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| Masterproef aangeboden tot het verkrijgen van het diploma Master of Arts in de **journalistiek**  |  |  |
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*****Refugees have a voice. Let it be heard.***

**FACULTEIT LETTEREN**

**FACULTEIT SOCIALE WETENSCHAPPEN**

CAMPUS SINT-ANDRIES ANTWERPEN

SINT-ANDRIESSTRAAT 2

2000 ANTWERPEN, BELGIË

**Refugee representation in ethnic community radio: a case study approach.**

Door: Maya Toebat

Promotor: Dr. Antoon Cox

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ACADEMIEJAAR 2020-2021



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**FACULTEIT SOCIALE WETENSCHAPPEN**

CAMPUS SINT-ANDRIES ANTWERPEN

SINT-ANDRIESSTRAAT 2

2000 ANTWERPEN, BELGIË

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# PREFACE

The past months, I dived into the world of refugee community radio and I learned that the prevalent media representation of refugees, or the fact that refugees are barely represented at all, is not the only way. The studies that I read, and the staff members of ethnic community radios that I spoke to, emphasised that refugees do have a voice, and that letting it be heard can have a big impact on how a host society behaves towards them. This was an enlightening journey, and I am grateful to everyone who assisted me with wise advice and motivational words along the way.

I want to thank the employees of Refugee Radio and Our Voice, who participated in this research and provided insight into how they, as ethnic community radios, represent refugees.

I want to thank my supervisors, Antoon Cox and Christophe Declercq, who welcomed me with my questions, and who took this dissertation to a higher level with feedback and interesting suggestions.

I want to thank my friends for listening to my enthusiasm and frustrations, and for the stimulating discussions.

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# ABSTRACT

**NL -** Mainstream media beelden vluchtelingen vaak af op een eenvoudige, negatieve manier. Etnische gemeenschapsradio – dat is radio over, door en voor een etnische gemeenschap, zoals vluchtelingen – gaat daartegenin door vluchtelingen zichzelf te laten representeren. Daarom onderzoekt deze masterscriptie hoe ethnische gemeenschapsradio vluchtelingen afbeeldt en hoe dat verschilt van reguliere media. Dit is een verkennend onderzoek aangezien de voorafgaande studies over etnische gemeenschapsradio vooral onderzochten hoe die radiozenders functioneren en welk effect ze hebben op het welzijn van de ethnische gemeenschap, maar niet hoe ze de gemeenschap afbeelden. Daarom werd er gekozen voor een casestudy methode, die geschikt is voor theorievorming. Twee radioprogramma’s over en (deels) door vluchtelingen werden geselecteerd: Refugee Radio (Brighton, VK) en Our Voice (Freiburg, Duitsland). In totaal werden er zes diepte-interviews afgenomen met medewerkers van de programma’s, die vervolgens werden getranscribeerd en geanalyseerd met de Grounded Theory-methode. De analyse van de twee casestudy's bevestigt dat de representatie van vluchtelingen in ethnische gemeenschapsradio op vele vlakken verschilt van die in mainstream media. In mainstream media zijn vluchtelingen ondervertegenwoordigd, en als ze aandacht krijgen, wordt er meestal over hen gesproken door anderen, worden ze als massa afgebeeld en is er alleen oog voor hun migratie. In Refugee Radio en Our Voice, daarentegen, nemen vluchtelingen een centrale plaats in, zijn ze zelf aan het woord en praten ze als individuen over de vele facetten van hun leven (dus niet alleen over het feit dat ze vluchtelingen zijn). Dat menselijker, gelaagder beeld van vluchtelingen hangt sterk samen met het feit dat vluchtelingen zelf deel uitmaken van die gemeenschapsradio shows. De resultaten suggereren bovendien dat de participatie van vluchtelingen in een radioshow en gemeenschap belangrijk is voor hun mentaal en socio-cultureel welzijn, hoewel verder onderzoek nodig is om dit te bevestigen. Deze scriptie eindigt, ten slotte, met enkele aanbevelingen die media kunnen toepassen in hun representatie van vluchtelingen, en tips om etnische gemeenschapsradio’s te ondersteunen en te ontwikkelen.

**EN -** When mainstream media talk about refugees, it is often in a facile and negative manner. Ethnic community radio – that is radio about, by, and for an ethnic community, such as refugees – brings a counterdiscourse through the self-representation by refugees. Therefore, this MA thesis investigates how ethnic community radio represents refugees and how that differs from mainstream media. Since most previous research about ethnic community radio focused on its functioning and its effect on the wellbeing of the community, but not on its representation of the community, this is an exploratory study. Consequently, a case study method was chosen, which is instrumental for theory-building. Two radio shows about and (partly) by refugees were selected: Refugee Radio (Brighton, UK) and Our Voice (Freiburg, Germany). In total, six In-depth interviews were taken with employees of the shows, which were fully transcribed and analysed with the Grounded Theory method. The analysis of these case studies supports the idea that refugee representation in ethnic community radio differs on many levels from mainstream media. In mainstream media, refugees are underrepresented, and when they do get attention, they are mostly spoken about by others, they are represented as a mass and there is only eye for their migration. In Refugee Radio and Our Voice, by contrast, refugees take in a central place, they get the microphone themselves, and they talk as individuals about many aspects of their lives (i.e. not only about them being refugees). This more human, multi-layered representation of refugees can first of all be explained by the fact that in the community radio shows, refugees participate themselves. The findings of the dissertation also suggest that refugees’ participation in the radio show and the community is important for their mental and socio-cultural wellbeing, although further research is needed to verify this. Finally, this dissertation is concluded by some recommendations that can guide media in their refugee representation, and that give ideas for supporting and setting up ethnic community radio shows.

# INTRODUCTION

Although the 20th century had already been labelled the “century of refugees” by holocaust survivor Hugo Gryn in 1996 (Kushner & Knox, 1999, p.1) and, later, “the century of people helplessly seeing others, who were close to them, disappear over the horizon" by English writer and critic John Berger (in Dyer, 2012, p.128), the scope and magnitude of displacement has not diminished in recent years. The UN Refugee Agency describes the period between 2010 and 2019 as a decade of displacement. Only in 2019, 79.5 million people have been forcibly displaced, of which 26 million people were refugees and 4.2 million people asylum seekers. Especially since 2015 there is an unprecedented growth of asylum seekers coming to Europe (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2020). Since then, more than ever before refugees have been a prominent subject in European politics, policy discussions, public debate and news media.

Given the impact of the media in representing refugees as well as feeding general perceptions one way or the other, it is necessary that media represent refugees in an authentic, diverse way. First, this is important because of media’s influence on public opinion. Journalists select the topics that they cover and they choose how they will cover them (e.g. with a specific angle, terminology, register…). They make information available, define how it is interpreted and accessed and, in that way, they shape our perception of events, and our attitudes towards certain groups (Bleich et al., 2015; De Cock & Joris, 2019; d’Haenens & Joris, 2019). Especially with regards to refugees, caution is needed: most people have no or limited real-life contact with refugees, so their main source of information are the media (Anderson & Masocha, 2017; Lams, 2019; Diez et al., 2019). Therefore, journalists have the responsibility to represent refugees in a realistic, pluralistic way, and not through stereotypes and one-sidedness. For, if stories about refugees consistently focus on criminality and threat, they will be considered as problematic.

Secondly, a realistic, nuanced representation of refugees is important for their wellbeing. Media images of them and their peers “weigh on migrants who develop and shape their self-representations and identities partly based on the media” (David, 2015, p.119). Negative coverage in dominant media may cause refugees to feel excluded and distance themselves from those mainstream media outlets. Or worse, they may accept these negative images and incorporate them into their self-representation. Ramasubramanian et al. (2017) state that “media, like other social cues, can influence minorities’ self and group-based perceptions. Intergroup comparisons in mainstream media are likely to increase identity salience and identity threat” (p.1881). More positive and varied representations, on the other hand, make them feel welcome and help them to adjust to the host country. According to Martin & Nakayama (2010, p.326) one key ingredient for the cultural adaptation of refugees is Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok’s (1987) concept of “psychological health”, which is the state of being emotionally comfortable in a new culture. The psychological health of refugees can be influenced by their media representation: if people from the host society get a more diverse and human image of refugees, they may act less hostile and more welcoming towards refugees, which makes refugees feel more at ease in the new country.

However, in mainstream media[[1]](#footnote-1), negative media coverage of refugees is commonplace. Anderson and Masoscha (2017) state that “despite the media playing an essential role in framing public discourse and policy around asylum/refugee seeker issues, this coverage has become increasingly negative, especially in Western countries and particularly over the past 10-15 years” (p.95). The consequences on public opinion are visible. For example, a poll by MORI for Readers Digest indicated that, already in 2000, many Britons had been influenced by the negative coverage on asylum seekers (e.g. they overestimated the financial aid for asylum seekers) (Mollard, 2001).

Nevertheless, there are other types of media that distinguish themselves from this mainstream media representation, such as ethnic community media. Ethnic community media are (often small, local) media by and for an ethnic minority, for example radio or tv shows that are made by refugees about their own interests and needs. Ethnic community media are more accessible and informal than mainstream media in which refugees can take part themselves: in a radio show by and about the refugee community, refugees are interviewed, they can introduce topics for the radio show, or they can even present the show. Therefore, we expect that these ethnic community radio shows by refugees share a different image of refugees than mainstream media; a representation from which mainstream media can possibly even learn. And if they could, they should.

Since the end of the twentieth century, several studies have examined community media, especially in Australia (Forde et al., 2009; Foxwell & Meadows, 2011; Philips, 2011; Ewart, 2012; Anderson & Masocha, 2017; Ewart & Beard, 2017; Order, 2017). However, many of these dealt with how (ethnic) community media function and not with the way they represent the respective community. Not much research output about refugee representation in ethnic community media has been published just yet; this in contrast to refugee representation in mainstream media, which researchers have studied extensively (Van Dijk, 1983; Cottle, 2000; D’Haenens & De Lange, 2001; Mollard, 2001; Van Gorp, 2005; Berry & Moore, 2016; Thorbjørnsrud & Ustad, 2016; Ewart & Beard, 2017; Joris et al., 2018; De Cock & Joris, 2019; De Cock et al., 2019; Diez et al., 2019). This dissertation was prompted by that gap. It is an exploratory study that examines how refugees are represented by ethnic community media, with a focus on the medium of radio. Existing relevant research will be taken into consideration in the literature review as a way of providing a framework in which the thesis under study sits.

The central research question is: How do ethnic community radios by and about refugees represent refugees? A first subquestion looks at the various aspects that make up that representation, such as the speakers, topics, frames or terminology. A second subquestion examines how this representation differs from mainstream media. A third subquestion examines how this specific representation is related to the importance of the community in ethnic community media. And a final subquestion investigates the goals that ethnic community media want to achieve with that representation, and to what extent they succeed in doing this.

In order to answer these research questions, a qualitative content analysis was conducted. First, a literature review was made about community media, and the representation of refugees in mainstream media and - as far as this was studied yet – in ethnic community media. More important, two case studies were focused on, to look at how refugee community radio functions and represents refugees in practise. Two ethnic community radio shows by and about refugees were selected: Refugee Radio, from Brighton (United Kingdom), and Our Voice from Freiburg (Germany). Via Zoom, in-depth interviews were taken with two (former) employees of Refugee Radio and four staff members of Our Voice. These interviews were fully transcribed and analysed with the Grounded Theory method.

This master's thesis consists of three large parts. First, an overview is given of the existing literature about ethnic community media and refugee representation in mainstream media and ethnic minority media, in order to define the theoretical framework of this research. Secondly, the methodology of the case studies is described. Thirdly, the results of the in-depth interviews are discussed and interpreted. More specifically, the third part looks at how Refugee Radio and Our Voice function as ethnic community radios, what the radio shows looks like, how they represent refugees and which limitations they experience. This dissertation is completed by the general conclusion and a couple of recommendations that are be drawn from this research. These can be a guide both for mainstream media, in order to revise their refugee representation, and for ethnic community radio shows, in order to expand their employees and audience, and thus their impact.

And that impact of ethnic community radio can be large. Being a refugee is more than fleeing from your home country or being in transit or transfer. It is a whole state of being. Historian Peter Gatrell uses the word ‘refugeedom’, translated from the Russian ‘bezhenstvo’, to refer to all these conditions and experiences of being a refugee. This holistic approach encapsulates the whole process from the displacement and the locations of departure-transfer-arrival, to their (humanitarian) relief work, the regulations and discourse of the host society, and the refugees being able to express themselves both vocally and culturally whilst settling in their new environment (in Gatrell et al., 2021). What is the place of ethnic community radio in this matrix? Ethnic community radio can mainly be positioned in the refugeedom after the arrival, when refugees are building a new life in a new country, but it also adds a dimension of belonging to those who are yet to arrive. What is interesting is that these radios shows are a form of relief work, since they support refugees socially and mentally (e.g. by meeting people and sharing their worries, grievances but also their daily small talk and anecdotes), and an opportunity for refugees to take action themselves, since they can participate as an active member of the radio show and raise their voice. The shows even feed to a hybrid identity of the refugee in a host nation. Furthermore, ethnic community radio is connected to the principles and discourse of the host society as the representation of refugees in these radio shows influences (or even reflects) the public opinion. In short, ethnic community radio can fulfil an important role in the refugeedom since it links many aspects of being a refugee and tries to harmonise them.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## ethnic community radio

We will start with an introduction of ethnic community media. Ethnic community media share aspects of both community media and ethnic media. Therefore, we will first take a look at community media, then briefly focus on ethnic media, and finally, see how all these aspects come together in ethnic community media, more specifically ethnic community radio. This background knowledge about ethnic community media, their characteristics and aims, will help us to understand the underlying structures and motivation for representing refugees in certain ways.

We chose to focus on community media, ethnic media, and more specifically the combination of ethnic community media, because of their strong interaction with the community. Ethnic community radio is not radio for refugees, but also by them. This research focus entails that we do not aim to relate much to discussions on related definitions such as exile media and diaspora media. Finally note that we consider radio to be part of media as much as press possibly is.

### Community media

#### definition

There is a large variety in community media. Each medium can differ in the audience, platform, structure and/or finance, depending “the community it serves” (Buckley et al., 2008, p.207) and “the resources and opportunities available” (Howley, 2010, p.2). First, community media are always linked to a specific community. This may be “a geographic community or a community of interest, a linguistic or migrant community or a group of people that is in some way marginalized”, etc. (Gordon, 2012, p.2). There are also many different platforms: television, radio, newspapers, magazines, online communication… (Lewis, 2015; Anderson & Masocha, 2017). However, radio is the dominant choice for community speech (Rennie, 2006; Lewis, 2015; Anderson & Masocha, 2017). The reasons are that “its content is relatively easy to produce and radio receivers are still far cheaper than television sets” – although nowadays many people listen to radio on their smartphones - and that radio “plays an important cultural role by promoting local music, satires, and opinions, all of which embrace community memory and history” (Rennie, 2006, p.4).

In addition, there is a lot of variety in social, political and geocultural settings. For example, the use of community radio differs geographically. In the United States, they function as noncommercial alternatives to profit-oriented media; in Canada, Australia and Western Europe, they challenge dominant constructions of a homogeneous national identity by looking at the interests of minorities that are ignored; and in Latin America and Africa, the main function of community radio is to stimulate social, political and economic development (Howley, 2010).

The diversity is also reflected in the various terms that are used to describe community media: alternative media, independent media, participatory media, citizens’ media, development media (Johnson & Menichelli, 2007, p.4); or radical media, grassroots media and tactical media (Nafiz, 2012, p.59). These terms point to deviating priorities. There is also a geographical difference is the terminology: in third world countries, community media are most often called ‘participatory media’, and in Europe ‘local media’ (Rennie, 2006, p.3). More specifically, in France and Italy, one talks about ‘assocatif’ and ‘libre’, in Spain about ‘communitarias’, and in Scandinavia about ‘lokal’ media (Jauert, 2015, p.189).

Despite these different formats, communities and aims, attempts have been made to arrive at an overarching definition. What all community media share is a strong bond with the community. Butler and Ó Siochrú (2020) emphasise that community media “do not just serve the community, or reflect the interest of the community, they engage directly with the community and the community engages directly with them – they are inseparable” (p.6). Community media are made by and for the community, for the benefit of the community and not for the profit of the station. Therefore, King (2017) defines community media as: “Non-profit, participatory media institutions that are largely volunteer-run and provide a service to a specific community of producers and audiences” (p.19).

#### characteristics

King’s (2017) definition reflects the three main features that community media have in common: community access, community participation and a non-profit orientation. Many scholars affirm that these three elements are at the hearth of community media (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002; Elliott, 2010; Nafiz, 2012; Lewis, 2015; Budarick, 2017).

First, community access is necessary. This means that a platform with communication tools and resources is provided for the community members so that they can express their opinions, interests, worries (Rennie, 2006; Howley, 2010; Nafiz, 2012). Furthermore, it entails that community members have the opportunity to “choose varied and relevant programmes and have a means of feedback to transmit its reactions and demands” (Nafiz, 2012, p52).

Secondly, community participation is very important. Community members are the protagonists. They are involved both in the organisational structures and in the media production (Berrigan, 1977; Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2001; Nafiz, 2012; Lewis, 2015). Khamkar (2017) even argues that audience participation is what distinguishes community radio from other local radio stations, which are made *for* but not *by* a neighbourhood.

Production-related participation gives local individuals the chance to become broadcasters. This is important because it makes it possible that community members “addres[s] their own local people and discus[s] their local community issues and interests” (Nafiz, 2012, p.2). It also empowers the community members, as it supports “self-expression and community building” (Johnson & Menichelli, 2007, p.3). Since the participating volunteers are non-professionals, many community radio stations offer training programmes, such as media literacy training, skills training, content production… (Johson & Menichelli, 2007; Butler & Ó Siochrú, 2020). Nevertheless, Nafiz (2012) is afraid that spontaneous community participation is often only an ideal: “For many communities, the ability to access and participate in radio is quite challenging. (…) For some in the community, there is no opportunity whilst for others, it is simply a privilege” (p.281). According to him, it is often the management that decides who gets access/participation, that is “those whose views best represent a station’s values, purpose and interests” (p.7). Therefore, it crucial that community media also allow and encourage the participation of community members in the management, in decision-making practices. Normally, community media are even owned by the community, “through a trust, foundation, or association” (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2001, p.3). In reality, it can also be an extern organisation, like an NGO, that manages the station, but these media are often also included under the term ‘community media’.

Thirdly, community media are run on a non-profit basis. For financial support, they rely on donations, grants, sponsorship, limited advertising, or other noncommercial support (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2001; Howley, 2010), and most of the staff members are volunteers from the community. The underlying philosophy is that community media do not focus on profits, but on the benefits for the community: “Access is not based on one’s ability to pay for it. The value placed on community radio’s participants and audiences is not based on a commercial contract but on a civil one” (Howley, 2010, p.25).

An additional, more obvious characteristic of community media is their localism. Community media are usually also local media: “They are created primarily with and by residents of a specific geographic place.” (Johnson & Menichelli, 2007, p.3). However, communities are not restricted to local societies. A community is “a group of people who share common characteristics” (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2001, p.3). This can be a place, but there are also “communities of language, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual orientation, and topic of interest” (Khamkar, 2017, p.179). The shared characteristics may even overlap. A migrant community, for example, is “*neither* a local geographic community nor community of interest based on shared origin, but a community that is greater than the sum of these two” (Cover, 2017, p.27, emphasis not added). This means that a community medium is a psychical infrastructure *and* a virtual space where likeminded people can meet. For example, the case study Our Voice is based in Freiburg (Germany), but it reaches listeners even outside of Germany.

#### Functions & aims

The main purpose of community media is to provide a platform where ordinary people can come together, communicate, share their stories, problems, solutions… (Foxwell & Meadows, 2011; Order 2017). Additionally, this means of expression can become a platform of change. Community media give the public the “capacity to solve problems in ways that lead to sustainable social change and development” (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). Hence, the functions and aims of community media are twofold: “celebrating community life” and “community mobilization and radical change” (Nafiz, 2012, p.59).

To start with the community life, community media promote local identity and community-building. Community media focus on local content and, thereby, “promote local identity, character and culture” (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002, p.70). Moreover, they are platforms for community communication. In that way, “community radio is more than a radio. It is a means of social organizing and social engagement” (Nafiz, 2012, p.284). This goal was already visible in the earliest community radios, for example the miner’s radios that originated in Bolivia and Colombia in 1947. Their principal focus was to unite the miners to fight for better working conditions (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2001). Community media really participate in the community by playing local music, reporting regional news, telling stories and opinions of the community members, announcing community news and events… This strengthens social cohesion (Nafiz, 2012; Ewart, 2012; Anderson & Masocha, 2017) and lowers social isolation (Order, 2017).

The other aim, of bringing change, can be first interpreted in the media sphere. Community media challenge traditional mainstream media structures and practices and provide an alternative (Carpentier et al., 2003; Forde et al., 2009; Khamkar, 2017). One reason why community media came into existence was the need for more local content. Mainstream media did not or inadequately respond to this demand for community news, but instead focused on general news and programmes (Nafiz, 2012). Therefore, community media originated, which provide “certain types of radio programming and certain viewpoints (…) otherwise unavailable” (Khamkar, 2017, p.179). Next to being an “alternative source of news and information about the community” (Foxwell & Meadows, 2011, p.95), community media subvert the representational practices of mainstream media. Especially, marginalised, minority communities feel that the dominant media misrepresent or underrepresent them. In their community media, they challenge these “inaccurate, prejudicial, and otherwise media representations” (Howley, 2010, p.5). For example, they break down stereotypes, counter racism (Forde et al., 2009; Order, 2017) and move away from the singular focus on the negative aspects of minorities (Foxwell & Meadows, 2011).

