innocent in an equivalent way to the innocence of the pathetic victim: neither is a threat to the host society. Consider the example of Mamoudou Gassama, a Malian refugee whose claim for asylum in France had been rejected, but who in 2018 was rewarded with citizenship after he scaled a Parisian building to rescue a child (media reports called him 'Spiderman'). His heroism absolved him of being an 'economic migrant' and facilitated his recognition as a 'refugee' instead.

[24] These increases are as measured in social attitude surveys, i.e., respondents reported a greater sense of 'solidarity' (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017), and in increased charitable donations (Bruneau et al 2017).

[25] I do not have space to discuss this here but am generally sympathetic to the provisions proposed.

[26] I am especially uneasy about the question of who has the right to tell the story of the dead. There would seem to be an obvious case for thinking that persons who know of profound injustice suffered by a dead person might have a duty to tell that person's story. But consider, again, the case of Alan Kurdi, who, as well as having been known only after his death, for his death, in news media, is now widely cited in academic articles.