Moreover, community media provide a platform for self-representation, since everyone can participate. This is especially important for minority communities, like refugees, who are underrepresented in mainstream media. Community media give a voice to the voiceless (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2001; Johnson & Menichelli, 2007; Forde et al., 2009; Khamkar, 2017; Order, 2017). They give communities “the opportunity to signal (…) that ‘we are here’” (Foxwell & Meadows, 2011, p.100). They “provide resources and opportunities for marginalised groups to tell their own stories, in their own voices, and using their own distinctive idioms” (Howley, 2010, p.5). And community media do not want to present just one voice of the community, but a diversity of people and views. Communities consist of different groups and interests, and community media try to reflect this variety in their representation (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada 2001; 2002).

Next to media transformation, community media try to bring socio-political change. They empower community members to take political agency and citizenship. Community media encourage open dialogue and provide platforms for opinion formation. Through these platforms, citizens can engage in democratic processes and bring their concerns to the public sphere (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). Especially for marginalised, neglected groups, community media provide a space where they “can attempt to influence the policies of various governments through the pressure of public opinion” (Forde et al. 2009). In this is way, community media function again as ‘alternative media’:

By providing a vehicle for individuals and groups routinely marginalized by dominant media to express their hopes and fears, their aspirations and frustrations, community media can serve as a forum for oppositional politics and ideological perspectives that are inconsistent and incompatible with the interests of dominant media (Howley, 2010, p.4).

Connected to political agency is the goal to promote social change and development. Community media give communities a space to “discuss their problems”, but also to “identify their solutions” and “make decisions affecting their own futures” (Nafiz, 2012, p.55). By focusing on community participation and reflecting the interests and needs of the community, community media “help the community to develop socially, culturally and economically” (Restrepo-Estrada in Khamkar, 2017, p.183).

### ethnic media

#### definition

Like community media, ethnic media can vary enormously. They differ in terms of content and audience, but also in the technology, formality and professionalism, scale and funding and ownership structures (David, 2015). For example, ethnic media can be small community media, but they can also be produced by commercial actors, global co-operations or public service broadcasters (Bailey et al., 2007; Johnson & Menichelli, 2007; Budarick, 2019). Furthermore, there are different terms to refer to ethnic media, reflecting the different minority groups that are involved: ethnic media, migrant media, minority media, minority-language media, diaspora media or multicultural media. However, these categories often overlap and have similar functions (Budarick, 2019; Schwarzenegger et al., 2019).

All these types fall within the scope of ethnic media. In general, ethnic media are media that “address particular ethnic, linguistic and/or religious groups that live within broader and diverse multicultural societies” (Georgiou, 2005, p.482). As this definition shows they can attend to different minorities: “Immigrants, (…) racial, ethnic and linguistic minorities, as well as (…) indigenous populations living across different countries” (Matsaganis, 2011, p.6). So, refugees are one minority, but ethnic media are not restricted to this group.

Finally, some scholars argue that ethnic media are not only created *for* but also *by* ethnic groups (Bailey et al., 2007; David, 2015; Matsaganis, 2001; Budarick, 2019). However, others show that this is not necessarily the case (Caspi & Elias, 2011; Khamkar, 2017). For example, they can also be produced by bigger media corporations, such as BBC with its Asian radio shows. Or they can be produced by charity organisations, which is the case for one of our case studies: Refugee Radio in Brighton.

#### characteristics

Community media are based on access, participation and a non-profit orientation. In ethnic media, there can be some participation of the ethnic communities, but this is not always the case, and even then, it is not guaranteed that only or mainly minority people are involved (Caspi & Elias, 2011; Khamkar, 2017). With regards to profits, many ethnic media are profit-oriented and produced by commercial actors (Bailey et al., 2007; Budarick, 2019). This is another aspect in which community media and ethnic media differ.

However, what they do share is the importance of access: ethnic media are also directed towards a particular ethnic group and reflect their interests and needs (Bailey et al., 2007; Budarick & Han, 2017; Khamkar, 2017). More specifically, Katz et al. (2012) state that “ethnic media often serve the low-income immigrant and ethnic minority communities that are disproportionately likely to be under-connected to broadband.” (p.80). In order to reach these groups with important news or even health information, ethnic media fulfil a crucial role. Furthermore, although the minority audience not always participates in the production, there are close connections in ethnic media between the producers and the consumers, the community (Katz et al, 2012; Budarick & Han, 2017). This relationship of trust between ethnic communities and their ethnic media, positions ethnic media in an position as “important meso-level communicators that can help translate larger social issues and ideas into local contexts and understandable, actionable recommendations for their audiences” (Katz et al., 2012, p.85).

#### Function & aims

Ethnic media have many more characteristics than the ones listed above, but these often overlap with their functions and/or aims, which is why they will be discussed here. Budarick (2017) summarises the goals of ethnic media as follows:

 Reaching out to a non-ethnic audience, providing marginalised minorities with a voice of their own, combating negative portrayals in mainstream media, aiding in the maintenance and adaptation of cultural traditions, and providing important information to migrants and minorities about their new society (pp.42-43).

Shortly, ethnic media promote community building, they try to find a balance between the home and host society of certain ethnic groups, and they challenge mainstream media who underrepresent and misrepresent minority groups (Budarick, 2019; Schwarzenegger et al., 2019).

First, ethnic media, like community media, “contribute to a sense of community, and cultural and political belonging” (Schwarzenegger et al., 2019, p.437). This goal is twofold: ethnic media both foster cohesion within the ethnic community and “help minorities integrate into the larger society” (Riggins in Khamkar, 2017, p.18). A way of reaching this goal is “by providing news and information about culture and cultural events and more specifically news about cultural matters that are locally relevant to audiences” (Ewart & Beard, 2017, p.180).

Secondly, ethnic media, more specifically diaspora and migrant media, look for a balance between reporting on the home and the host culture. They provide news and information about the new place of living, which “facilitate[s] and accelerate[s] their audiences’ adjustment to the new society (Caspi & Elias, 2011, p.63), but they also keep the public informed about their homeland and connected to their cultural heritage (Husband & Chouhan, 1985; Caspi & Elias, 2011; Ewart & Beard, 2017; Khamkar, 2017; Schwarzenegger et al., 2019).

Thirdly, ethnic media, like community media, have a counterhegemonic potential. Ethnic media react to the misrepresentation of minorities in mainstream media in various ways: they “deconstruc[t] stereotypes and complexifying discourses” (David, 2015, p.3); they “destabilize the dualities of a homogeneous We against a homogeneous Other” (Georgiou, 2012, x); they “counteract (…) their biased portrayal” (Ferrer & Retis, 2019, p.4); and they “formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1990, p.67). Furthermore, they oppose the underrepresentation of minorities in mass media. Marginalised minorities get a voice in ethnic media and can construct self-representations. This means that ethnic media makers do not solely struggle against dominant media, but also “voice ideas which are important and distinctive in their own right, that are not necessarily counter-hegemonic, but are still of significance for different communities” (Bailey et al., 2007, xii). Through ethnic media, ethnic minority groups can raise awareness about their struggles and concerns (Schwarzenegger et al., 2019) and “push for recognition and citizenship rights in the media public sphere” (Ferrer & Retis, 2019, p.4). Finally, mainstream media neglect the interest of ethnic minorities in terms of the news topics. Therefore, ethnic media deliver information about local, community issues (Katz et al., 2012; Khamkar, 2017).

According to Budarick & Han (2017) this locally relevant news facilitates the “social inclusion” of ethnic minorities. Ramasubramanian et al. (2017) add that this counterdiscourse has “positive effects on ethnic minorities by boosting their ethnic pride and increasing ethnic performance whereas reliance on mainstream media to learn about one’s ethnic group can lead to decreased self-esteem” (p.1892).

### ethnic community media

Already in the 1940s, the first community media appeared and in the 1960s, they rapidly spread over several continents. First, these were pirate stations, then in the 1970s-1980s, they became more legalised and regulated (Johnson & Menichelli, 2007; King, 2017). The rise in ethnic media followed a bit later. Budarick (2017) states that “many ethnic minorities lacked a place on public airwaves until the 1980s” (p.40). Now, they are widespread too.

Community media and ethnic media exist in all kinds of formats and genres. One of these types is ‘ethnic community media’: a mix of community and ethnic media, as the name implies. The discussion above showed that ethnic and community media share many functions: they both promote community-building, counterhegemonic representations, self-representations, and empower the community members to claim their place in the media, and the social and political sphere. The main differences are that community media focus on participation and have a non-profit orientation (they are made *by* and *for* (the benefit of) a community), whereas ethnic media can be commercial, and they think that participation is less important than reaching an ethnic minority audience. Therefore, we can consider ethnic community media mostly as community media - in which the audience participates - of which the community is more specifically an ethnic group. In short, community media by and for an ethnic community, such as refugees.

This marginalised, ethnic audience of community media is not new. Because of their counterhegemonic aim, community media have historically often been connected to audiences “who feel side-lined, disenfranchised or even repressed by the mainstream media” (Order, 2017, p.11). For example, since the 1970s, media created by migrants for migrants were flourishing (Schwarzenegger et al., 2019). They now exist all over the world: from Radio ALFA in Paris, produced by a Portuguese migrant community, to SANZ, a radio station by South-Africans in Australia.

These migrant community media can play a vital role to withstand migration challenges. Foxwell & Meadows (2011) analysed migrant community radio in Australia. They learned that ethnic community radio distributes news from the new society but also from the home country of the migrants, along with familiar music, and sometimes even in their native language. This helps migrants to overcome homesickness. Furthermore, community radio reduces the loneliness of newly arrived migrants and refugees because it helps them “in maintaining community connections, developing local networks and offering culturally relevant music” (Order, 2017, p.8). Community media, thus, support migrants in their integration in the host society, while at the same time retaining a connection with their culture of origin (Ewart, 2012; Anderson & Masocha, 2017).

Finally, ethnic minority radio is not only beneficial for the refugees in the audience, but also for those who participate in the production. One reason is that they feel supported because ethnic community radio gives them more visibility. Because of their minority position, refugees are not in power to demand the attention of mainstream media, and whenever they get represented, they have no control over their portrayal. Community radio, by contrast, lets them “represent themselves to each other – and (…) communicate and validate their presence and place within the broader understanding of culture” (Forde et al., 2009, p.47). This is empowering, and at the same time, it subverts mainstream representations of refugees, which are often negative, as the next passage will show.

## Refugee representation

As the introduction stated, the influence of media on public opinion should not be underestimated. The topics, perspectives, terminology... that journalists select, influence our image of ourselves and of the other, and our relationships to those other groups. Accordingly, media and communication professor Simon Cottle (2000, p.2) declares that:

The media (…) perform a crucial role in the public representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultural power. It is in and through these representations (…) that members of the media audience are variously invited to construct a sense of who ‘we’ are in relation to who ‘we’ are not, whether as ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’, ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’, ‘citizen’ and ‘foreigner’.

Especially our image of refugees is often based on the news coverage about them, since many people do not have regular or close contact with refugees. According to Diez et al. (2019, p.129), “the media (…) are where audiences can get to know refugees’ situation better and form their own collective viewpoint on the situation, the people depicted, their stories, and their lives.” Therefore, it is important that refugees are represented in a realistic way, that is a diverse and human way.

However, as the next passage shows, negative, stereotypical coverage about refugees is common in mainstream media. This can give way to exclusion, social isolation and create tensions between groups (Ewart & Beard, 2017, p.167). Furthermore, when the limited and stereotypical representation of minority groups in mainstream media is the only reference points for minority members, they may feel even more “devalued and excluded from mainstream culture” (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017, p.1890). However, Cottle believes that media can also serve social and cultural diversity and become “spaces in and through which imposed identities, or the interests of others can be resisted, challenged and changed” (2000, p.2). According to the above description that is the goal of ethnic community media. Ramasubramanian et al. (2017) agree that ethnic media provide minority members with an alternative and relatively more positive source of information about one’s ethnic identity, which subsequently make minority members feel more positive and secure about their ethnic identity” (p.1891).

This dissertation analyses how ethnic community radio represent refugees, and how that differs from mainstream media. The following literature overview shows the common practices in the representation of refugees. These recurring strategies give an idea of how refugees are often represented, and they will help to contextualise the results of the case studies in part three. Since the research about the radio representation of refugees is limited, we will mostly expand our view to media in general. First, we will look at refugee representation in mainstream media (1.2.1). Then, we will turn to ethnic community media and discover how they provide a more positive counterdiscourse and an alternative self-representation (1.2.2).

### Refugee representation in mainstream media

Mainstream media, by which we mean public broadcasting service and big commercial media, are known for their negative focus in the media coverage about refugees. This passage investigates the different aspects that make up that media representation of refugees. However, we do not want to blame *all* mainstream media for representing refugees in a one-sided, marginalising way. Nor does it mean that a mainstream news medium uses *all* the following aspects in its representation. There are many differences between individual media in the coverage of migration issues, based on their brand identity, audience... Thus, what will follow is a general overview of the representation of refugees that is often – but not exclusively - present in mainstream media.

#### stereotypes

Media create stereotypes about refugees by repeatedly focusing on only some aspects of immigration, while leaving others out. For example, they often focus on the facilities in the host country and not on the reasons why refugees fled their home country. Ewart & Beard (2017) believe that minorities, in general, are often stereotypically represented as ‘the other’, as not fitting into the dominant culture, and as criminals. More specifically with regards to immigration, Schwarzenegger et al. (2019) mention the cliché of associating migrants with social problems, such as poverty, unemployment and threats to the welfare system. Diez et al. (2019) analysed the representation of refugees in 140 European media in 2017 and they concluded that in the stereotypical stories, crime was the main topic. They also observed that the UK was the country where the media promoted most stereotypes.

Moreover, Diez et al. (2019) underline that the omission of information contributes to stereotypes. Not only what is said is important, but also what is left out. A one-sided focus marginalises or silences some aspects and highlights others, with the effect that the visible aspects may be considered as ‘the reality’ by the audience. For example, in 83% of the stories of their sample, religion was not spoken about. But when it was mentioned, journalists mostly talked about Islam. Consequently, the audience may believe that migrants are Muslims, which is not always the case. Likewise, some stories did not specify where the refugees came from, and when the nationality was mentioned, it was most often a country in the Middle East. De Cock et al. (2019) also noticed, in their content analysis of four Belgian and two Swedish newspapers between 2015 and 2017, that the main focus was on Syrian refugees. This “could lead to public misperception of the ‘real’ and ‘good’ refugees coming from Syria as they embody ‘the dreamed archetype of the refugee’ (…), as opposed to ‘the others’ from other countries and being underexposed” (p.52). Another example is that of Husband & Chouhan (1985), who state that British media focus on coloured immigration, thereby obscuring “the large number of white immigrants” (p.274). Finally, Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou (2016) analysed the media coverage of illegal immigrants in the US, France and Norway. They discovered that the illegal status of irregular immigrants has become their core characteristic, whereas the process behind the immigration, or the fact that it contains a complex, heterogeneous group of people is not taken into account. This selective glance leads to the cliché of the ‘illegal immigrant’.

#### myths

A second aspect of the refugee representation in mainstream media is the repetitions of myths. Mollard (2001) analysed six Scottish newspapers for eight weeks in 2000. She exposed several asylum myths that were prevalent in the coverage. A first myth was that “the number of people applying for asylum in Britain is reaching crisis proportions”, and that most refugees where “ineligible for asylum” (p.9). The newspapers spread this myth by exaggerating the number of applicants and discussing the increase mainly with regards to ineligible asylum seekers. A second myth was that “most asylum seekers are ‘economic migrants’” (p.9). Many of the articles in the sample focused on economic migration and asserted that the increase of migrants was caused by the rise of economic migrants. However, not all migrants are economic migrants, and not all ineligible applications are attempts for economic migration. Thirdly, Scottish media spread the idea that migrants should be feared, by presenting them as a threat, by making unsubstantial claims about the number of migrants and their motivations, and by mixing the terms - with different meanings - ‘asylum’, ‘illegal migration’, and ‘economic migration’. A fourth and fifth myth were that “asylum seekers get huge State handouts” and that “the numbers of asylum seekers using State-provided services (…) are spiralling out of control” (p.12). The newspapers explained in detail how much it costs to support a refugee and they linked poverty among the host population with the money that goes to the asylum seekers. By contrast, they rarely mentioned the poor quality of housing that is offered the asylum-seekers, nor that they are not allowed to work in the first six months after arrival. According to Mollard, this focus on the cost is dehumanising: “It accords more significance to the cost of helping those in need than to the importance of relieving human suffering” (p.12). A last myth was that of the high ‘social cost’ of asylum seekers. Many articles indicated that asylum seekers are detrimental to the British society, whereas only 8,5% of the sample mentioned that asylum seekers may also contribute to the British culture with their different music, beliefs…

Connected to these myths is the use of exaggerations. In Mollard’s analysis, many articles exaggerated the numbers of migrants coming to the UK and the possible negative effects of the rise of asylum seekers, thereby supporting the above-mentioned myths. Another myth and exaggeration is that refugees are flooding us. Husband & Chouhan (1985) declared, be it already in 1985, that British national press circulated this idea, with the effect that the majority of white people in Britain believed that Britain was facing a disturbing immigration crisis. While in reality, immigrants are often localised in a few municipalities.

#### negative focus

Several studies indicate that a negative, problem-oriented portrayal of migrants is common in mainstream news media. This idea returns in different era and countries. According to Husband & Chouhan (1985), the negativity bias was already present in the 1960s-1970s in the United Kingdom. The consensus in the national press was then that “Britain had an ‘immigration problem’ and that the ‘problem’ was ‘coloured migration’” (p.274). The racist stance of the national British press continued in the 1970s. In 1981, Van Dijk (1983) analysed national and regional Dutch newspapers. He concluded that the news coverage about ethnic minorities put the spotlights on sensation, thereby creating a negative image of them. In the early 1990s, this problem was still in place in the Netherlands, as the study of d’Haenens and De Lange (2001) showed: the overall representation of refugees and asylum seekers was negative, and erroneous generalisations and suggestions of threat were made. Mollard (2001) also observed in her sample of Scottish newspapers in 2000 that 44% of the articles were negative, 34% neutral, and only 21% positive. More recent studies confirm the negativity bias in Western media with regards to refugees (Van Gorp, 2005; De Cleen et al., 2017; Strömbäck et al., 2017).

However, there are national differences. Berry & Moore (2016) examined the media representation of refugees and migrants in five Europe countries: Spain, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom and Sweden. The Swedish press had the most positive portrayal of refugees and migrants. German media too had a more liberal, supportive attitude towards migrants, although they also showed a concern about the rise of refugee numbers. By contrast, the British coverage was the most negative and polarised. The dominant British media showed a sense of hostility and suspicion towards migrants. They represented migration as a ‘problem’, a ‘crisis’, and associated migrants with threatening, unfair behaviour and a risk for social welfare. This negative focus promotes intolerance and the ‘othering’ of migrants (Esses & Medianu, 2013).

Nevertheless, research of Diez et al. (2019) about migrants in European media in 2017 shows that negativity is not always prevailing. Their sample of 571 articles of 140 European media was mainly neutral (50%) and only 17% of the articles were negative. Still, it could also be that the negative attitude is lower here because of the different timing or because the articles were evaluated in another way.

#### topics

An important topic in the media representation of refugees is politics, more specifically citizenship. The news discourse “is preoccupied with who should be included and who should be excluded” (Anderson & Masocha, 2017, p.95). Diez et al. (2019) also indicate that politics is the most common topic in the European media coverage of migration (with 55%), followed by crime (19%), social & health issues (12%), economy (9%) and displacement (5%). Within the category of politics, they observed national differences: countries in northern Europe focus on migration, those in eastern Europe on deportation, and southern countries talk more about integration. De Cock et al. (2019) confirm that. They compared the refugee representation in Belgian and Swedish newspapers between 2015 and 2017. In their sample, the major topic was also the political responses on the refugees, both in Belgian and Swedish press. The second and third main topic differed in Belgium and Sweden: Belgian newspapers secondly focused on the aid supplies, whereas Swedish on the civil society’s response; and thirdly, Belgian newspapers zoomed in on post-arrival integration, where Swedish media pointed to the harsh journey of the refugees, which illustrates the north-south difference (journey vs. integration) that Diez et al. (2019) indicated.

Germany and the UK also differ in their topic selection, as Berry & Moore (2016) show. This is interesting since the two case studies of this dissertation are a German and a British refugee community radio. According to Berry & Moore, post-arrival integration is a large theme in German media. In the UK, on the other hand, recurring themes are policy, the reception/rejection of refugees and migration numbers. That migration issues are told by means of numbers in the UK, is supported by Mollard’s study of Scottish newspapers (2001). These too focused on the number of people arriving in the UK, which was, moreover, often used as a justification for opposing admission.

#### terminology

The difference between the UK and Germany is also visible in the terminology that is used to describe migrants. In the analysis of Berry & Moore (2016), the British and Italian press prefers the word ‘migrant’. Furthermore, British newspapers tend to intermingle labels with different meanings in the same article. For example, 42% of all analysed British articles used the terms ‘immigrant’/’migrant’ and ‘refugee’/’asylum seeker’ interchangeably. Furthermore, there was frequent use of the term ‘bogus asylum seeker’ in the UK press, especially in the right-wing media. The recurring use of that term constructs “the image of an immigration system (…) manipulated, ‘abused’ and compromised by ‘illegal’ migrants” (p.15). A report by the Migration Observatory about British media coverage about immigration between 2006 and 2015 also argued that ‘illegal’ was one of the three most-used adjectives to talk about immigration. Additionally, Mollard (2000) points to the use of the term ‘bogus’ to describe ineligible asylum seekers in her analysis of the Scottish press. She adds that negative, dehumanising terminology is used not only to describe the migrants but also the migration process in general: ‘flood’, ‘wave’ and ‘influx’ were 31% of the negative keywords in the coverage monitored.

In contrast to the UK, German and Sweden usually use the terms ‘refugee’ or ‘asylum seeker’, which is the terminology that the UNCHR (the UN Refugee Agency) thinks is appropriate for most people entering Europe. According to Berry & Moore (2016) this is no coincidence, since “Germany and Sweden are the two countries which have been most accommodating to refugees” (p.114).

#### frames

News media always use frames, also in their portrayal of refugees. By choosing a news angle, images, information sources, keywords…, frames are constructed which invite the audience to look at the reality in a specific way. According to Entman (1993) “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p.52).

There are several dominant frames in the representation of migrants. Anderson (2015) identifies four major frames: asylum seekers as ‘security threats’, as ‘bogus’, as ‘illegal’ and ‘as health threats’. Lams (2019) distinguishes between “narratives of security” and “narratives of care”, or between “the ‘intruder’ and ‘victim’ frames” (p.85). Especially the last dichotomy, of victim and threat, is prevalent (Van Gorp, 2005; Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007; Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou 2016; Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017). Therefore, we will look deeper into these two frames.

Bailey et al. (2007) discovered that the use of either the ‘victim’ or the ‘threat’ frame is dependent on the stage of the journey in which refugees are located. They argue that, at the end of the 20th century, there was a consensus among Western media to portray refugees as innocent victims and ask compassion for them. Refugees were represented as victims for two reasons: because they were considered to be innocent, pure, with no political attachments, but also because the narrative of “hungry refugees wandering (…) along dusty paths” fits in the sensational reporting criteria (p.269). However, once the refugees managed to flee to western countries, media became more intolerant, and the ‘threat’ frame became more common: “In the process of trying to reach Western shores, and once they do, they are depicted as economic migrants disguised as bogus asylum seekers, scrounging on rich countries’ resources” (p.270). Especially after 9/11, refugees have been portrayed as a security issue, with more restrictive policies and less balanced voices in the media as a result.

Furthermore, there is a difference in framing between different countries. Berry & Moore (2016) found out that ‘threat’ theme was most common in Italy (10,1%), Spain (9,2%) and the UK (8,5%), in contrast to Germany (4,8%) and Sweden (2,3%). More specifically, the framing of refugees as a threat to the community or to the welfare system was most prevalent in the British press. This negative framing also reflects the tendency of the British press to associate migrants with crime. Philo et al. (2013) looked at the portrayal of asylum seekers in the UK and confirmed that the ‘intruder’ and the ‘threat’ frame are very present in there. They identified eight frames, of which the most common were ‘illegal immigrants or economic migrants’ (1), ‘exaggerated numbers’ (2), and ‘asylum seekers as a burden on the job market and the welfare system’ (3).

However, it is difficult to say which frame is most common, ‘threat’ or ‘victim’. For example, Joris et al. (2018) departed from the eight frames of Philo et al. and identified these in Austrian, Belgian, British, French and German press in 2015. They concluded that the ‘victim’ frame was most common. By contrast, Diez et al. (2019) did a European analysis too, but in their sample, refugees were associated with war, terrorism, and violence in 33% of the cases, and they were considered victims in only 26% of the articles. Accordingly, both frames seem to be dominant.

Nevertheless, these two dominant frames are problematic. The ‘threat’ frame creates a distance and a negative, hostile attitude towards refugees. The ‘victim’ frame is less explicitly negative, but it is not to be preferred either. Smets et al. (2019) make clear that “this powerful image hinders refugees from being seen as reflexive agents, and only grants them legitimacy with proof of their suffering” (p.193). The ‘victim’ frame legitimises the presence of refugees, but “it also hinders the feelings of being someone, or have been someone before – an individual, embedded in a social and family life” (p.186). Reducing refugees to suffering victims may lead to feelings of inferiority towards the host society and shame of being a refugee. Furthermore, it makes it harder for refugees to show their resilience and capabilities. Therefore, more realistic and diverse media representations are needed, which represent refugees not as passive victims, but as reflexive agents in their new society.

Refugees are not only deprived of their individuality by their portrayal as victims, but also by framing them as a collective mass. Often refugees are represented as a group. De Cock et al. (2019) did a quantitative content analysis of four Belgian and two Swedish newspapers between 2015 and 2017. No less than 76,5% of all articles depicted refugees as a massive, uniform group. Furthermore, the research of Diez et al. (2019), of 140 European media in 2017, showed that often the nationality, profession or religion of the refugees is not mentioned. This depersonalises the refugees. Consequently, “the public distances itself from the situation by not recognising individual identities, rather only a great mass of anonymous people” (p.126).

#### Voice?

Journalists have the power to silence people or to let them speak. However, for minority groups it is even harder to speak because they have less authority and means to attract media attention. And for them the risks of being misrepresented or sanctioned are higher (Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, 2016). Among the most marginalised groups in Western societies are irregular immigrants: they have no status and are rarely recognised as actors. Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou did a content analysis of US, French and Norwegian mainstream media coverage of irregular migration. The results confirmed the inequality: only 9% of the news sources that were quoted were irregular immigrants themselves.

It is a general problem that refugees rarely get a voice in their representation. Mainstream media rely on the same narrow group of sources every time they report about immigration. These are mostly the political elites and institutions, whereas the refugees themselves are muted (Van Dijk, 1983; Mollard, 2001; De Cock et al., 2019; Lams, 2019; Diez et al., 2019). It is crucial that refugees get access to media participation to tell their own stories as subjects, which is now rarely the case.

It is also interesting to look at the role that is assigned to refugees in the few cases when they do get to speak. Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou (2016) argue that in the few occasions when irregular migrants speak in the news, the focus is still on these immigrants being illegal and victims, but they are no longer passive victims but instead “active individuals with agency” (p.350). However, the illegal immigrants talk mostly about their personal experience, so there is a limited role register available. Berry & Moore (2016) discovered a similar restriction in the German press. In the analysed newspapers, refugees were prominent sources, but when refugees got a voice, it was usually in one of the following contexts: to describe the reason why they fled, to talk about their goals now that they are in Germany, and to discuss how it is to live in Germany. These are more positive themes, but still, they are restricting refugees in terms of what they can or cannot talk about. Finally, in the sample of Diez et al. (2019), the quoted migrants mostly got the role of subject (67%) but rarely of expert (only 3%). Therefore, the researchers conclude that refugees are only present in news stories about migration, and not as a commentator for other issues in society, about which they may have an opinion too.

#### no representation

The seven aspects that were listed above describe how refugees are depicted when they are in the news. However, in many cases refugees are not even represented at all in the media, as is the case for minority groups in general. For example, Phillips (2011) found in her analysis of 209 news stories, that 139 of them do not show any ethnic minority faces, not even in the background. Moreover, Diez et al. (2019) observed, in the analysis of European news media between May and June 2017, that stories about refugees became less newsworthy as the months passed. This shows that refugees are losing media presence.

This needs to be changed: refugees and migrants are part of their new host society and they should be part of the accompanying media. Therefore, it is important to ensure that they have access to news media and can contribute to the public debate, about migration *and* about other issues.

### Refugee representation in ethnic community media

After the discussion of refugee representation in mainstream media, this part looks at the representation in ethnic community media, which is the focus of this dissertation. As the above-mentioned studies show, mainstream media are known for their often negative, stereotypical representation of refugees. One explanation for this is the lack of reporters with a migration background, and a lack of minority journalists in general (Cottle, 2000; Schwarzenegger et al., 2019). Since participation and access of minorities is central in ethnic community radio, one could expect that these platforms do a better job. However, not much research is done yet about the representation of refugees in ethnic community media to verify this. Therefore, we will sometimes resort to academic studies about the coverage of ethnic minorities in general; a group which includes refugees, and which brings to surface many relevant aspects about refugee representation as well. First, we will look at how ethnic community media struggle against mainstream media, then at how they think more out of the box in their self-representation, and finally, we will briefly discuss the limitations that ethnic community media experience.

#### counterdiscourse

One aim of ethnic community radio is to destabilise hegemonic representations. In their own media outlets, ethnic minorities challenge the dominant views and propose alternative, nonconformist frames of social reality (Carpentier et al., 2007; Caspi & Elias, 2011; Nafiz, 2012; Anderson & Masocha, 2017; Ferrer & Retis, 2019). They “provide for the production and maintenance of alternative interpretations of events, issues and people, sometimes challenging other media and sometimes simply targeting certain issues neglected in mainstream, white media” (Budarick, 2017, p.55).

There is a general belief among ethnic minorities that mainstream media are failing to represent them appropriately, as anything other than victims or criminals. Ethnic community media struggle against the negative, stereotypical media coverage (Caspi & Elias, 2011; Ewart & Beard, 2017). In that way, they “have become empowering tools to struggle against cultural hegemony, exclusion and discrimination” in society in general (Ferrer & Retis, 2019). For example, Anderson and Masocha (2017) studied the project ‘The Powerhouse Radio Show’, a 9-episode radio series made by young people from refugee backgrounds in Australia. This radio show “circulated alternative information, contributing to an ongoing dialogue about migration, asylum and refugee issues, challenging stereotypes and negative representations currently circulating in mainstream media” (p.88).

#### self-representation

Rodriguez (2001) warns against considering community media, which she calls ‘citizens’ media’, only as alternative media opposing mainstream media. This leads to binary thinking and “blinds our understanding of all other instances of change and transformation brought about by these media” (Rodriguez, 2001, p.20). Ethnic community media are not just contesting social codes, relations or identities, but they are also actively mediating and transforming these and empowering the community members to bring about the change. In other words:

 Producing alternative media messages implies much more than simply challenging the mainstream media (…). It implies having the opportunity to create one’s own identity with signs and codes that one chooses. (…) It implies becoming one’s own storyteller, regaining one’s own voice (Rodriguez, 2001, p.3).

As mentioned above, refugee voices are largely absent in mainstream media. For marginalised communities with limited or no access to media, community media provide the opportunity and infrastructure to make themselves heard (Bailey et al., 2007; Carpentier et al., 2007; Ewart & Beard, 2017; Moreira, 2018; Schwarzenegger et al., 2019; Rodrigo-Alsina et al., 2019). Through ethnic community media, refugees can talk about their struggles and their stories “in their own voices, using their own distinctive idioms” (Nafiz, 2012, p.27). They can reconstruct and negotiate their representation and identity and demonstrate it to the outside world.

Self-representation is important for two main reasons. Here, Couldry’s (2010) distinction between voice as a process and as a value is relevant. Voice as a process means “giving an account of one’s life and its conditions” (p.7). Voice as value means that it “values all human beings’ ability to give an account of themselves; it values my and your status as ‘narratable’ selves” (p.13). Thus, the stories told by refugees are not only important to show multiple perspectives that exist in a diverse society. They also empower the speakers “by signifying that their statements are considered important enough to be broadcast” (Carpentier et al., 2007, p.225).

Many studies talk about the capacity of ethnic community media to give a voice to minorities, but less is said about what these self-representations look like. Still, there are some recurring characteristics. First, migrant communities talk about different topics than mainstream media. This alternative information mostly deals with what is going on in the local community or in the home countries of the migrants. Ethnic community media provide a space “for promotion of minority’s interests” (Caspi & Elias, 2011, p.63), refer to “examples that are familiar to the general local community” (Nafiz, 2012, p.27), and discuss “local cultural manifestations” and “political issues in the neighbourhood” (Nafiz, 2012, p.45)

Secondly, refugees explore and shape their identity in their self-representation. Ethnic minority media show what marginalised ethnic communities look like in the eyes of its members, not how they are perceived through the majority’s blinders. Therefore, Caspi & Elias (2011) believe that these media bring a more diverse and authentic representation of minority groups. As such, “they can become vessels in a struggle for authentic, inclusive, or pluralistic representation” (Schwarzenegger et al., 2019, p.439).

Apart from the self-representation of minorities as group, ethnic community media provide more diversity in individual identity constructions. “Rather than fixed and stable representations, representations of racial and ethnic identities emerge as performative and transforming” (Arapoglou et al., 2016, p.4). Cover (2017) took interviews with staff members of migrant community radios in Australia. The employees talked about “the intention and capacity [of migrant community media] to disseminate discourses promoting complex and multifaceted identity information” (p.19). This heterogeneous identity can be reached by favouring complexity over oversimplified, singular categories of migrant identity, like ‘citizen/other’. The migrant media makers especially criticised the simplistic distinction between host and migration society and the idea that there are two accompanying identities that are strictly separated. Instead, they try to overcome the hybridity of ‘home and host’ by balancing these two interests and embracing a more complex, multifaceted migrant identity.

Lobban (2013) illustrates this in her paper ‘The immigrant analyst’. She moved from South Africa, to the UK, to New York, but her identity is more than the sum of these three countries:

An immigrant enters her new country with one set of selves. These are then overwritten and refracted by her experiences with peers, neighbors, colleagues, and authorities in the new culture, and this experience shapes her consciousness, subjectivity, and sense of identity (p.556).

The “selves” of migrants “don’t fall into neat binaries of nationality” (Lobban, 2013, p.565). Instead, they are variable and made up of a bunch of aspects. That is why Cover (2017) concludes that there is a need to “embrace the unknowingness of the ‘other’ aspects of complex, multifaceted identities that may be conditioned by more than merely ‘home’ and ‘local’” (p.32). Ethnic community media try to do that.

Moreover, refugees take on other roles in their self-representation than in mainstream media. They are more often ‘agents’ and ‘subjects’. Georgiou (2018) analysed digital initiatives that highlight the voices of refugees, more specially two institutionally organised initiatives (i.e. ‘I am a refugee/I am a migrant’ and ‘Aware Migrants’) and two grassroots initiatives by the refugees themselves (i.e. Refugee Radio Network and Migrant Voice). Although both types of media paid attention for the refugees as individual human beings, there was a difference in representation. The institutional initiatives represent refugees as individuals with agency, but their words are made to fit into the Western imaginaries (e.g success, hard-work ethos, punishment for illegality), they are not recognised as equals to the European audience (e.g. only their first name is mentioned, which reduces their agency), and they are not political agents with political, legal rights but they are limited to humanitarian aid. The grassroots initiatives have a closer relationship with the refugee community. In these media, refugees take on another image. First, they are ordinary individuals and there is no special focus on success and spectacle. Second, they have agency: they are agents of suffering, but their suffering is rarely represented as a mass event, rather as an individual experience. Finally, they are also political agents: “They have voice, they have demands, they contest injustice” (p.54). In this way, the community media go away from the dominant frames of passive victims or success stories. Refugees choose their own, alternative representation and show that they have a voice in politics.

Echevarria et al. (2015) confirm that migrants portray themselves in community media more as political actors, which is unusual in mainstream media. They analysed two leading migrant community media in Spain. These presented migrants as active individuals involved in political practices, for example by referring to migrants as voters.

#### Limitations

Despite the possibilities that ethnic community media offer for the representation of refugees, they also face some limitations. Even in this media sphere there are tensions and contradictions at play, arising from the powers that influence media production: “Ethnic minority media are still media, and as such are not beyond struggles, negotiations and dynamics that affect both the journalistic and the social field” (Ferrer & Retis, 2019, p.6). This can “limit their counterhegemonic potential” (p.1).

First, ethnic community media are directed to a specific community, which is often a small audience. This leads to a short range, and “as their discourses (…) do not reach a wide public, migrants’ social and political interests and claims will remain invisible” (Rodrigo-Alsina et al., 2019, p.2). Therefore, Ewart & Beard (2017) highlight that it is not only important that minorities get a voice, but also “to ensure people are listening” when they tell their stories (p.183).

A small audience also causes problems to find distributors and advertisers that want to cooperate. Although ethnic community media are non-profit media, they still need to be economically viable. Therefore, they may feel commercial pressure and, for example, favor ‘light’ content (Rodrigo-Alsina et al., 2019). Husband and Chouhan (1985) saw this happening with ethnic media in the UK in the 1980s. These media took over the journalistic belief in ‘balance’ and neutrality, and they wanted to maximise their audience. In order to avoid conflicts and the exclusion of certain audiences, they focused on “harmonious integration” (p.286). Consequently, the ethnic media only recognised cultural difference, but they did not use the platform to let diversity flourish. For example, there was an inability to respond to the language diversity of the different ethnic minorities. With the idea of a large audience in mind, many ethnic media chose for English, or ethnic languages with a lot of speakers, like Hindustani. They did not deploy language as “the vehicle for ethnic political mobilization” (p.288) that it could be. Bukhari (2019) looked into ethnic media for South Asians in Vancouver. Here too, mostly the bigger communities were given representational possibilities. By contrast, the smaller communities, like Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Gujarati, “were offered time slots (…) with limited options, largely for entertainment programmes and more specifically music programmes” (p.91). Bukhari concludes that ethnic media often operate like commercial media and that bigger advertisers of larger communities influence the media content.

Instead of focusing on big communities, it seems to be preferable to foster a dialogue between different communities, also small ones, and in that way reach a larger audience. Besides, this approach can challenge the exclusivity of mainstream media, who often have a clear link with a white audience. Ethnic community media want to be open to a varied audience of different communities and enter into dialogue with all these different listeners (Budarick, 2017; Georgiou, 2018). Especially radio is “a medium ideally positioned to explore and give voice to the diverse experiences of members of migrants communities and [the] white [community] alike”, since it is “a forum facilitating two-way (…) discussion” (Moylan, 2013, p.31).

In addition, ethnic community media give a voice to minorities, but they sometimes set restrictions for their representation. Georgiou (2018) detected this in her analysis of two institutional and two grassroots migrant media. In the two institutional initiatives, the words of refugees respond to Western imaginaries, which can be seen as “yet another expression of a Eurocentric imaginary” (p.55). The Western references emphasise commonality, which “opens up possibilities for the humanization of newcomers”, but at the same time “sets conditions for their humanization”. Even the two analysed grassroots media, which provide alternative, more impure, mixed representations, set parameters for the conversation. For example, not all types of migrants are included, but a selection of successful, eloquent, strong-minded subjects.

Finally, ethnic community media may focus on a proper representation of the migration story of refugees, but at the same time repeat other stereotypes, like gender. For example, Echevarria et al. (2015) noticed that in the two Spanish minority media for migrants that they analysed, men were shown in the public domain, whereas women were portrayed in domestic spaces and were repeatedly depicted as mothers. That is problematic: gender is also an aspect of the identity of refugees and should be taken into account too.

## Conclusion on literature

Ethnic community media share with community media that access, participation, and the benefits of the community are central. In addition, they share with ethnic media that they support ethnic minority groups. In the representation of these minorities – here refugees - they subvert the mis- and underrepresentation by mainstream media.

In general, mainstream media (un)consciously make use of stereotypes and they sometimes even reinforce myths. Moreover, they tend to focus on the negative aspects of migration (e.g. they depict it as a problem). This is connected to their use of terms with a negative connotation like ‘(illegal) immigrant’ or ‘bogus’, although some media – especially in Germany and Sweden – use more positive terms, such as ‘refugee’. In addition, refugees are represented in the context of limited topics (mostly politics) and frames (perpetrator/threat or victims). Finally, mainstream media often deprive refugees of their agency: they attribute refugees a passive role, they do not let refugees speak themselves, and they sometimes even completely silence refugees.

Ethnic community media, including *refugee* community *radio*, subvert this dominant media representation of refugees. But more important is that they provide an alternative image in their self-representation. This self-image, of the community and of individuals, is much more complex and diverse and it depicts refugees in an agent role. Furthermore, ethnic community radio adjusts the content of its programmes to the interests of the migrant community. However, ethnic community radio has limitations as well, which they need to be aware of, such as the preference for larger communities or the use of limited frames (e.g. ‘success’). Besides, research about the minority representation in ethnic minority media often remains theoretical. As such, the above-mentioned limitations could be a reflection of a reality that does not always correspond to the ideal of a positive, diverse and careful representation.

Therefore, the third part of this dissertation looks at refugee community radio in practice. In-depth interviews with media makers of two refugee radio stations will gauge for their representational strategies and look at how these resemble earlier academic observations. In other words: how do journalists of ethnic community radio stations, by and for refugees, represent refugees? What are their methods, their motivations behind this specific portrayal and the challenges that they experience?

# METHODOLOGY

After discussing the theoretical framework of ethnic community media and the representation of refugees in mainstream media and ethnic community media, we now move on to the research of this MA thesis itself. Two refugee radios - Refugee Radio and Our Voice - were focused on as case studies in order to investigate to what extent the theory about refugee representation in ethnic community radio corresponds with what happens in practice and to see what these two radio shows can add about this subject. This section explains the methodology of that research: it starts with describing the research questions (2.1), then moves on to the data collection (2.2), and finally clarifies the data analysis (2.3).

## Research questions

The literature review already reveals ethnic minority radio’s vision on the representation of ethnic minorities. However, the studies remain quite general and theoretical. Therefore, this research focuses, more specifically, on the representation of refugees, and on how the ideas of ethnic community radios get manifested in practice. The main research questions are:

* How do ethnic community radios by and about refugees represent refugees?;
* How does that differ from mainstream media?;
* How does this representation correspond to the community aspect of the radio shows?;
* How do they perceive their goals with this representation?

## Data collection: in-depth interviews

### The in-depth interview

In order to answer these research question in-depth interviews were taken with the staff of two radio stations. According to Guest et al. (2005) the in-depth interview is:

A qualitative research method in which a researcher/interviewer gathers data about an individual’s perspectives on a specific topic(s) through a semi-structured exchange with the individual. The researcher/interviewer engages with the individual by posing questions in a neutral manner, listening attentively to responses, and asking follow-up questions and probes based on those response (p.116).

In-depth interviews give insight in the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of a topic. This qualitative method makes it possible “to elicit rich information from the perspective of a particular individual and on a selected topic under investigation” (Pranee, 2009, p.43). The strength of in-depth interviews is, thus, that the open-ended questions elicit detailed responses, which may include nuances and contradictions. Furthermore, they pay attention to the interviewee’s interpretation of a situation, to “the connections and relationships a person sees between particular events, phenomena, and beliefs” (Guest et al., 2005, p.30). As such, this method is less suitable for reviewing hard facts, but it does lend itself to “explore new issues in depth” (Boyce & Neale, 2006, p.3), like refugee representation in non-mainstream media.

### the Respondents: two case-studies

In the selection of respondents, we did not look for a random sample, but this dissertation works with two case studies that are representative for ethnic community radio. The case study method was chosen because it is useful to explore, test and illustrate theoretical ideas by showing how they work in a particular case. A case study “provides the researcher with a holistic understanding of a problem, issue, or a phenomenon within its social context” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p.256). Because the case study method “requires researchers to explore a phenomenon by placing themselves in the context and study real-life situations” (p.2), Tasci et al. (2020) believe that it is especially instrumental for theory-building. The case studies are, thus, used to explore theoretical ideas about refugee representation in community media, about which not much research is done yet.

The case studies were selected by means of the following criteria: it had to be a community radio station or show (1) about, by and/of for refugees (2), (partly) in English (3), and based in Europe (4). Determining shared criteria for the case studies helps to delineate the research scope and facilitates a mutual comparison of the cases.

Once these criteria were defined, suitable radio stations were contacted, of which employees would be interviewed. Initially, only the British radio show Refugee Radio was approached. This was done by email in November 2020. However, as it turned out, Refugee Radio does not have a large staff. In the past, Refugee Radio sometimes worked with volunteers and interns, but at the moment, the radio show only has one employee. This presenter agreed to participate. Still, in order to listen to different voices about the programme, a former intern, to whom the presenter had referred, was also contacted (in December 2020 by email). This intern worked during a couple of months in 2019 at Refugee Radio. More specifically, she was the project assistant and media officer of the Castaway Heritage project, which captured the oral histories of twenty refugees around Sussex in a book and podcast episodes.

Since the number of respondents from Refugee Radio remained very limited, other European refugee radios were contacted as well, to use as a second case study. The presenter of Refugee Radio referred to a similar, homonymous radio station in Hamburg (Germany): Refugee Radio Network. This station was contacted by email at the end of November 2020, but it replied that it was unable to participate in the research project. Then, in February 2020, Our Voice was contacted by email. This is a radio show for and by refugees from Freiburg (Germany). Four employees of this programme wanted to participate.

In total, there were six interviewees: two (former) employees of Refugee Radio and four staff members of Our Voice. Three of them were women and three of them men. Furthermore, three of the interviewees were fulltime and paid employees, two were (former) interns, and one was a fulltime volunteer. Finally, three of them studied journalism, whereas the other three learned radio-making on the field. All six interviews were conducted via Zoom between 17 February and 1 March 2021. The duration varied between 55 and 106 minutes. The interviews were recorded via Zoom with the permission of the respondents. Afterwards, they were integrally and truthfully transcribed with Otter.

### INTERVIEW Questions

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured. That means that the topics were predetermined in a questionnaire (cf. Appendix), but that the order of the questions was free and that probing was possible. The interview guide was drawn up on the basis of the literature review and on listening to six random episodes of each radio show. The questionnaire consisted of four big themes: the organisation, refugee representation, counterdiscourse, and the vision and goals of the programme. Determining the questions in advance facilitated a systematic comparison of the responses. However, according to Baarda and De Goede (2012, p.234), the researcher should not rigidly hold on to his questionnaire, because then he could miss important data. Therefore, there was space to deviate from the sequence of the questions and to add relevant topics that the interviewees brought up. Furthermore, the method of probing was used to inquire about underlying opinions and motivations behind certain representation mechanisms.

## Data analysis: Grounded Theory Method

The qualitative data (i.e. the transcribed interviews) were analysed by using the Grounded Theory method with Nvivo software. This is an inductive method, which distils theoretical concepts from empirical data. Applied to this exploratory study, Grounded Theory was used to make qualitative statements about the representation of refugees in ethnic community media.

The Grounded Theory method calls for a cyclical process: there is “a continual interplay between data collection and analysis to produce a theory during the research process” (Bowen, 2005, p.13). This means if the respondents mentioned relevant issues, these were also incorporated into the following interviews, for example the design of the radio show, the financial situation, the language(s) that they used, the connotations of the term ‘refugee’, and the interaction with the audience. In other words, “analysis is necessary from the start because it is used to direct the next interview” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.3).

Not only the interviews, but also the analysis was carried out in a cyclical way. The data were constantly compared to look for overlapping, frequently occurring patterns and themes, and to refine the codings. This research process makes sure that all relevant aspects are captured and that only those concepts that are repeatedly present in the interviews earn a place in the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). More specifically, the coding process of the Grounded Method consists of three phases: open, axial and selective coding. In the first phase of open coding, data are torn apart and given conceptual labels (e.g. topics, language, terminology, volunteers, audience). The researcher writes these codes and themes down in a list. In the second phase of axial coding, the codes and (sub)categories are further described and provided with data. Furthermore, the relationships between the codes are examined: codes are linked to subcategories (e.g. the radio show, the organisation, mental support, refugee participation), and subcategories to overarching categories (e.g. community radio, refugee representation, limitations). This helps to identify (ir)relevant elements, which slims down the first list of codes. In the meantime, data are still being collected. In the last phase of selective coding, the codes and categories that need more description are further filled-in and they are all structured (Koetsenruijter & Van Hout, 2018). The codes and categories are thoroughly compared to look for patterns, coherence and then, they are grouped around overarching categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

# RESULTS

This part looks at how refugee representation in ethnic community radio works in practise. We first briefly introduce the two case studies of Refugee Radio and Our Voice. Then, we move on to the analysis of the six in-depth interviews, which discusses and compares how the two radios function as (ethnic) community radios (3.2), what the radio shows look like (3.3), how they represent refugees (3.4) and which limitations they experience (3.5). There will not be a division between a 'results' and 'discussion' section because that is less relevant for this content analysis. The results will, thus, be presented and immediately interpreted.

## CASE STUDIES: REFUGEE RADIO & OUR VOICE

As the ‘Methodology’ section explained, this dissertation uses a case study method which examines two ethnic community radios: Refugee Radio from the United Kingdom and Our Voice from Germany. However, as you will see, Refugee Radio is less consistent with the strict definition of community radio since the main audience is not refugees. Our Voice is a more traditional community radio, which does also address refugees. Still, both radios were selected because they are instructive cases that fall under the broad category of ethnic community radio.

### Refugee Radio

Refugee Radio is a radio show that is based in Brighton, United Kingdom. It wants to give refugees, migrants and human right workers the chance to share their stories. The show exists since 2008 and was founded by Stephen Silverwood, who worked with refugees as a social worker and decided to interview some of them in a radio show. First, it was aired through a pirate radio station, Radio 4a. Then, the show was transferred to several legal stations, which changed over the years. Now, it is exclusively broadcasted, every Wednesday from 2 to 3 pm and Friday from 5 to 6 am, on Radio Reverb, the local radio station from Brighton. The radio show is also available as a podcast on the website of Refugee Radio and on Spotify. Every month, a new episode comes out.

Nevertheless, Refugee Radio is not a Radio Reverb-show. It is produced independently by the homonymous human rights charity Refugee Radio, which has limited contact with the host station. Refugee Radio is a small organisation with three permanent staff members and one freelance employee in total. Since the radio show is only one aspect of the charity, that mainly provides mental health support for refugees, only one staff member is responsible for the radio show. Sometimes there are also some refugees volunteering for a couple of months (About us, n.d.), but at the moment of the interviews this was not the case, among others due to Covid.

Through interviews and music, Refugee Radio gives a voice to refugees. However, it is not a strict ethnic community radio since the target audience is mostly the UK host population, and even with that audience, there is not much contact. Still, like other ethnic community radios, the participation of refugees is very important for Refugee Radio. In fact, the radio show can be seen as a part of the wider charity organisation for the refugee community. For example, refugees who participate in the off-air mental support group often become guests, or sometimes even (co-)hosts of the radio show.

### Our Voice

In recent years, many refugee community radio shows were founded in Germany. One of them is Our Voice. This radio show was founded in 2017 by Radio Dreyeckland, the local radio station in Freiburg. Our Voice calls itself “the voice of the invisible.” Through diverse stories of refugees who now live in Germany, the programme wants to show that they are “more than ‘just’ refugees” and it wants to deconstruct the negative, stereotypical image of refugees by showing their own perspective (Our Voice, n.d.). The (main) programme is on air every first, second and last Wednesday in the month from 4 to 5 pm. Every third Wednesday there is a special show, ‘Colourful Culture’, in which a refugee artist is invited for a jam session. Each episode is also available on the [website](https://rdl.de/sendung/our-voice-die-stimme-der-unsichtbaren) of Radio Dreyeckland for one week.

The radio show is owned and broadcast by Radio Dreyeckland, but the refugee staff works independently from the host station. The team of Our Voice consists of five people: three permanent staff members, one intern, and one BFD-volunteer[[2]](#footnote-2). There are also about twenty volunteers who come to help every now and then. All the staff members are refugees or migrants. The target audience is both refugees and Germans. Therefore, this is a real ethnic community radio: by and for refugees. Furthermore, it is a multilingual radio show. The main language is English or German, but the language sometimes changes during the episode, with parts in French, Arabic, Persian, Kurdish...

## COMMUNITY RADIO

The literature review defined ethnic community media as “community media by and for an ethnic community, such as refugees” (p.15). There are three main characteristics that all community media have in common, and that ethnic community radio, therefore, also shares: community access, community participation and a non-profit orientation. This part explores how these three aspects and are implemented in practise. It deals less directly with the representation but knowing how and by whom the show was created, helps to understand the logic behind that representation.

### NON-PROFIT

Normally ethnic community media are owned by the community through a trust or an association. For **Our Voice**[[3]](#footnote-3)this is more or less the case since the radio show is owned by the local radio station Radio Dreyeckland. It is strictly not possessed by the members of the community itself, but Radio Dreyeckland is also focused on the residents of Freiburg. **Refugee Radio**, by contrast, is owned by a human rights charity called Refugee Radio. However, literature by Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada (2001) showed that it happens quite often in reality that an NGO manages the community radio station (cf. 1.1.1.2)

Both programmes are not financed by the station that broadcasts them. They rely on funding from external grant making trusts, that they have to apply to for every new project. That is typical for ethnic community media because they are focused on the benefits of the community and not on profit-making. A staff member of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2) states that some commercial channels have done similar interviews with normal refugees, like Refugee Radio, which means that if they want, they could also become a commercial production company. Still, he believes that that would not work, because you need to have “a respectful relationship of trust with somebody (…) in order to get them to do an interview with you. (…) That's why it has to be a community thing.” However, the non-profit orientation does not make it easy for the producers (cf. 3.5.2): there is only enough money to pay a small, permanent staff and apart from that, they work with volunteers.

### PARTICIPATION (BY REFUGEES)

In (ethnic) community radio, the participation of the community members is very important. They are involved both in the organisation of the station and in the production of the shows, for which they are often offered training. Both Refugee Radio and Our Voice are indeed open to the input of the refugee community. Still, they achieve that participation to a different degree.

#### IN THE ORGANISATION

**Our Voice** was established by German staff members of Radio Dreyeckland. They looked for four refugee/migrant journalists, who were given the task to build the radio project and bring other refugees to the station. After six months, the refugee journalists took control of the project, which was also the initial aim of the founders. Consequently, all the staff members have a refugee or migration background, so every decision at Our Voice is made by refugees themselves. One employee (Appendix 4) argues that this self-organised radio show is the idea for most refugee radios but it almost only works in Our Voice. In most of the other refugee radios in Germany (and in Refugee Radio), German people are still coordinating the project.

The permanent staff of Our Voice also actively tries to involve other refugee volunteers or employees. They embrace the anti-hierarchical system of community media and consider everyone as a colleague:

Every opinion is important. (…) It can be 99% against 1%, but the 1% is valuable in our system. (…) If any person on whole (…) is like hesitating, then everything should be thought again. (Appendix 4)

More specifically, there is an editorial board meeting every Monday, in which everyone is welcome to share his ideas. In this editorial group, the main staff members do not impose on the volunteers and newcomers what they should do for the show, but they only exchange ideas and discuss what everyone would like to say in the programme and in what way (e.g. an interview, a reportage…). More structural problems can also be addressed in these meetings. For example, the intern who was interviewed mentioned that he did not have any accreditation to prove that he is a journalist when he goes outside to make a reportage (Appendix 6). This issue is now under consideration. The refugee community is also included on a broader scale, beyond the radio show. For example, there was a debate among several refugee radios in Germany about which German term they would use to refer to refugees (cf. 3.4.2.5) and the advisory board included many refugees (Appendix 5).

One new staff member indeed has the feeling that newcomers “have [impact in] decision making” (Appendix 5). However, another new employee (Appendix 6) declares that he sometimes is afraid to raise his voice in the discussions. He had not been there for a long time and was not trained as journalist. Therefore, he feels that his opinion is less relevant: “I don't normally propose to them what actually we could do (…) better. Because I know for now, they know how they do things (…). I don't want to intervene too much.” He too is aware that “they welcome (…) ideas”, but at the same time feels that he is not in a position to change the system. Even though the organisation tries to be non-hierarchical, there still is (for some participants) a kind of hierarchy between the permanent staff, and the volunteers and newcomers. This employee sometimes even has the feeling that he is not heard. For example, he has made a reportage that is not put on-air but keeps pending. Therefore, he thinks that it is “sidelined” and he “do[es]n’t have a say” (Appendix 6).

However, this could also be a misunderstanding, which one employee (Appendix 4) believes is sometimes the case. She, for example, observed that the participating refugees often wait for the staff’s approval to make radio, whereas they do not need to do this. She is, thus, aware that Our Voice may create a space with opportunities for other refugees, but this can only work when newcomers dare to take it:

We have the feeling that whenever we leave this space for the newcomers, then they feel there's nobody, because they think we should be there before the show. Then we always say: 'No, if we are not there and you are there, then you are Our Voice'. You take the space because it's your space. (Appendix 4)

This is a small problem in comparison with the participation that Our Voice already achieves. It is, however, the main problem of **Refugee Radio**. The radio station wants to be open and inclusive for the refugee community but it does not find refugees who want to fill up that space (for a long time):

I've run training sessions with them how to do make radio programmes, (…) [to] get that ball rolling. And I think they've just, they've just got too many other problems going on. And they're not, euhm, as interested in radio generally (…) as a medium. (Appendix 2)

Sometimes there are refugee volunteers who come now and then, and the former intern of the Castaway Heritage project (Appendix 1) also had a migration background (her parents fled from Syria and she was born in the UK), but the permanent staff of Refugee Radio only consists of the British presenter and not of refugees. Nevertheless, Refugee Radio tries to be participatory, even in the decision-making of the charity in general. It takes into account the opinions of the refugees and consults them as much as possible:

We have a (…) charity governed by a board of trustees. And all of the trustees are (…) refugees, asylum seekers, migrants (…). So we try and make sure that the actual sort of governance of the charity is as representative of the people that we're working with as possible. (…) And then within the projects, we do have (…) long term, euhm, participants who (…) act as project champions, (…) and we consult with them about things (…) like the ground rules for the project through to sort of recruiting new members of staff. (Appendix 2)

#### IN THE RADIO SHOW

In community media, normal people get the opportunity to become broadcasters. Both Refugee Radio and Our Voice normally work with several volunteers who participate in the production of the shows. However, at **Refugee Radio** there were a handful of volunteers in the past, and there are normally new volunteers starting this year, but at the moment of the interview, the presenter worked alone without the help of volunteers. **Our Voice**, by contrast, did have around twenty volunteers who participate every now and then, and there were also a more permanent intern and volunteer who were new but already very active. The radio show wants to be open for everyone to join, whether it is because “they want to learn something” or “have been doing radio before or (…) have been interested, or they want to talk in radio” (Appendix 3). Everyone is welcome, not only as a guest of the show, but also to make an interview or reportage about a topic that they think is important. They are in charge of producing things, even if they have almost no experience and are not yet doing it perfectly:

We are not in a classical system (…) [but] in the concentrated system where you believe in the capacity of other. (…) So only talking in a closed place is not enough but let the person do, then you believe the person have the capacity.” (Appendix 4)

Even the interviewees at both radios are doing more than answering questions. They can really give input. At **Refugee Radio**, they can suggest music if they want and they have a say in editing (i.e. they can decide if they want parts to be omitted (Appendix 2)). The intern of the Castaway Heritage project of Refugee Radio in 2019 (Appendix 1) states that the interviewees in that project also played a very active role: they made pictures for the website of the project and they sometimes even co-hosted an interview. Furthermore, their own interview was “entirely their episode”: the guests could choose three songs that were played during the interview, they directed the path of the episode, and the interviewer stayed very much on the background:

We kind of just had (…) guidance points, like something that would trigger a memory (…) or something that would encourage them (…) to carry on talking. But it wasn't like we were giving our opinions. It wasn't even like a conversation. (Appendix 2)

At **Our Voice** too, the guest sometimes chooses the music, for example from their home country or in their own language. It is also often they who define the topic of the show: a staff member states that sometimes “people come to Our Voice, having something to say that we did not, would never planned” (Appendix 4). Moreover, like in Refugee Radio, the interviewer is more of an absent moderator, who listens and edits, but tries to not influence the story.

#### TRAINING

Both as staff members, interns, volunteers and interviewees, refugees get many opportunities at Our Voice and Refugee Radio. The two community radios ask a lot of input from the community members and they let them produce things even if they have no journalistic experience. Nevertheless, both radio stations offer training sessions, to teach the refugees some basic skills and to empower them.

**Refugee Radio** deliberately embraces a “DIY-ethos” and “the lack of professionalism” (Appendix 2). Even the presenter himself (Appendix 2) was a self-learned radio host: he did not study journalism but anthropology. After making the programme for more than ten years, he has built some knowledge and experience that he wants to pass on through workshops. He takes groups of refugees to the studio, where they learn how everything works, how to interview someone and how to make radio shows in general. Even the interviewees of the Castaway Heritage project - who did not really participate in *making* the podcasts - got workshops about the preproduction process of a radio episode (e.g. legality, confidentiality, planning content). However, the project intern (Appendix 1) explains that these workshops were considered as one of the community activities rather than as useful training: “What [they] were doing didn't matter”, whether it was “cooking, or playing music, or doing media training”, as long as “they (...) enjoyed it and it got them out of the house.”

At **Our Voice**, three employees studied journalism, and at the beginning of the project in 2017, they were trained as media educators in order to instruct other refugees. They now offer training in the form of journalistic, organisational, political and empowerment workshops (Appendix 3). The journalistic module teaches refugees what an interview, a feature, reportage or vox pop is, and how a recorder, mixer... works. In other words: what is a journalistic piece and how to use the technical tools to make it (Appendix 4). The theoretical and practical part of this training are, thus, often combined:

The same day, you could talk about interview with somebody, then you tell the person you are already ready for your first interview (…). Go on the field and, and do it. (Appendix 4)

The empowerment module talks more about your rights as a radio maker, and what you can(not) do ethically. Often refugees are afraid to raise their voices, because they think it might have a negative impact on their asylum procedure. The workshops, then, assure them that they have the right to speak in Germany and do not have to be scared of the law (Appendix 4). The intern who was interviewed (Appendix 6) attests that he first had a lot of fear to make his voice loud. But after going to Our Voice, he “realised that (…) [Germany] is a country of, euhm, long term democracy. And (…) your opinion is welcome, human rights are respected.” He now has the confidence “to say things as it is.” Furthermore, Our Voice is also a kind of political project that sometimes (co-)organises demonstrations. Therefore, it also hosts political workshops, which helps refugees to understand their role as political activists and teaches them, for example, how to write speeches.

This might seem to be a lot of training but actually the training does not last very long:

In the community radios, we guide, but guide not for too long. We guide for essentials [and] when you feel the trainee have talent, then you let him do what he can do. And sometimes it can surprise you. (Appendix 4)

The staff members teach refugees the basic skills but then really let them practise. For example, when the two main employees went to a congress, they gave the new intern and volunteer the opportunity to host a radio show completely by themselves. The short training is also useful for refugees who do not have much time and help as a volunteer only now and then. They are trained technically to do the job, and after that, they can just come and make a journalistic piece whenever they want. Furthermore, the workshops do not take place on a regular basis. The training depends on what the refugees need or wish to do (Appendix 4). Still, after the training, the refugees are followed up, and offered help if necessary (Appendix 3).

The new volunteer asserts that he did not receive much training, although he thinks it is crucial:

It's necessary (…) for me to have more training. Because (…) I've never been [doing] journalism back in Africa. I just started it here in Germany. So I think I need more workshops so that I can know more about it. (Appendix 5)

However, the new intern (Appendix 6) also indicates that they learn by doing and by observing other employees. He, for example, was inspired by a staff member who always insists on saying things as they are and really showing the feelings of the interviewees. He now tries to do that as well.

### safe COMMUNITY Space

Both Refugee Radio and Our Voice try to build a community of refugees around the show and offer refugees a place where they can feel safe. First, the employees are familiar with the (local) refugee community and feel trusted by them. The employees of **Refugee Radio** have worked their way into the refugee network in Brighton. The presenter (Appendix 2) knows many refugees and asylum seekers through his previous job as a case worker, and the (former) intern (Appendix 1) knows the community because her parents were migrants themselves, and she was part of the student society network ‘Student Action for Refugee Star’. At **Our Voice**, all the employees are refugees or migrants, which means they are by definition part of the refugee community in Freiburg.

Secondly, the radio shows try to make refugees feel comfortable to participate, to ask for support or to tell their stories.The presenter of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2) is not a refugee and explains that it is not always easy to convince people to come and talk in the show: “The tricky thing is getting access to people and having (…) a respectful relationship of trust with somebody over a period of time in order to get them to do an interview.” However, because it is a small community radio, the presenter can take his time to get to know the interviewee first. This respectful relationship also lasts during the interview. The interviewee can get comfortable in the studio and settle into the interview. The interviews sometimes even take place at the guest’s home if he feels uncomfortable in the professional-looking studio. The staff, thus, really tries their best to make the guests feel at ease. This seems to work according to the intern:

Sometimes they just say things unknowingly. Because they're comfortable with us, because we've set the environment that it's a safe space to talk about whatever you want, really, and because X has like, euhm, mentored a lot of them before. So (…) it was like kind of talking to an old friend. (Appendix 1)

Even after the interview, the guidance continues. Especially for refugees with mental health issues, Refugee Radio does debrief sessions afterwards:

You've taken someone mentally, already turbulent, (…) you've asked them to talk about something and they're like, here. (*points to the ground)* (…). So you have to bring them back up. (…) We have to make sure that like, they were happy when they came in, and whatever you talk about, they're happy when they come out. (Appendix 1)

**Our Voice** has the advantage that all the employees are refugees or migrants themselves. This makes it easier to attract other refugees and to be trusted by them: “They trust you because you have the same background like them. They are no more scared of 'ok, maybe they want it against my asylum procedure” (Appendix 5). Nevertheless, Our Voice also actively tries to create a safe space where refugees can feel at home and tell their story, without fear of it being distorted and without feeling under pressure. Especially for women they build this safe space: they noticed that women were not coming to the general events since they were shy and did not want to mix with men, and started to organise events only for women, so that they can feel that it is their space too (Appendix 4).

### ACCESS (FOR REFUGEES)

Ethnic community radio is not only made by the community but also for the community. However, whereas the target audience of Our Voice partly consists of refugees, Refugee Radio focuses more on the British population.

The presenter of **Refugee Radio** (Appendix 2) is aware that it is not a typical community radio *for* refugees. This is not so much because the show does not want or try to address a refugee audience, but rather because it is unable to reach the refugee community. The presenter thinks that refugees are not really interested in listening to (general) refugee stories: “There isn't solidarity across the countries of origins for different refugees. And they're not interested in any sort of (…) commonality between their stories.” He believes that refugees do not find solace in hearing similar stories, because their stories are all so different: “It's like, 'Oh, no, but it's different for me, because in my country is like this'.” Therefore, he thinks that a radio station has more chance of reaching a refugee audience if it “broadcast[s] for a particular community in a particular language rather than just generally (…) for the refugee community.” Yet, this is not possible with their English show.

However, it does not mean that there are no refugees at all in the audience. The presenter gives an example of a refugee who was inspired by hearing an interview:

I have seen that happen, where people have said to me: ‘(…) One day, I'm gonna be like that guy getting up and talking about my experiences, I'd love to have the confidence to do that'. (...) That quote was, is from one person that (…) I did do public speaking training with, and I did do confidence, euhm, building work with and did go on to, euhm, speak, you know, publicly about his experiences. Euhm, so it did happen. And he was inspired by another refugee he saw doing that. (Appendix 2)

Still, this is an exception within the larger group of British listeners. Since Refugee Radio cannot reach many refugee listeners, the target audience is the British people, to whom it wants to bring an “accurate representation” of refugees (Appendix 1). However, even the British listeners do not interact much with the show, for example through feedback. Therefore, they rather form a virtual community of interest, than a visible geographic community.

The target audience of **Our Voice**, on the other hand, consists of both refugees and Germans: “The show is dedicated to German society, to refugees and migrants” (Appendix 4). However, the employees have different ideas about how many refugees actually listen to Our Voice. Some think that “refugees (…) hear us naturally because it’s the refugee radio” (Appendix 4), and that even the refugees in the camps have easy access to the radio “through their phone online” (Appendix 5). Others, by contrast, state that “refugees (…) don't have that much access to radio. (…) The information come[s] to them (…) [just] because they are part of the show, or they will tell their friends” (Appendix 3), and “if you read percentage of refugees who listen to radio, you not get 1 percent” (Appendix 6). Since the number of refugee listeners might be lower than expected, one respondent believes that it is also crucial to reach non-refugees; “people who don’t know about the rights” (Appendix 3). Our Voice, thus, also targets German listeners, whose perceptions about refugees it wants to change, and whom it informs about things that are happening in the world, for example, in Nigeria:

Maybe most Nigerians living in Germany have already seen it (...). But the Germans (…) maybe they have other ideas or maybe they don't have the time to look to other euhm, land, countries, what is happening there. (…) So we give them information direct. (Appendix 5)

Moreover, Our Voice has more interaction with the audience than Refugee Radio. The employees often get feedback, both from refugees and from Germans, and even from people living in “other countries” (Appendix 5). Many refugees mail that they want to participate in Our Voice or that they would like to talk to the interviewee. The radio show also receives a lot of feedback and cooperation demands from German organisations who want to host events with them.

To conclude, both Refugee Radio and Our Voice are (to some extent) made by refugees, but they have more difficulties in reaching refugee listeners. Refugee Radio has almost no listeners who are refugees. Our Voice does have refugee listeners, which is also visible in the feedback, but according to some employees the number of refugee listeners should not be overestimated. In contrast to what Nafiz (2012, p.281) believed, we should, thus, not be afraid “that spontaneous community participation is often only an ideal” (cf. 1.1.1.2), but the difficulty is rather the access of the community. However, as the presenter of Refugee Radio said, if the radio shows “have great input from the refugee community in making the thing, (…) it probably almost doesn’t matter if anybody listens to it” (Appendix 2). For both radio shows it seems to be more important that refugees can participate in the production than that they listen to the final product.

## CONCLUSION ON COMMUNITY RADIO

Refugee Radio and Our Voice both fit in the definition of ethnic community radio in terms of the non-profit orientation and the community participation. They are not commercially driven, but they are committed to the refugee community, by encouraging refugees to participate and by sharing an accurate representation of them with the British/German audience. However, they correspond less to the definition in terms of access for the refugee community. Especially Refugee Radio has difficulties in reaching refugee listeners.

The literature review showed that ethnic community media are a mix of ethnic media and community media (cf. 1.1.3): they share the participation and non-profit orientation with community media, and the ethnic minority audience with ethnic media. Therefore, we can conclude that Refugee Radio and Our Voice are ethnic community media that are more closely related to community media than to ethnic media.

## RADIO SHOW

After having looked at how the radio shows of Refugee Radio and Our Voice are made, this section zooms in on the radio show itself: what is the design of the show and which topics are discussed?

### FORMAT

Both Refugee Radio and Our Voice give a voice to refugees, but they do this in a different way. Refugee Radio is a one-hour programme which presents the personal story of one refugee. Our Voice is also a one-hour show, but it has a magazine format, which gives a broader picture of the refugee community through several shorter interviews and reportages. The respondents explain why they chose for this format of their show.

According to the presenter of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2), “the original concept was to do a sort of *Desert Island Discs* [[4]](#footnote-4) type of programme, which was a long form interview where you really get to know a person and have mostly just talking about their lives and a little bit of music.” After a while, the musical element became less important, but the interview remained the core of the show. Moreover, Refugee Radio does not only want to give refugees a microphone, but also give them “a proper amount of time to set out their story”, although even then, “it's an only an hour to talk about your whole life.” The presenter thinks this long interview with one person is a form of respect towards the guest, whom he wants to make clear that “your life is worth my time, it is of interest. (…) And I want to share the whole thing, because I think that has value.” In this way, he opposes mainstream media who often “talk to you for days and then (...) just use 10 seconds of what you said” (cf. 3.4.1). He is aware that Refugee Radio might not be the most “exciting and interesting show” and that it would be more “easily listened and popular” if it had “a magazine format”, but he does not see the point of making such a - more “commercial” – programme.

The staff members of Our Voice do see the point of a magazine format. Our Voice is “a variety show”, which contains several elements, for example “a report about (…) the potus that was in Freiburg, (…) a special story (…) of someone, and (…) a vo[x]-pop, [about] for example, (…) ‘what does freedom mean?’” (Appendix 3). First, they choose for this variety in order to give the audience a pleasant listening experience. One respondent believes that “just interview (…), it's like blah, blah, blah show, talking, talking, talking (…). And then people are bored.” Therefore, they provide “short pieces” “so that people will follow” and they let the audience “relax with a bit musical, (…) short talk, and then another piece” (Appendix 4). However, they too try to distinguish their programme from commercial radio shows. It is not just a music show, but they also “want to be a bit political.” In addition, their pieces are “six minutes”, so “not so short, like in commercial medias (…) [who] have like three (…) or two minutes” (Appendix 3). A second reason for the magazine format is that it can “focus on different areas (…) like politics, demonstration, (…) asylum process” (Appendix 5). Finally, the employees consider it to be an inclusive format, because it “give[s] everybody the possibility to say something in the show” (Appendix 3). The participants can do different things: choose the music of the show, do an interview, make a reportage, participate in a discussion in the live show... Consequently, they can also take on different functions, for example as “presenter”, “reporter”, “activist”, “artist” …, in contrast to a news broadcast which only has one presenter who reads and moderates the news (Appendix 4).

Moreover, Our Voice also tries to give everyone the opportunity to participate with its multilingual approach. Refugee Radio is an English show. Our Voice, by contrast, has either English, German, or sometimes French as its main language, but the episodes often contain a mix of languages. One employee argues that this is important “to have a real inclusion space” (Appendix 4). First, Our Voice want to be inclusive for the interviewees, who “shouldn't be excluded because (…) [they] could not talk English or (…) German, but who can “communicate in the language they understand the best” (Appendix 3) so that they “can express [them]selves very well” (Appendix 5). Second, they want to be inclusive for the audience that “does not have to speak German to understand what we are talking about” (Appendix 4). However, when the guests do speak in their own language, there is usually also a moderator who provides a translation in German (Appendix 3, 4, 5).

Clearly, the two radio shows have very different designs, which both have their advantages. Refugee Radio can delve deeper into the story of a single refugee. Our Voice brings a variety of topics and interviewees into one episode and allows more people to participate. This difference may also have been partly due to the fact that more andpaid staff members are working on a show of Our Voice, who each want to share a message, while the presenter of Refugee Radio is usually on his own.

### TOPICS

Although the design of the radio shows of Refugee Radio and Our Voice is different, the topics often overlap, since they both focus on the life of refugees.

Refugee Radio talks about the personal story of an individual refugee:

Ideally, it would be (…) their life story. (…) It would start with their experiences in the home country where they grew up (…), and then talk about their journey, and then talk about their (…) experiences settling into the new society. (…) But it very rarely takes that complete shape. (…) For example, I almost never asked people about their journey. Because (…) often people have had to work with (…) human smugglers (…) and they've had to use fake documents, or they've had to do things that they haven't reported to the home office (…) The classic story would be that beginning, middle and end, but often the middle gets a little vague. (Appendix 2)

Several smaller topics are touched in this life story. For example, the six episodes in the sample talked about the migration system and refugees’ journeys, but also about their home country, music, food, politics, poetry… The presenter especially tries to pay close attention to the job of the interviewees in their home country. He believes that “one of the most devastating things about having to be a refugee is (…) not just (…) the loss of their previous identity, but (…) the loss of their previous profession” (Appendix 2). Refugees may have been a doctor or a teacher in their home country and “don't get to be that here” because they “can't use that qualification here.” Consequently, they are often “working in a kebab shop” or as “a taxi driver or whatever.” Refugee Radio pays attention to “that thing that they were before”, thereby recognising that “they're still that thing, they just don't need to be anymore.” More specifically, the presenter seems to have a preference for artistic guests: “Poetry and, (…) music, I get into quite often” (Appendix 2). According to him, these are two areas where culture is hybrid. Food and sports are such areas as well, but these are not often the topic of the show since he is “not very interested in sport and food doesn't work very well on the radio.”

Although the staff members may sometimes select guests according to their interests, the former intern of Refugee Radio (Appendix 1) argues that the topics depend on what is important for the interviewees. For example, “one student wanted to talk about education, because he was in an ongoing struggle (…) to get back into higher education. (…) In someone else's interview, we spoke about, like sexuality.” She also noticed some recurring topics: many people speak about “mistreatment in detention centres”, about “the kinds of questions that they would get in interrogations”, about the “culture of distrust on this side of the border”, and about “being underestimated, linguistically, and academically.” Furthermore, there is often “an element of nostalgia” and people are “proud[ly] [talking about] the communities they were raised (…), the language, their religion” or their traditional music and food. Yet, they also often talk about “their future dreams like wanting to continue with like, learning and (…) then continuing to (…) make money for themselves” (Appendix 1).

In **Our Voice** the topics are also often defined by the interviewees (Appendix 3, 5). Furthermore, this show too talks about the lives of refugees, their journeys, interests and worries. Sometimes this is done through a “personal story” in an interview (Appendix 4). However, often the fragments in the show examine more generally what refugeedom, or the life of refugees, looks like in Germany, and more specifically in Freiburg: “How people treat them, whether they give them good welcome, or they discriminate among them”, what the “new developments in the life of refugees” are…. (Appendix 6). In addition, one respondent indicates that the guests can “give advice for people who are just migrating” (Appendix 5), although a colleague cautions that this is done through inspirational stories and not through “basics pieces” about, for example, “how do you come in town, how do you buy your ticket” (Appendix 3).

Since the main question of Our Voice is ‘what is *now* going on in refugees’ lives in Freiburg?’, there is a stronger focus on politics and current affairs than in Refugee Radio. One employee states that they “focus on (…) politics, demonstration, (…) asylum process” (Appendix 5). More specifically, this means discussing “new laws (…) in asylum procedure” (Appendix 4), “police control” (Appendix 5), the restrictions and challenges of refugees “living in a first emergency camp” (Appendix 6), etc. However, Our Voice also pays attention to community issues that are less directly linked with migration: “We also talk (…) [about] the problem in the, in the communities. (…) Not always (…) immigrant issues, but also (…) the (…) life system in general (…), for example, like the corona” (Appendix 5). Likewise, they sometimes talk about “which organisations are there in Freiburg” (Appendix 3) and which events will take place.

Literature stated that ethnic community radio often functions as a representative of community issues and interests (cf. 1.1.1.3; 1.1.2.3). Clearly, this function is more present in Our Voice than in Refugee Radio. Nevertheless, that does not mean that Our Voice only reports on the host country, Germany. The home countries of the refugees are discussed as well, as is often the case in ethnic media (cf. 1.1.2.3). Sometimes this happens in the form of a news fact about a particular country. For example, “If (…) at the moment, something really bad happened in Togo and the German media are not really talking about it, then we make to piece on it” (Appendix 3). However, like in Refugee Radio, the home countries are usually covered more indirectly through the stories of the interviewees. According to one employee most refugees really want to “talk about their own country” because “they want (…) the audience to know the reasons why they left their own countries and what is going on presently in their own country now” (Appendix 5).

The literature review conveyed that mainstream media talk about limited topics when dealing with migration, mostly politics and the citizenship of refugees (cf. 1.2.1.4). Refugee Radio and Our Voice distinguish themselves from that approach, but each in a different way. Refugee Radio does not really deal with politics but talks more about what occupies one refugees. Our Voice, by contrast, does talk about socio-political developments that have impact on refugees in Germany, but it focuses on the refugee community in Freiburg, whereas these local issues are overlooked in mainstream media. What both community media have in common is that they – albeit indirectly – pay attention to the home countries of the guests, that the topics are introduced by the refugees themselves, and there is always a link to the refugee experience of the guest, but that this is not necessarily the main topic.

## REFUGEE REPRESENTATION

This section delves deeper into one aspect of the shows: their representation of refugees. First, we briefly look at how the employees of the two radio shows perceive the refugee representation in mainstream media (3.4.1) against which they provide a counterdiscourse (3.4.2). Then, we examine more elaborately what this counterdiscourse looks like and what the logic behind it is (3.4.3).

### MAINSTREAM MEDIA

The employees of both Refugee Radio and Our Voice criticise the mainstream media for several reasons. First, because refugees are often “underrepresented” in the mainstream news, as an employee of Our Voice states (Appendix 4). A colleague adds that refugees are ignored, especially after they arrive in the first-arrival camps or ‘layers’:

 Their news are very small about refugees. Mostly when they are on a sea is when they talk about them (…), or when they are out there facing challenges (…). But (…) I've never heard or seen any television talk about refugees after they have been kept in the layer, how they go, what they go through. (Appendix 6)

Secondly, even when refugees are represented in mainstream media, they do not get a voice (cf. 1.2.1.7). This frustration is mentioned by almost all of the staff members of Refugee Radio and Our Voice (Appendix 1, 3, 4, 5, 6). The former intern of Refugee Radio (Appendix 1) argues that during the period that she worked at the Castaway Heritage project, “the media was filled with talks of Brexit and borders (…) and (…) a lot of the people that were being spoken about, their stories and their voices weren't actually being heard” (Appendix 1). An employee of Our Voice confirms that “in the mass media, they talk about the people, (…) [but] not with the people” (Appendix 3). Instead, “they call doctors, professors from big schools, Harvard, Oxford, to talk about the refugees” (Appendix 4). The intern at Our Voice (Appendix 6) believes that in this way, “they don’t make the facts of what is real underground” and the audience does not see what is actually happening in refugee camps:

[The camps] were supposed to give some specific amount of money to refugees (...) which (…) most of the camps don't do. The camps that I used to stay, never gave me pocket money. (…) Media just go to ask like people responsible for the camp. They never hear these stories. (Appendix 6)

Thirdly, the idea prevails that refugees are not represented as persons or individuals, but as a mass (cf. 1.2.1.6). According to the former intern of Refugee Radio, British mainstream media are “talking about numbers, and like faceless crowds of people coming into the country on boats. (…) They don't focus on their faces” (Appendix 1). Some employees of Our Voice agree that mainstream media talk about refugees like a mass. In Germany, the refugee crisis was described as a “Flüchtlingswelle, (…) [a] wave on the sea. (…), this mass of people coming to Europe” (Appendix 3). A colleague even argues that refugees are portrayed “like (…) an invasion (…) on the European population” (Appendix 4). This representation of refugees as a wave of people was also noticed in literature by Mollard (2000; cf. 1.2.1.5) and Diez et al. (2019; cf. 1.2.1.6), and it dehumanises refugees.

Fourthly, many respondents (Appendix 1, 2, 3, 4) criticise the typical framing of refugees either as a victim or a threat, which corresponds to findings in the literature review (cf. 1.2.1.6). The presenter of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2) adds that refugees are sometimes also framed “as these incredible heroes (…) and these amazing survivors”; a frame that he rejects as well.

Fifthly, some respondents accuse mainstream media of always having an agenda in mind when representing refugees. According to the former intern at Refugee Radio (Appendix 1), they always serve a purpose:

Whenever there's like, dissatisfaction towards the government, they use (…) immigration as like the scapegoat of 'Oh, like, (…) it's all the immigrants’ fault.' (…) The mainstream media is used to deflect attention away from shortcomings that, you know, should be addressed.

This is an extreme example, but more generally, there is the belief that “the news and the television are picking what is important to them (…), what they wanted to broadcast to the hearers” (Appendix 6). That also entails that when refugees are interviewed, they often have to stay within the script that the journalists already have in mind. The presenter of Refugee Radio sees it this way:

They just want to do this story next Wednesday, (…) and they know what the story is going to be and they just want to use us as a sort of refugee location service to fill up that slot. (Appendix 2)

For example, mainstream media let refugees speak but only in a limited role register (cf. 1.2.1.7), and about limited topics (cf. 1.2.1.4). According to an employee of Our Voice (Appendix 3), refugees are mostly represented “in their role as a refugee and (…) not because they are (…) a banker (…) biologist, or something like that. (…) They have some other expertise.” The presenter of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2) thinks that this limited focus is exploitative and disrespectful:

When people claim asylum, they go to the home office, and they tell their refugee story, euhm, about how they were tortured, or what trauma they went through (…). And then the vast majority of (…) journalistic work with refugees, it's just about (…) perform that story for me again (…). And it's exploitative. ‘Hey (…) talk to me for an hour and then I'll just use the two minutes when you talked about being tortured. And (…) It's a terrible thing to reduce somebody, to (…) that one horrible thing that happened to you that time (Appendix 2)

The above-mentioned points of criticism echo many of the aspects that were raised in the literature review about the representation of refugees in mainstream media (cf. 1.2.1): refugees are underrepresented, they get no voice, and they are portrayed within limited frames and roles. Moreover, literature by Berry & Moore (2016) indicated that there exist regional differences, for example between Germany and the United Kingdom, with a larger focus on numbers and crime in the United Kingdom. However, this contrast was not visible in the interviews, except for the frequent use of numbers in the United Kingdom. The respondents of Refugee Radio and Our Voice had quite similar ideas about the refugee representation of British and German mainstream media.

### COUNTERDISCOURSE

Both Refugee Radio and Our Voice want to go against mainstream media. Subverting the representational practises of mainstream media, is one of the main goals of both radio shows (cf. 3.4.3.1) and an aim of ethnic community media in general (cf. 1.1.3; 1.2.2.1). However, they do not counter or expose mainstream media explicitly. Refugee Radio and Our Voice subvert mainstream representations of refugees more indirectly or “organic[ally]” (Appendix 1) by replacing it with an alternative representation: by representing refugees in another, more personal and authentic way, by letting their voice be heard, and by showing “a reality underground” (Appendix 6). In other words, by showing, not telling. The characteristics of that counterrepresentation are set out below.

#### VOICE

Like other community media, Refugee Radio and Our Voice want to be a platform for self-representation by the people. This is the most important difference with mainstream media, and it is also the aspect that underpins almost all other characteristics of refugee representation in the two radio shows.

All the respondents think that it is crucial to listen to the voice of refugees - who are usually voiceless in mainstream media - and let them show their perspective. Almost all the interviewees at **Refugee Radio** are refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers. There are only some exceptions when the guest is not a refugee, but an expert working with migration issues, for example in a charity. However, the presenter of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2) concedes that these are “not [his] first choice of guests”, but “really fillers.” They are invited mostly when he could not find any refugee that wanted participate in the show, but he “would always rather talk to [refugees].”

At **Our Voice**, giving a voice to refugees is the very basis of the radio show, as the name illustrates. This is underlined by all the employees that were interviewed (Appendix 3, 4, 5, 6). One staff member (Appendix 3) declares that “the idea is really [to] (...) make news from the people (…), from [their] perspective.” Another respondent (Appendix 4) links this to the community aspect: “It's difficult for a, an asylum seeker to talk in (…) mainstream media, but here are community radio where you can talk [about] what bothers you.” Firstly, refugees can raise their voice as interviewees in the show. This is very important since they “really need to have a space where they can express themselves, (…) their frustration and find inclusive space” (Appendix 4). Secondly, they are represented through the staff members – who are all refugees and migrants. One employee (Appendix 6) testifies how he became part of Our Voice:

At the end of the day, I realise I could give my voice to the voiceless (…), to the people in the camp through the radio. (…) So I decided to join them so that I could speak for those who feel shy and those who have grievances but cannot express themselves so that the people living in Germany and all over the world will know what exactly is transpiring in (…) various camps in Germany and some part of Europe. In the refugees’ life.

Moreover, Our Voice does not only give refugees the chance to talk in the show, but it also organises other events and public debates, “where (…) refugees and migrants can really take space and say more of (…) what (…) t[hey] say before on the radio” (Appendix 4).

Giving refugees a voice - or rather letting them be heard since “they had their own voice” already (Appendix 1) – has an impact in several ways. First, “it’s an opportunity (…) to empower the [refugees] because many people are sitting in the camp. They don’t know what to do” (Appendix 3; cf. 3.4.3.2). Secondly, it is a way to “rais[e] awareness about what is going on really in their lives” (Appendix 3), and to provide a different perspective on events:

[When] you let [refugees] speak for themselves, then people get to know: ok, there's another perspective of the issue. (…) So you have the possibility to hear the two versions of the things and make your own opinion. So what we are doing is not like imposing it to the public, but letting public to make the difference between what the mainstream medias are saying and what (…) the first consents are saying and make their own self opinion. (Appendix 4)

Another respondent of Our Voice (Appendix 5) illustrates this with an example. When refugees are attacked by the police, it often seems that they did something wrong. Yet, when they can tell their own version of the events, the truth may be different:

They want to make their own voice heard also like to say: This is what happened, I didn't did anything, they just came to the park, (…) like police. (…) They controlled only the black people there, or only the migrant people there, they didn't control other people also. And in their controlling, they also face a threat, like putting them in the ground, like discrimination.

This is a different perspective on the same event. Our Voice and Refugee Radio want to show this side of the story as well in order to create a more complete picture.

Finally, these personal stories can inspire other refugees, or they can make (local) people feel called upon to help. There might be people "out there who want to help a refugee (…) politically or individually, who decided that look, euhm, we, things have to changed” (Appendix 6). Although this change happens “step by step” (Appendix 5), there are some signs that the radio shows indeed have an effect. A respondent Our Voice, for example, states that they see their impact in society “through (…) the cooperations that are sent, (…) through the application of internships that are sent (…), [and] through (…) the political invitations (…) [to] tel[l] about this project” (Appendix 4).

#### AUTHENTICITY

Refugees can speak for themselves at Refugee Radio and Our Voice. The two radio shows also try to leave the stories of the refugees as authentic and untouched as possible, in contrast to mainstream media that, according to them, shape the stories in order to fit in their script.

One way of keeping the interviews authentic is by not editing too much. As the shows of **Refugee Radio** are not live but pre-recorded, some edits can be made, but these are minimal so that it stays “an authentic conversation (…) about the reality of the issue” (Appendix 1). Both the (former) intern (Appendix 1) and the presenter (Appendix 2) state that they mostly leave out things that the interviewee wants to take out. Other things that are cut out are the “briefing period” at the beginning of the interview, “extremely long pauses”, parts when the interviewee asks to “clarify (…) a word in English”, and things “that would have affected [the asylum] case [of the interviewee]”. Yet, they would not leave out phrases that are “inherent to the story that they were telling” (Appendix 1).

The focus on authenticity is also very visible in the book that was published of the Castaway Heritage project, to which the intern (Appendix 1) contributed. In the book, the interviews were transcribed verbatim, except for some minimal edits:

 We wrote the transcript as they were said. So even when they were forming sentences, and then they would backtrack, we'd write that in. [Or] (…) the way like grammar is formed in their own mother tongue. (…) Like with the Arab participants, (…) when they'd make a mistake with like, word order or something, (…) they'd make it (…) because (…) they're applying like Arabic grammar to English. (…) It was important for us to keep those like micro mistakes (…) because in written prose, you don't have the identifier of voice (…) or accent. So we thought this was as true to them as we could get.”

In **Our Voice**, the shows are live, but the interviews are usually pre-recorded as well. How much is edited in an interview depends on the length of the conversation: “If (…) I was talking someone for 20 minutes, then (…) I will cut much out of it. If it was short, then it's ok” (Appendix 3). However, the respondent does not explain what kind of things she cuts out. Still, another respondent of Our Voice underlines that they do not want to “impact on the stories of people” but let “the story remain authentic” (Appendix 4). They too want to share pure, unfiltered, plain stories. Furthermore, this employee encourages the guests to tell their story “with all the emotion around it, with all the truth, all the heart in the story” (Appendix 4). Inspired by this, the intern at Our Voice (Appendix 6) also tries to “say [things] (…) in such a way that [one] could get your feelings”, to tell things as they are:

If you (…) [have] this kind of sickness that kills people. And you say 'look, I'm not going to let it be known by any person'. (…) How can you get a medication for your sickness? (…) How would the people get your feelings that you are really suffering? (…) You need to tell your feeling as it is so that people will know that exactly this what this guy is saying (…). But if you continue to say (…) you are ok. Then who cares about ok? (…) Nobody cares about ok. We don't have any solution for ok. Because, ok is ok. (Appendix 6)

#### INDIVIDUAL STORIES

The representation of refugees in Refugee Radio and Our Voice is authentic because they get a voice, which is unfiltered, but also because they can tell their story as an individual instead of disappearing in a mass of refugees.

**Refugee Radio** really wants to show stories of individuals. Almost each episode is totally dedicated to the story of one specific refugee. The former intern (Appendix 1) states that this was also the purpose of the Castaway Heritage project:

 This was (…) entirely about the (…) participants' humanity, their personality, their name, their voice, like everything that identified them was in the project, was in their episode, and in their chapter of the book.

An episode of **Our Voice** welcomes several guests and reporters, but they too almost all speak for themselves and not as a group: “The idea was (…) to go away from this idea of refugees as a group of people who are coming to Europe and taking everything but individuals with their own experiences” (Appendix 3). Another employee (Appendix 4) agrees that it is very important to pay attention to the individual differences. For example, when referring to African people, Our Voice does not generalise:

We are not talking of black people coming of Africa. (…) We are talking about single people (…) who have single stories. (…) So, we are not talking about me (…) as any other African person. Africa is big. There is Togo, there is Cameroon, there is Congo, there is (…) Eritrea, Somalia, South Africa, (…) and so forth and so on (…). Who doesn't have the same education, who doesn't have the same, euhm, historical background, who doesn't have the same stories. (…) Everything is different. (Appendix 4)

Clearly, the aim of both radio shows is to let refugees talk and let them talk for themselves, as individuals. This again illustrates how they indirectly combat the representation of refugees (as a mass) in mainstream media.

#### DIVERSITY

The aim of ethnic community media is to give a pluralistic representation. As the literature review showed “community media do not want to present just one voice of the community, but a diversity of people and views” (cf. 1.1.1.3, p.11). By sharing personal stories of many refugees, Refugee Radio and Our Voice indeed show that there exists a large diversity within the refugee community. But what does this diversity look like exactly and do the employees consciously look for diversity in the selection of the guests?

At **Refugee Radio**, it is mostly the presenter who looks for guests, instead of refugees coming to the radio: “People don't come and request to do it. (…) I often have to spend a long time making a connection with somebody and earning their trust (…) before they'll agreed to do it” (Appendix 2). However, in this search, he does not actively look for a diverse mix of people, except for a balance between men and women:

I don't think I've ever consciously tried to make it diverse, in terms of a mixture of men and women, old and young, people from different countries. (…) It does just naturally tend to be very diverse. I've never had to make too much of an effort. Euhm I must admit, in the past year, (…) where I've had an option to choose from a pool of people, (…) I have, euhm, chosen to interview more women than men. Just to sort of ensure there's a gender balance.

The intern at the Castaway Heritage project (Appendix 1) states that they interviewed “a balanced, (…), all rounded mix of refugees and asylum seekers.” There were stories of refugees from different countries and regions (e.g. Central Asia, The Middle East, East Africa, Eastern Europe) and with different driving forces that brough them to the United Kingdom (e.g. sexuality, economic reasons, war...). There was also a mix of refugees who had recently arrived or who had already been in the United Kingdom for many years. Again, like in Refugee Radio in general, this diversity was not actively sought for:

We didn't really almost realise how diverse it was until we did the interviews. (…) Some people's interviews were like really jokey and light and nice. And some people were, was heavy and like harrowing, and like very clearly traumatic. (Appendix 1)

**Our** **Voice** shares diverse stories as well. There are speakers “from different countries, from different languages” and with a different “stage (…) in their life now in Germany” (Appendix 5). In contrast to Refugee Radio, Our Voice does not really have to look for guests. Often refugees are coming to them because they want to say something (Appendix 3, 5). Still, like Refugee Radio, this radio show does not select guests in terms of diversity either: “It comes more naturally” (Appendix 4). Nevertheless, there also seems to be exception for the balance between men and women, which is more actively looked for, at least by some employees:

I think for many it's incidentally, (…) but for us x and I, (…) we actively look for women, because we saw that when we organise the events, (…) sometimes we are just there with only men coming. (…) We started to organise also empowerment workshops for women. And they're the women coming from like, from different countries, (…) [like] from Nigeria, (…) Gambi[a], (…) Syria. (Appendix 3)

Both Refugee Radio and Our Voice, thus, are a stage for refugees from different sexes, countries, and with different experiences. They keep in mind that there are enough female speakers, but apart from that they do not actively look for a diverse mix of guests. This diversity seems to be inherent in the refugee community, which is a mix of very different people. Therefore, the former intern of Refugee Radio (Appendix 1) thinks it is all the more incomprehensible that refugees are usually reduced to one group in mainstream media:

When the main (…) news clumps this hugely diverse group of people under one umbrella, (…) the collage of stories in our book highlights that that's not really the reality at all. (…) If anything, you can't group these people all together.

#### TERMINOLOGY

Refugee, asylum seeker, migrant, illegal migrant… There are several terms to refer to a person who has migrated, all with a slightly different meaning and connotation. Both for Refugee Radio and Our Voice, terminology is a sensitive issue on which the employees have a clear but sometimes different point of view.

As the name illustrates, **Refugee Radio** mostly uses the term ‘refugee’. This was claimed by both the respondents (Appendix 1, 2) and it was also the most common term in the six episodes that we listened too (with sometimes the words ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘exile’ appearing as well). Both the former intern and the presenter of Refugee Radio state that they actively think about which term they use. They chose for the term ‘refugee’ for several reasons. First, the word ‘refugee’ is used to be precise. For the former intern (Appendix 1), this means that she wants to use the accurate, specific legal terminology, because different terms refer to different situations: “Before they got status, they're asylum seeker, after they got status, they're a refugee and they have the same rights as a British national. (…) That kind of stuff was important.” The presenter (Appendix 2) also uses the term ‘refugee’ to be “clear”, but for him this rather means to be “honest about our intentions” than to connect a specific term to a specific situation. The latter is also shown by the fact that he uses ‘refugee’ as a collective term:

The term ‘refugee’ had, should really, (…) be with a lowercase r. I use ‘refugee’ to mean anybody who's an exile (…) from their home. (…) Undocumented migrants, (…) people who are trafficked, (…) people who are (…) failed asylum seekers or whatever. (Appendix 2)

A second reason why the employees of Refugee Radio mainly use ‘refugee’ is because they have the feeling that there are negative connotations attached to the term, as opposed to ‘migrant’, which they want to change: “It was (…) like a reclamation (…). The negative connotations weren't coming from us. We were trying to change like (…) what's written in the newspapers” (Appendix 1). The presenter (Appendix 2) elaborates on this:

I wanted to have the word ‘refugee’ in the title of the project from the start, because I thought it was becoming something of a dirty word (…) and I wanted (…) people to feel positive about the word. Euhm. But yeah, for most refugees, they'd rather not hear it that often. (…) I understand that people don't like to label and understand that they don't want to be tied to that identity (…). But there's still work to be done around the stigmatizing (…) and (…) I don't want them to feel ashamed of that label. Because (…) it does apply to them. (…) As uncomfortable as it is, it's it's true. (…) I think it's better if we (…) just confront the term head on and (…) make it mean what we want it to mean (…) rather than being scared of it and using words like ‘migrant’ or ‘exile’ in an attempt to be inoffensive. I think we then just, euhm, concede the centre ground for the government to determine (…) what these words mean.

The presenter is aware that ‘refugee’ is a label that many people do not like to receive or even refuse, but that is precisely why he uses it: in order to change that perception. That ‘refugee’ is perceived as a rather negative term is striking, because the literature review showed that the UNCHR recommended this term, and also ‘asylum seeker’, as the appropriate, desired term (cf. 1.2.1.5). The presenter (Appendix 2) talks even more negatively about ‘asylum seeker’, which he does not even want to reclaim:

The term ‘asylum seeker’, (…) that's actually a horrific term. (…) These terms, (…) make you, euhm, something other than you are, they make you a thing that's seeking. The concept of the seeker, (…) I think, has a psychological impact (…) that is intentional on behalf of the government, and I think is, is something that we need to (…) resist and not just meekly adopt.

However, what does correspond to the literature review is that the British press often uses the adjective ‘illegal’ (cf. 1.2.1.5), which Refugee Radio resists as well: “We were interviewing people who were technically illegally in UK. But like, you don't refer to someone as illegal?” (Appendix 1).

The employees of **Our Voice** also actively think about the terminology, but they have more divergent ideas about which term is appropriate. Especially about the English terminology, they disagree. One employee states that they use the term ‘refugee’, because it is linked to a specific experience: “It's different than a migrant. (…) It's not the same experience” (Appendix 3). Furthermore, she also wants to reclaim the term: “We should own the word and create our own story of it.” However, she indicates that this choice sets Our Voice apart from other German refugee radios, who are more held back by the “bad framing” of the term ‘refugee’ “in the mass media.”

A colleague agrees that the word ‘refugee’ often has a “negative connotation”, although there are also “people that think, ‘ok it's egal’” (Appendix 4). She understands both sides, but she does seem to prefer the term ‘migrant’: “We respect the people that we interview so much. So we really call them ‘migrant’.” She only uses the term ‘refugee’ when she wants to “explain something specific in the show” for the audience. However, she indicates this first to the interviewee, who may feel uncomfortable with this term: “For some reasons, if you use ‘refugees’, then we explain: ‘I, I hope it's not shocking for you because what you're saying should be clear. It should be said, and it should be said clearly.’”

Another staff member (Appendix 5), by contrast, really refuses the term ‘refugee’. He believes that “the people in camp (…) prefer ‘migrants’ or ‘asylum seeker’”, whereas “the term ‘refugees’, they don't like it.” If he himself is called ‘refugee’, he “feel[s] frustrated”, because refugees are “also immigrant” or “asylum seeker also.” The last respondent of Our Voice (Appendix 6) believes the opposite. According to him, he is a refugee and not a migrant:

I'm not a normal migrant. I am refugee. I live in a layer. I don't have the privacy. (…) I don't have my right, my freedom. (…). I want the people (…) out there listening to me to know that these are my conditions. When you mention of refugee, people must understand how life is difficult for this person in their camp. (Appendix 6)

He attaches less importance to the connotations, but he wants the audience to know that he is not just someone who has migrated but a refugee, who has a much more difficult situation. According to him, using a nice term hides the suffering of refugees. He even believes that “because these people are (…) so nice to these terms, that is why maybe there have not been a big change in the camps. But if they are really seeing it as it is, (…), there could be a change.” He, thus, wants “to be precise” in his terminology, like respondent 3. However, for him this precision is not restricted to using the term ‘refugee’, since not all the people whom they report about are strictly speaking refugees: “We let people know that these people are asylum seekers, these people are refugees, these people are migrants (…). So we are always specific.”

Clearly, there is much divergence about the English terminology in Our Voice. Also in the episodes that we listened to, both the term ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ were used. However, there is less discussion about the German terminology. A couple of years ago, there was a debate with all the refugee radios in Germany in which they decided to no longer use the word ‘Flüchtling’, which is the German translation of ‘refugee’, but to change it into ‘Geflüchtete’, which could be translated as ‘migratised’. This new term was also heard in some of the shows in the sample. It focuses more on the process of migrating than on the result. Both respondent 4 and 5 think this is important because in “Flüchtlinge, the 'linge' is like diminish, (…) reducing somebody to (…) another level” (Appendix 4).

To conclude, Refugee Radio mainly uses the term ‘refugee’ and in Our Voice one employee always uses ‘migrant’, others change between ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’, and another respondent prefers ‘refugee’; in German, they normally use ‘Geflüchtete’. Despite the differences, the correspondents of both Refugee Radio and Our Voice actively think about the terminology and they are all very aware of negative connotations that are attached to the words. They also agree that the term ‘refugee’ is often used in a negative way. Therefore, respondent 5 refuses the word, whereas respondents 1, 2 and 3 use it to reclaim it and turn it into a more positive word.

Moreover, literature by Berry & Moore (2016) stated that the British press often uses the term ‘migrant’ and the German press ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’ (cf. 1.2.1.5). The interviews show less of that dichotomy, probably because less was said about the terminology of mainstream media. Berry & Moore also suggested that ‘refugee’ and ‘asylum seeker’ were more positive terms. However, the interviews show that this is an easy assumption, and that in reality the connotations may be perceived as completely different, with ‘migrant’ being a more positive word than ‘refugee’[[5]](#footnote-5).

#### FRAMES

As indicated earlier in the literature review (cf. 1.2.1.6) and the results (cf. 3.4.1), mainstream media portray refugees often as victims or threats, which can be called two ‘frames’. A frame is an angle to look at reality, which means there are always several possible frames or perspectives to look at the same event. Furthermore, framing is inherent to journalism. Every report contains (a) frame(s). Consequently, not only mainstream media frame, but the two ethnic community radio also use framing, even though the respondents sometimes felt uncomfortable with the term. However, Refugee Radio and Our Voice use different frames than mainstream media, and they also differ from mainstream press because they often do not use only one frame but alternate between frames, thereby showing different perspectives on the refugeedom or refugees’ lives.

Both respondents of **Refugee Radio** (Appendix 1, 2) indicate that they want to get away from the image of refugees as a ‘threat’ or a ‘victim’. Instead, they portray refugees as human beings, as “people talking about their families and people dreaming of the future and people who are going through like real struggles being interrogated” (Appendix 1). They want to show that a refugee is just a person who also happens to be a refugee:

[We] simply allo[w] people to present themselves as people. And (…) the best way of doing that is allowing people to be a bit boring and (…) to be a bit (…) specific about their own situation. Whether that's talking about (…) a supermarket they go to or a nursing qualification they failed to secure or whatever it is (…), that's the reality of it. And that's the first and most fundamental myth that needs to be (…) dealt with. (Appendix 2)

Whether consciously or unconsciously, the radio makers of Refugee Radio use multiple frames in one episode to show that the guest is a human being with many facets, and that the refugee experience only one of them. Therefore, they are frustrated by the fact that mainstream media use framing in an essentialising way and reduce refugees to one frame:

The issue of (…) the victim refugee or the terrorist refugee, is that (…) the media sees them as only that. (…) Even if you are a victim refugee, that's not just entirely your being (…), you have a career, you have a family, you have passions, and hobbies, interests, and (…) a complex history that brought you to where you are today. So you might be a victim now, but that doesn't mean you'll be a victim for the rest of your life. (Appendix 1)

In addition, this respondent states that even though someone is a victim now, who “need[s] support”, he can at the same time “ha[ve] agency, (…) ha[ve] the ability to speak for themsel[f].” Consequently, she and her colleague reject the ‘victim’ frame because it implies that refugees “got no agency whatsoever” (Appendix 2) and that they need a “savior” (Appendix 1). This corresponds to what literature by Smets et al. (2019) argued: the ‘victim’ frame may appear as more positive but is in fact also dehumanising (cf. 1.2.1.6). However, this does not mean that Refugee Radio never shows that refugees are victims of certain systems. The difference is that the radio makers choose to let the victim in his power and not present themselves as saviours:

We were trying to (…) bring light (…) to matters that they thought were important. (…) And through those stories highlight the shortcomings of the immigration system. (…) It's not our job to be like, ‘here we are, we're saving you’. (Appendix 1)

Furthermore, the respondents underline that they do not define the frames themselves. Instead, they follow the frames that the guests introduce: “We get into what their identity of themselves is, whether it's as a mother or as a student, or whatever it is, rather than just simply as a foreigner” (Appendix 2). This self-framing also means that if refugees “situate themselves in [a victim position], (…) then (…) that's how it comes across” but the employees “do try not to place them in boxes” (Appendix 2). The other respondent agrees: “If (…) they self proclaim, (…) ‘I am the victim’, then fair enough”, but “it's not up to us to say, ‘Oh, poor thing’, (…) really it's condescending and patronizing” (Appendix 1).

As was explained, frames can shine a different light on the same reality. The presenter of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2) refers to one specific way in which he tries to do this. While mainstream media focus on the pull factors, or the reasons why someone wants to migrate to another country, he focuses on the push factors, or the reasons why someone has to leave his home country. He thinks that by addressing the pull factors, the media but also the British government make people believe that refugees are just coming “to access benefits.” Yet, somebody told him: “I was a prince in my country and I'm a beggar in this country. Why would I choose to do that?” That is why the presenter wants to “talk about th[e] [home] country and what's going wrong in that country (…), the (…) persecution they face, the economic situation (…), what's the British government doing in relation to their countries?” This counterframe is a more conscious choice of the presenter instead of a self-framing of the guests. Nevertheless, it is also a way of making the audience look at refugees in a different way.

Moreover, self-framing by the refugees is not possible either in the few episodes where the guest is an expert and not a refugee. Inevitably, these episodes create a more passive image of refugees, and they “become far more (...) instrumentalised” (Appendix 1). The employees are aware that this is not an ideal setting, but even then, they try to present refugees as complex human beings. According to the former intern, the guests also looked at refugees in that way: “The lawyers, the interpreters, the caseworkers, they all know that they’re dealing with humans” (Appendix 1). For example, “the caseworker (...) wasn’t like, stating numbers (...), she was talking about (...) people’s stories” and the lawyer “was emotional” in the interview and talked about “specific stories of children that she had represented.”

At **Our Voice** all the guests seem to be refugees or migrants. The staff members also follow the self-framing of the guest. For example, one employee argues that he tries to take over from the guests the “words that maybe they've already said” (Appendix 5). Moreover, the radio makers also reject the use of one single frame. One respondent argues that “we don't stand into one category. It is open” (Appendix 3). She certainly wants to prevent from portraying the interviewees *only* as refugees:

We really don't use that framing. (…) We try not to talk about (…) just the story of being a refugee. (…) There is this story of refugee in, in the people but it doesn't mean that it's what makes the people. (Appendix 3)

However, this refugee experience remains one aspect of their lives, which the programme does not ignore: “We will never leave, we cannot leave the stories, the problems, the difficulties that are here” (Appendix 3).

In contrast to Refugee Radio, an episode of Our Voice consists of several smaller parts, which means that within each part or interview, there is place for less frames. Therefore, it may happen that one characteristic frame stands out. In the six episodes that were listened to, this focus was often on the suffering or victim position of the interviewed refugee. However, there were also examples in which the guest appeared as a ‘hero’. Both respondent 3 and 4 gave the same example of such a “successful story” (Appendix 4). In 2019, they did an interview with a refugee from Iraq who went “from nothing to a kickboxer” (Appendix 3). This kickboxer is a person with many layers: he is a refugee, who was suffering for some time in the past, but who managed to climb out of that situation. Still, the focus lies very much on his success. This is the frame that stands out.

In short, the use of frames of both radios is quite similar. They want to show that refugees are complex people, who have many characteristics and interests. Therefore, they alternate between many frames by which they show different perspectives on refugees’ lives. Moreover, these frames are the ones that the guest uses to tell his story and which the radio makers take over. However, there does seem to be a difference between the two shows in the sense that Refugee Radio presents one long interview with one person, which makes it possible to introduce many different perspectives, whereas in the different shorter interview in Our Voice, there is less space for variety.

#### ROLES

People fulfil different functions in their lives, for example as a father, man, doctor, dancer, adult… all at once. When they speak, it is often from one such a role. In the literature review (cf. 1.2.1.7), Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou (2016) and Berry & Moore (2016) showed that when refugees get a voice in mainstream media, they usually can speak from a limited role register, that is mostly from their role as refugee. Diez et al. (2019) added that refugees rarely are asked to talk about their professional expertise. Refugee Radio and Our Voice try to subvert this restriction and let the refugees talk from whatever role they like, whether it is as a refugee, a biologist, a journalist... This resembles the multitude of frames. Nevertheless, frames and roles differ in the sense that frames tell something about the perspective from which someone else looks at refugees, whereas the roles depart from the refugee who talks from them.

Since refugees speak at Refugee Radio and Our Voice, they are agents by definition. Nevertheless, the interviewees may still be passive or stuck in their life situation, over which they have no control. A staff member of Our Voice explains:

 They can’t do so much. (...) They don’t have an opportunity to work, so (...) you are keep in one place. (...) They are a little bit frustrated in life activities (...). They are a little bit sad of what they are passive to this life. (Appendix 5)

Still, there are also refugees who have been able to take up the reins, especially those who have been staying in the host country already for a while. They more often talk about their profession. In the episodes of **Refugee Radio** that we listened to, there were musicians, an actor, a poet, a banker and an activist, who all spoke about their interests and expertise. The presenter (Appendix 2) assures that:

 [They can talk] about their own field. (...) What they have to say is of interest (...) and is (...) to be listened to. (...) Even if they’re wrong (...), even if their economic analysis of the Great Lakes region of Africa is is incorrect, at least you’re hearing a different perspective on it.

However, the guests do not necessarily need to “talk about issues”, but they may also “talk about themselves”, whether this is “as a mother or as a student, or whatever” (Appendix 2). In one radio show of the sample, a guest even spoke from her role as a refugee, a woman, a poet, and a banker, all in one episode. Refugee Radio, thus, recognises that refugees are multifaceted people who can talk from several roles, and certainly not only from their role as refugee.

Several employees of **Our Voice** similarly declare that refugees “are more than the topic of migration” (Appendix 4) and that in the radio show, they “not [only] talk about [how] they came here, how difficult it is here but (...) also (...) about their lives” (Appendix 3), even about “different aspects on life” (Appendix 5). One employee (Appendix 3) argues that:

The most important interviews even are those where the person talks about his work as a journalist back home or before, or the person talks about his love for a specific kind of food, or talk about, like, one aspect of their culture that they really like, and that they think people should know about it. Or their love for football (…). So it's much more about them as (…) a person (…). People with their own experiences (…) and this experience as a refugee is just one.

For example, in the observed sample, refugees spoke from their expertise as an intercultural promotor, a musician, and an activist. The respondents themselves also mentioned the kickboxer (Appendix 3, 4, cf. supra), and a refugee right activist, who “was also a refugee and (...) still fight for the right of refugees” (Appendix 3). Moreover, like in Refugee Radio, many guests are musicians. Our Voice even has a special episode once a month, called ‘Colourful culture’, which introduces “artists with a migration background” (Appendix 3). These episodes really focus on the musicianship of the guests. They jam and philosophise about life in general, and barely talk about migration.

To conclude, in both radio shows, refugees are not restricted to a limited role register, in which they have to talk about their life as refugees. They can talk about different aspects of their life, and consequently from several roles. This means that they are also taken seriously as experts, which is rarely the case in mainstream media. That refugees take on active, sometimes even political, roles in their self-representation corresponds to the findings of Georgiou (2018) and Echevarria et al. (2015) that were presented in the literature review (cf. 1.2.1.2). However, there is also a difference between the two shows: the one-hour show of Refugee Radio consist of an interview with only one guest, which means that this guests has the opportunity to speak from many different roles, whereas in the (multiple) shorter interviews of Our Voice, they speak from one or a limited number of roles. Nevertheless, Our Voice also presents a diversity of roles in total, since the guests have many different interests and functions. And the crucial thing is that, even if they speak from one role, this is not necessarily their role as refugee.

#### POSITIVE?

The literature review stated that many mainstream media adopt a negative tone to report about migration (cf. 1.2.1.3). The mainstream news often connects refugees to crime and threat or portrays them as a problem. The question is if the counterdiscourse of these two ethnic community media is more positive. Refugee Radio and Our Voice do shy away from a polarised, critical tone, and try to adopt a more empathic, direct perspective. However, that does not mean that all the topics are ‘good’ or positive. Both shows pay attention to what is going well in refugees’ life and how they contribute to the society, but they also show the challenges that refugees are facing. The former intern at Refugee Radio (Appendix 1) states that the interviewees told “really beautiful anecdotes”, but they also talked about “some issues that (...) you kind of need to like pause [for].” An employee of Our Voice (Appendix 4) similarly declares that refugees “have much good things, but they’re also most difficult things” and “Our Voice doesn’t force anybody to give a positive narrative.” However, these are things that are negative or difficult in the lives of refugees, which is different than saying that refugees themselves are bad.

#### CONCLUSION ON REPRESENTATION

Through the literature review it became evident that although research about ethnic community radio states that it provides more positive self-representations, there are also limitations. And we suggested that these “limitations could be a reflection of a reality that does not always correspond to the ideal of a positive, diverse and careful representation” (p.28). However, in Refugee Radio and Our Voice this is not the case: their refugee representation does capture refugees in a nuanced way, that corresponds to the theory in many areas.

The representation of refugees in Refugee Radio and Our Voice can be summarised as direct, human and multifaceted. Both radio shows put the spotlight on the refugees, who get the microphone - especially in Our Voice, since the presenters themselves have a migration background. The interviews are normally pre-recorded, but the radio makers try to edit as little as possible so that it remains an authentic, unfiltered story. Moreover, refugees speak as individuals and not as a mass. Because of this and because refugees are by definition a varied group of people, the programmes provide a diverse picture of refugees. Furthermore, they show that there is not only much difference between every refugee, but also that each refugee individually is a versatile person, who also has a family, a profession and passions. This pluralistic representation corresponds to what the literature review revealed about self-representation in ethnic community media (cf. 1.2.2.2). Both programmes, thus, do not essentialise the guest within one frame, but they try to alternate between frames (especially in Refugee Radio), thereby demonstrating that, for example, a refugee is stuck in the asylum procedure but also takes action as an activist and even plays the guitar. Analogously, he can speak from all those different roles.

The representational strategies of Refugee Radio and Our Voice are more or less the same. Nevertheless, there are some differences. First, in Our Voice, there is less time for each guest to address all their functions and interests. Refugee Radio, by contrast, focuses on one guest per episode which makes it possible to present him in all his complexity. What also plays a role is that Refugee Radio is more of a human-interest programme about the life and passions of one refugee, whereas the guests in Our Voice do not always come to talk about themselves, but often also raise socio-political issues. Second, the radio shows differ in their terminology to refer to refugees: Refugee Radio chooses the term ‘refugee’, whereas many of the employees of Our Voice prefer ‘migrant’ (although there is also internal debate between the colleagues).

Certainly, the two radio shows are very different from what the literature review and the respondents revealed about refugee representation in mainstream media. A first explanation is that the only topic of Refugee Radio and Our Voice are refugees, in all their aspects. This means that the news coverage of refugees is not limited to a small item every now and then - which is consequently often not very complex, but one-sided and even stereotypical - but that it can go much deeper into what drives refugees. Another crucial factor is that the representation in the two ethnic community radios starts from the refugees themselves. This direct self-representation creates a more elaborate, honest and authentic image than when they are spoken about. Finally, the representation seems to be strongly connected to the community aspect of the two radio shows. Refugee Radio and Our Voice are accessible, informal media organisations, that open their doors for refugees in order to participate and speak for themselves, and that create a safe space where refugees can raise their worries and ideas. Usually even a relationship of trust needs to be established before refugees are willing to tell their story on-air. Community radio works on this relationship: the employees often already get to know the interviewees in off-air activities, and more generally, they make the refugees feel welcome in a community.

### MOTIVATION FOR THIS REPRESENTATION

The in-depth interviews disclose that the above-described refugee representation in Refugee Radio and Our Voice is driven by two goals: empowering the refugees and challenging mainstream narratives. An employee of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2) formulates it like this:

There is a sort of double (…) bottom line (…). On the one hand, I want it to be (…) a beneficial experience for the person I'm interviewing. (…) [On the other hand] I wanted (…) to combat dehumanisation of refugees and migrants.

First, the goal of creating a counterdiscourse is discussed, then is examined how the radio shows provide mental support for refugees.

#### COUNTERDISCOURSE

Both Refugee Radio and Our Voice came into existence in order to create an alternative media representation of refugees. A respondent of Our Voice, who was there from the beginning, states that “in order to change these narratives, (…) different refugee radios came up [in Germany] just for refugees to have the possibility to talk for themselves” (Appendix 3). The presenter of Refugee Radio similarly declares that:

Combating dehumanisation, (…) combating racism, challenging stereotypes, and directly hitting sort of myths and misconceptions. That was always at the heart of it. And that's still in the back of my mind every time I do an interview.

As the quote suggests, Refugee Radio keeps trying to counter the negative coverage of refugees in mainstream media, even after having existed for more than ten years. For example, the Castaway Heritage project from 2019, to which the intern contributed, wanted to “subver[t] mainstream media and offe[r] something a little, little bit more compassionate and empathetic” (Appendix 1). Our Voice, as well, still tries to bring “another perspective” (Appendix 4).

According to the respondents, this counterdiscourse is important in order to change the perception of the audience. The presenter of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2) believes that “changing the opinions of the British listeners (…) has value.” However, he is aware that “the participants don’t care” about that because “their situation is so urgent and pressing and their own problems are so immediate, that they don't have time for any sort of abstracts.” Moreover, a staff member of Our Voice (Appendix 3) even hopes that the alternative representation of refugees eventually will change mainstream media:

Maybe this would have an impact on the media, that media (…), when we talk about something, then first of all, also ask to the victims, (…) the people themselves. (…) This is what I would like to achieve some, someday.

Note that this counterdiscourse does not only influence the host society, but also the refugees themselves. If the host society sees a more complex, human image of refugees, they may act less hostile towards them. Consequently, refugees may feel more accepted and included, which facilitates their adaptation to the new culture (Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987).

However, the extent to which this counterdiscourse actually changes the beliefs of the audience, is not very visible and difficult to measure. According to the presenter of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2) “there's no real good scientific metric for counting if Refugee Radio is working to achieve that goal. So that goal is therefore more nebulous and less important.” What is a more visible and important aim for him, is empowering refugees by letting them speak on the radio. An employee of Our Voice (Appendix 3) agrees that it is first of all “a refugee show, which is meant to empower them (…), to give him the space to talk.” These two ethnic community radios first want to be a safe space for refugees to come and tell what is on their mind, and only secondly try to spread that message.

#### MENTAL SUPPORT

##### On-air

Foxwell & Meadows (2011) stated that ethnic community radio plays an important role in the wellbeing of refugees because it reduces homesickness by talking about their home countries (cf. 1.1.3). This effect was not really mentioned by the respondents, possibly because they focused more on the refugees who participate in the show than on the audience. However, their statements do correspond to the ideas of Forde et al. (2009, p.47), who argued that ethnic community radio supports refugees by giving them “the capacity to represent themselves to each other – and to communicate and validate their presence” (cf. 1.1.3), and to those of Carpentier et al. (2007, p.225) who assert that radio can empower refugees “by signifying that their statements are considered important enough to be broadcast” (cf. 1.2.2.2).

The presenter of **Refugee Radio** (Appendix 2) believes that participating in the radio shows empowers refugees. According to him, this positive effect is even more important than the finished journalistic product:

It's far more meaningful as a participatory exercise for the people that are doing it. (…) And in terms of the impact on them, I hope that it's empowering and respectful. And I certainly know that it is empowering and respectful, as opposed to taking part in euhm mainstream media, which is so often a, a real smash and grab experience, and people do feel exploited.

The radio makers of Refugee Radio certainly intend to mean something to the participating refugees. However, for the actual effect, we have to look at the reactions of the refugees themselves. The former intern (Appendix 1) indicates that the refugees who told their story in the Castaway Heritage project reacted in different ways when they saw the result:

Some of them were like, overjoyed, like: ‘wow, this is a product of like my history. This is a product of like, who I am and I've participated in something meaningful.’ (…) [Others] were very like nonchalant about it. Like, ‘yeah, oh, yeah, I did that interview a few months ago. Oh, that's pretty cool.’”

While for some participants the project did not change that much, many participants are proud of their contribution and the project has boosted their self-esteem. However, the respondent (Appendix 1) concedes that she cannot say for sure “whether it had a long, long lasting effect on them” since she saw many of the participants only for a while.

The respondents of **Our Voice** agree that being part of a radio show makes refugees feel empowered and valuable. One employee states that the participating refugees “have more confidence” because “they have the feeling that (...) this is our voice. (…) They believe after getting that interview, it will be played in our, euhm, radio station. So they feel something is at least (…) a little bit changed” (Appendix 5). In other words, by talking on the radio, refugees get the feeling that they can contribute to something. A colleague argues as well that it is their job to let refugees know that they are worth it to tell their story, to “say 'ok, you know, people listen to you and they want to hear (…) more if you want.’” (Appendix 4).

Furthermore, the journalistic workshops play a role in empowering the participants. One employee of Our Voice (Appendix 5) testifies that the workshops gave him more skills, so that now he is “able to do some interviews, do some reportage, go for, (…) demonstrations.” Therefore, he “think[s] the workshop is, is important.” Moreover, the staff of Our Voice tries to give feedback to tell the participating refugees “you are doing great” (Appendix 4), which certainly gives a confidence boost as well.

In addition, a respondent argues that the radio show provides a form of mental support for refugees because it distracts them from their worries:

When you sit at home, you don't do anything, (…) your mind keep thinking so many different things. (…) You need to put yourself to do something, (…) making yourself busy. Because when you keep on sleeping, being at home, (…), you have maybe (…) mental problems. (…). [So you need] distraction from that, stop thinking more about the asyl[um] process and focus on the (…) impact you put in the voice of the voiceless. (Appendix 5)

Finally, an employee of Our Voice (Appendix 3) noticed that letting refugees tell their story on the radio can have a therapeutic effect. She believes that “when you speak about what you're going through (…), it's a kind of healing.” A colleague (Appendix 4) agrees that sometimes people “need to share [their story] to be free.”

##### Off-air

Next to the support that refugees may experience by participating in the radio shows, Refugee Radio and Our Voice provide off-air mental and social support activities. As mentioned earlier, **Refugee Radio** is a charity of which the radio show is only one of the projects. The charity mostly receives funding “to deliver (…) mental health projects” (Appendix 2). For example, the former intern (Appendix 1) states that they organise a mental health support group every Monday and that they do “mental health walk[s]”:

They (…) go (…) around Sussex, and just (…) get isolated people out (…), actively walking and seeing new places, euh, places that they might not have had the chance to go (…) so (…) take them to like really, really rural, (…) scenic places, which would do them so good. (Appendix 1)

**Our Voice** focuses more on the radio show, but one employee (Appendix 3) indicates that they too support refugees also in other ways. She underlines that “it's not just about talking about the radio”, but “while looking for people to come to the team, [they] see which (…) problems (…) people have”, that they try to solve with them. In addition, refugees can come to for a counselling session: “They can come with their topics, with the problems” and the staff members of Our Voice suggest “where to go, for example, to which organisation.” The staff is even aware that some refugees may want “go out of the camp” and provides a room “with beds and couch and so that people can come and just rest” (Appendix 3). Besides, the employees of Our Voice also empower and support each other. For example, one staff member (Appendix 4) testifies that she received a lot of backing from the other employees when she recently arrived:

X and Y were for a total support at my beginning. (…) Y was like: 'Hey, X, let us see how we can do to help Z to stay in this project'. X was always like: 'Y, what can we do now for Z to stay in this project? So my colleagues, they were migrants, but (…) they empowered me by supporting me being there. Also without X and Y (…) I couldn't have been in this project for long.

She now tries to do that herself for the new employees.

Finally, and more indirectly, ethnic community radio helps refugees to create a social network, which improves their adaptation to and psychological health in the host culture. Refugees had to leave their friends and family behind, and they often have to build a new network of friends and acquaintances from scratch in the host country. At Refugee Radio and Our Voice, they can meet other volunteers and employees (in the radio shows, mental support sessions…). According to Adelman (1988, in Martin & Nakayama, 2010), these contacts in the host country are very important as a form of ‘social support’. He believes that being surrounded by friends, both from the host country and from the home country or other refugees, helps refugees to reduce stress and uncertainties, and gives them more self-confidence and even a sense of identity. However, Martin & Nakayama (2010) add that in order to achieve this effect, the network needs to consist both of members from the host culture and from the home culture. This is possible in the two case studies: In Refugee Radio, refugees meet people both from the host society and the home country because the staff is British, and the participants of the workshops and radio shows are refugees. In Our Voice, the organisers and participants are refugees, but they can also meet German people, for example in the host station Radio Dreyeckland or in debates hosted by German organisations. Finally, these social encounters are important in order to reduce the loneliness and isolation that refugees may experience when arriving in a new country. Research by Order (2017, p.8) showed that “community broadcasting (…) should be valued as a medium to reduce social isolation and enrich community cohesion.”

## LIMITATIONS

Refugee Radio and Our Voice portray refugees in a respectful, exemplary way. Nevertheless, every media organisation has its advantages and disadvantages, and as the literature review showed ethnic community media often encounter limitations too (cf. 1.2.2.3). This is also the case with the two case studies. They struggle with the small impact of radio, financial issues, the difficulty of engaging refugee staff for a long time and a language barrier. However, these problems have little or nothing to do with refugee representation, which means we zoom out again to look at the radio stations more generally. Still, the limitations are worth mentioning because the proper functioning of the radio stations is necessary to continue to represent refugees in an appropriate way.

### small IMPACT of radio

Literature by Rodrigo-Alsina et al. (2019) and Ewart & Beard (2017) stated that the audience of ethnic community media is often quite small because they address a specific community, which means that the stories of the minorities still have little visibility and impact (cf. 1.2.2.3). The employees of Refugee Radio and Our Voice are also aware of having a small impact. However, they connect it less to the fact that they are community media, but rather to the waning impact of the medium of radio.

Two respondents in particular fear that hardly anyone listens to the radio anymore. The former intern of Refugee Radio (Appendix 1) states that “radio in its obvious self is (…) dying and making (…) [room] for like the more immediate stuff (…), like podcasts. (…) People don’t really (…) put on radio as much as they used to, 10-20 years ago.” A respondent of Our Voice (Appendix 6) similarly declares that “almost 70% of the population (…) don't have time for radio. (…) They are always engage with (…) social media stuff, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other stuff. (…) So I think, though we are doing our best, but few people hear this, our stuff.” According to him there are two reasons why listeners drop out. Firstly, they do not have time to listen to the radio: “Even when I was in my country, sometimes when I'm going to radio station to do programme, I tell my friends, yeah, I'm going to radio (…) can you listen to me? They say: 'Oh my friend, we don't have time to listen to radio'.” Secondly, he believes it is too difficult to find the radio shows, especially in comparison to social media: “There was a programme that we did, I wanted to listen to (…). I need to download the radio app (…) I need to go to (…) www.ldr.de, (…) the radio frequency website code. And I realised that this is too stressful.”

Although a colleague states that refugees (also in the camps) have access to the radio show - because “if you have a smartphone, you have internet, you can just tune in” (Appendix 5) - the intern (Appendix 6) thinks that there are hardly any refugees listening. He even concedes that although he works at the radio, he does not listen to it himself. Another staff member of Our Voice (Appendix 3) adds that it is especially difficult to reach refugees who are not active members of the community around the radio show:

How would the information come to them? It's because they are part of the show, or they will tell their friends, and they will tell the others and then that's how they get the show. (…) Other they get the information directly from us, because we are there to meet them (…). We share the informations (…) [through] WhatsApp.

However, radio also has some advantages. First, the presenter of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2) states that he prefers radio over television because it is easier to stay anonymous on the radio, which is important for some refugees. He explains that he sometimes “obscure[s] somebody's immigration status during the interview” because “their asylum case hasn't been determined yet and they don't want the home office to prejudge them by listening to the show.” Second, the former intern of Refugee Radio (Appendix 1) argues that the audience listens to the story of a refugee in a more unbiased way because radio has no images: “With a picture, you look at it, and you make an assumption, and you bring your own bias into that picture. (…) Whereas, like, if someone's telling you something, (…) these are subjective stories.” Finally, a respondent of Our Voice (Appendix 4) maintains that spoken stories hit harder: “The stories are so authentic that you have to hear them to believe them. (…) I mean, this people (…) sometimes lose their words because (…) they tell you their story. So it's quite something different.”

For these reasons, but also because it was the initial design, Refugee Radio and Our Voice stick to making radio. The presenter of Refugee Radio still prefers radio as a medium for the show. He does not attach so much importance to the small impact but thinks it is much more important that the programme means something for refugees as a “participatory exercise” (Appendix 2). The employees of Our Voice, by contrast, do try to increase their impact. The intern (Appendix 6) sees a solution in offering the show on social media. He already proposed this idea to the person responsible for the technical aspects in the radio station:

I told her look, if you want your radio to be listened, you need to go on (…) social media. (…) Most of the radio station and television stations in my country are now on Facebook, streaming live (…) on (…) Youtube and other stuff.

Usually this is not yet the case, but sometimes an episode can already be followed live on social media. For example, one of the episodes of Our Voice in the sample was a special broadcast for the Colorful Voices Festival that was broadcast live on Instagram. The employees also actively post announcements on social media. Furthermore, a staff member of Our Voice (Appendix 3) thinks that several refugee radios should join in a network to get a larger scope. She is co-founder of the Colorful Voices network, in which various German refugee radios join forces:

We were thinking, ok, (…) even if one person or 50 people are listening to Our Voice, you will still have 1000 people looking at as a racist show there, you know. Then the idea is, (…) how can we be more heard? And that's how we came up with the idea of having a network. (…) Because having a network and having a platform, where all different radios put their content, it will help. Maybe we have a bigger impact on the society.

## FINANCE

Because Refugee Radio and Our Voice are small, non-commercial ethnic community radios, they also have financial difficulties. As section 3.2.1 explained, the radio shows rely on funding from external trusts and foundations and they have a limited budget. What is more, the employees are not even paid for their journalistic work, like hosting the show. Our Voice has three paid staff members but they are strictly speaking only paid for the organisation and coordination of the projects (Appendix 3). Refugee Radio only has one paid employee who is responsible for the radio show. He also declares that the radio show had been funded in the past, but that at the moment, there are only grants for the community and heritage projects of the charity and not for the radio show (Appendix 2).

One possible effect is that the radio show becomes voluntary work and can be less of a priority. This is the case for Refugee Radio: the presenter (Appendix 2) only makes a new episode once a month, because he has to do this on top of his paid work in the charity. Another scenario is that of Our Voice, which makes more of an effort to develop the radio show: it has more employees (i.e. three permanent staff members, one intern, and one fulltime volunteer), broadcast more often and has other projects apart from the radio show, such as a podcast. However, therefore, it is constantly looking for extra funding. And according to a staff member (Appendix 3) this means that there is always more work: “When we apply for new money, we have to create something else that's not done before.” They do not receive extra money for the current projects, but always have to add new, additional projects.

Both scenarios are not ideal. Still, Refugee Radio and Our Voice do not allow themselves to be pressured commercially, as is sometimes the case with ethnic community media who, for example, prefer larger communities to have a larger audience (cf. 1.2.2.3). Both radio show stick to their vision as an inclusive community project, even if that means that they have not enough money or more work.

### ENGAGE REFUGEE STAFF

Since it is already difficult to pay the few permanent staff members, Refugee Radio and Our Voice rely on volunteers for extra help. However, these volunteers are less “tied down” to the programme: they just “contribut[e] what they wan[t] to” (Appendix 1) and they “come go come go” (Appendix 3). In addition, they can always choose to stop. The radio makers indicate that they find it difficult to engage refugees to participate in the radio show for a longer time and on an active basis, although they need such committed participants.

At Refugee Radio, this limitation is very visible since there are no volunteers at the moment. Still, it is mainly the staff of Our Voice that mentions the problem. Two respondents explain that refugees often work for the show for a while, but then leave because they found a paid job:

 [It] is not easy to keep the people here, because there is no real perspective, there is no money for that. (…) If they find an apprenticeship or work, it's much more better for their status. (…) And then they go. (Appendix 3)

 People are in need of money. So people easily go because they found a better job. (Appendix 4)

For example, the intern at Our Voice (Appendix 6) testifies that he will probably leave when he gets an opportunity that corresponds more closely to his previous profession as an IT teacher:

I am much interested in going to IT field. Because that is where I have the foundation. (…) I am still (…) happy to be engaged on the radio. (…) But (…) in case any of my favourite course come across, then (…) I cannot assure that I stay still with the radio.

Because of this problem, the staff of Our Voice is looking for ways to make refugees more reliable (voluntary) employees. One respondent states that they “think about the sustainability of the project”, which is “not only the commitment, but also the financement”; “how (…) to finance the project so that the newcomers should be able to take over of it?” (Appendix 4). For example, her colleague (Appendix 5) explains that they give refugees the opportunity to do a Bundesfreiwilligendienst year (BFD) at Our Voice, which is what the interviewed volunteer was doing:

Sometimes we think, okay, someone is interested in joining the team, but maybe we have to find a way to make this person reliable. (…) If we try to find ways that the person will get a bit pocket money and be a bit more sure of what he's doing here, then it's much more better. So, at the radio, there is a possibility that people can do this BFD, this voluntary year here. And then from this there, there is an official contract (…), how much time he should be there, (…) and they get pocket money (…) and insurance (…), [which] is really important (…), actually he doesn't have any insurance. And this is a way to cover the person. (Appendix 3)

Someone who does a Bundesfreiwilligendienst works a year fulltime at the radio. However, he remains a volunteer, since refugees cannot sign real job contracts, as the intern explains: “As a refugee, I'm not allowed to sign a contract with any company” (Appendix 6). Still, this engagement is important, also with an eye on the future. After all, the goal is that the current staff will be supplemented or replaced by new refugee employees after a while:

If everything was working well, we should give chance to others. We should totally go out for the project, for the young ones to take it. But (…) we did not yet find the people that are really committed to take the project. (Appendix 4)

The aim of Refugee Radio is also to be taken over by refugees. However, Refugee Radio is even further away from that goal since the organiser is still the British founder and not a refugee. His explanation is not the financial situation, but he gives other reasons. First, it is difficult to engage refugees because of their heavy life situation. They “got too many other problems going on” (Appendix 2). A respondent of Our Voice also gave an example of a refugee who was very committed but “couldn't make it because (…) the asylum procedure was more harder” (Appendix 4). Second, the presenter of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2) believes that refugees actually do not want to be connected to the label ‘refugee’: “They're not refugees. (…) that's our label for them to distinguish them from us, as the host population. (…) It's not a label anybody wants for themselves.” He gives an example:

There's one person who was really into radio. (…) I thought, brilliant, he'll take over from me, he'll be the new host of Refugee Radio. And then he just, he went and started his own thing. And it was a radio station for Afghans. (…) Because he's not a refugee, he's an Afghan. (…) The fact that he's (…) an asylum seeker in England, or is trying to claim refugee status in England, that's not his identity. It's just a word or label that we use. So nobody wants to spend the rest of their life with that label around their neck. (Appendix 2)

Still, this term is in the name of the show: Refugee Radio. The question is, thus, whether a different, less labelling name could be a solution. However, the presenter is not keen on doing that. Even though the name is “unhelpful (…) in a lot of ways”, he prefers it “because it's a bit more honest about our intentions” (Appendix 2). The name Our Voice, on the other hand, is more neutral, which is maybe why some guests come by themselves. Although the title may want to convey the same ideas as Refugee Radio, it already shows that this really is a project of refugees themselves (which is true since the staff are refugees and migrants), and not others talking *about* refugees.

To conclude, refugees participate on a voluntary basis at Our Voice and to some extent also at Refugee Radio, but it is difficult to rely on them for regular and long-term help. Reasons for this are that they cannot be paid, that they have too many other concerns, and that they want to get rid of the label ‘refugee’. However, Our Voice does look for ways to bind refugees to the show, for example with the Bundesfreiwilligendienst, which is a win-win for both parties.

### LANGUAGE BARRIER

There are also challenges in terms of language: at Refugee Radio mainly for refugee guests, at Our Voice more for refugees as a presenter. Refugee Radio is broadcast in English. The guests do not have to speak perfect English, but they do have to speak it a bit. This creates a language restriction, which the presenter had not thought about at the start:

 When I started doing this, (…) I just thought, oh, radio will be good, because it will help people preserve their anonymity and they can use fake names (…). It never occurred to me, of course, not everybody speaks English. (…) Having worked with (…) refugees and asylum seekers for years, (…) and having used interpreters almost every day, you'd think that would have occurred to me in advance. Euhm. But it didn't. And it was while before I realised, 'Oh, yeah, not everybody speaks English'. (Appendix 2)

However, despite this “inherent language barrier”, he does not “really see a, another way of doing things.” Refugee Radio did have some multilingual episodes in the past, with for example a mix of English and Arabic, but according to the respondent, “people aren't that interested in doing it. (…). It doesn't come up that often” (Appendix 2).

Nevertheless, multilingual broadcasts would be a solution for the language restriction, as Our Voice shows. There, people can speak in their own language if they want. However, the host still has to speak one of the moderating languages: German, English or French. It is especially useful to speak German in order to make “an interview directly with Germans”, according to the volunteer (Appendix 5). Yet, that is more a challenge than a real problem. It is even positive that working at the radio show is a motivation to learn the local language.

### conclusion on LIMITATIONS

The respondents of Refugee Radio and Our Voice are aware that not everything is working perfectly yet. First, there is the problem of the small impact, among others because it is a radio show. Secondly, the financial resources are limited. Thirdly, it is difficult to find committed refugees who come regularly and for a long time. Finally, mostly at Refugee Radio, the language barrier excludes some refugees to participate in and understand the show.

Apart from the language barrier which excludes some voices, these limitations do not really set restrictions for the way refugees are represented. Nevertheless, the issues show that the ethnic community radio stations struggle to thrive and that their counterdiscourse can hardly compete with the mainstream media. Consequently, community radio by refugees may portray refugees in a preferable way, but as long as the audience remains small, they are mostly useful as participatory projects and not because of their message. However, that is not necessarily a negative thing. As the presenter of Refugee Radio (Appendix 2) already stated, the show is “far more meaningful as a participatory exercise for the people that are doing it.” Radio may not be a popular medium anymore, but it seems to be a suitable medium for the purpose of supporting refugees’ wellbeing: they are included in a community, they can interact with other refugees and the host community, and they can share their story. Despite the small scale, ethnic community radios are meaningful for the refugees who participate.

Nevertheless, there is room for some improvements. The main challenges are reaching a wider audience and finding engaged staff members, who preferably are refugees themselves. More financial support seems to be an important solution, for example through welfare grants. This allows the radio stations to expand in terms of projects and of employees, who probably feel more attracted and stay longer if they can earn their living with it. Furthermore, more financial means will help the radio shows to invest in their visibility on online media platforms. However, the radio makers do not have to wait with the latter until they get more money. Nowadays, it is easy to upload content on social media. The episodes of Refugee Radio are already available on Spotify, but Our Voice could also distribute the episodes via Spotify (www.podcasters.spotify.com). Moreover, Our Voice could make the shows available on its website for longer period, because now they disappear after a week. What Refugee Radio, on the other hand, could change, is giving the term ‘refugee’ a less central place, which would hopefully attract more refugee employees, who in turn show that the programme is not about refugees as an object but by them as actors. Ideally, these refugee participants can also introduce more languages (and translations) in the show. More general recommendations for setting up or supporting ethnic community radios follow after the conclusion, in part five.

# CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore how ethnic community radios represent refugees,. Community radio is radio about, by, and for a certain community. In ethnic community radio that community is an ethnic minority, such as refugees. Moreover, ethnic community radio is based on three fundaments: it is non-profit oriented (the goal is not to make money but to support the community members), and community participation and access to the show are crucial. However, existing literature about representation in ethnic community media mainly covered minorities in general and not the representation of refugees. This dissertation dived into that gap and studied two refugee radio shows as case studies: the British Refugee Radio and German Our Voice. In-depth interviews with six (former) employees of these radio shows, between 17 February and 1 March 2021, gave a detailed image of how they represent refugees and what their motivations for this representation are.

Both Refugee Radio and Our Voice correspond to a certain level to the definition of ethnic community radios: they are non-profit radios, refugees participate in the show (especially at Our Voice, which is led by refugees, whereas at Refugee Radio, they are mostly just interviewed) and they can access it to some extent (although the target audience also consists of the British/German host population, and refugees do not listen so much in practise). Although there is no perfect interaction with the community in the sense that these radio shows are totally made by and for refugees, they do differ a lot from mainstream media[[6]](#footnote-6), which are usually not produced by refugees and not directed towards a refugee audience either.

Besides, refugees are not very visible in mainstream news coverage. Both the literature review and the respondents state that refugees are underrepresented in mainstream media. And, when they do get represented, it is usually not them who are interviewed but experts who talk aboutrefugees and their situations. Consequently, mainstream media are not in touch with what is happening underground, and they may spread misrepresentations and myths about refugees (e.g. ‘they are all economic migrants’). Ethnic minority media, by contrast, let the voice of the refugees be heard. Refugee Radio and Our Voice represent refugees throughout their show and they involve them in this representation. In both radio shows, almost all the guests are refugees and at Our Voice even the presenters are refugees or migrants too.

Furthermore, Refugee Radio and Our Voice are one-hour shows in which there is time for in-depth discussions and various topics. In Refugee Radio, these topics are introduced through the life story of one refugee who is interviewed. Our Voice, on the other hand, has a magazine format with several smaller elements (a report, interview, vox-pop, music…). In this show, a variety of topics passes in review as well, but these are often less personal and more general, socio-political issues. In addition, in both radio shows, the topics reflect the interests of the community, and they include issues about both the host society and the home countries of refugees. However, their refugee experience is not the only topic. That is different from mainstream media who, when they talk about refugees, discuss a limited range of topics all dealing with migration (e.g. rubber boats, politics, citizenship). This leads to a representation that is simplistic (as it only pays attention to refugees being refugees) and stereotypical (by repeating only some aspects of the lives of some refugees).

Moreover, the topics are introduced by the refugees themselves in the two ethnic community radios. In general, the interviewed refugees guide the conversation in order to make it as authentic as possible. That is also why afterwards limited editing takes place. The respondents believe that mainstream media, by contrast, often have an agenda in mind, direct the interview themselves, and cut out a lot afterwards.

Since mainstream media talk *about* refugees, they often generalise them to a faceless crowd. Refugee Radio and Our Voice prevent this by giving the microphone to individual refugees, who speak from their own experience. This individual representation also helps the radios to show a more diverse image of refugees, because they present many different stories, instead of lumping everyone together. Refugee Radio and Our Voice state that they actively look for a balance between male and female speakers, but that apart from that, the diversity comes naturally, since refugees are a very pluralistic group (with different nationalities, ages, migration reasons…).

Apart from showing that there are many different refugees, Refugee Radio and Our Voice underline that any one individual refugee is a multifaceted human being with many interests, dreams, struggles… and who is not 'only' a refugee as per the mainstream media. This multitude of refugee sentiments and aspirations is achieved through using multiple frames, thereby shedding several perspectives on refugees’ lives. These frames are introduced by the interviewees themselves through the topics that they talk about. Especially in Refugee Radio, the variety of frames is visible, since the show consist of a one-hour interview with usually only one guest, but Our Voice too tries not to put the interviewees in boxes. This stands in clear contrast with the representation in mainstream media, which essentialise refugees to being refugees and seem to prefer the ‘victim’ or ‘threat’ frame. Analogously, the guests in Our Voice and Refugee Radio can talk from whatever role they like, whether it is as a refugee, biologist, journalist, brother, poet, political actor…. In mainstream media, by contrast, they can often only speak from a limited role register, that is mostly from their role as refugee, and rarely as expert or political actor.

Finally, terminology is an important aspect of refugee representation. However, there are different opinions about the terms in Refugee Radio and Our Voice (and in Our Voice internally), with ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’ being the most common ones. Still, what they do share is a general aversion of ‘illegal migrant’, ‘flood’ and ‘stream’, which, as literature stated, are sometimes present in mainstream media. In addition, many respondents share the idea that the terminology should be precise, in contrast to mainstream media that sometimes mix terms. Finally, they are aware of how (other) refugees feel about the terminology, that is that most of them do not like ‘refugee’. Still, despite that awareness Refugee Radio still uses ‘refugee’ and even has it in its name, and some employees of Our Voice also say ‘refugee’. The goal is then to reclaim the word and turn it into a more positive term.

In short, Refugee Radio and Our Voice demonstrate that ethnic community media by and about refugees make sure that refugees get represented and that they represent themselves. This creates a more direct, honest and authentic image of them than when they are spoken about. Furthermore, ethnic community radios represent refugees in a pluralistic way, both because they show that different kinds of people have fled, and because one single refugee can talk about different aspects of his life.

The human, complex representation in Refugee Radio and Our Voice is largely based on the fact that refugees participate. This is possible because ethnic community radios are more informal and accessible than mainstream organisations and they do not require the employees to have journalistic experience. Moreover, these radios build a relationship of trust with the refugees and welcome them in a safe space of likeminded people, which makes them feel more comfortable to tell their story. However, there is not total community participation yet in all ethnic community radios. At the moment, refugees come to Refugee Radio just as interviewees (or sometimes as volunteers) and not as employees or organisers, unlike in Our Voice. Consequently, Refugee Radio has less immediate feedback from the refugees, and the presenter has to make more of an effort to connect with the guests because he is not a refugee himself. Still, the different level of participation does not seem to create a different representation, which is hopeful for other media: even if they cannot let refugees take over in all areas yet (e.g. as reporters or organisers), their representation will already change a lot by starting to interview refugees.

Much has been said about how ethnic community radio represent refugees, but what is the purpose of that representation? Like other community media, Refugee Radio and Our Voice try to have a counterhegemonic potential. The respondents hope that creating a proper refugee representation will change the host population’s opinions about refugees and even influence mainstream media’s approach. In the long term this will also have an impact on how comfortable refugees are in the new country. Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok (1987) explain that if the host society (virtually) comes into contact with refugees and gets a more nuanced, human image of them, they may act more open and less hostile towards refugees. And when the host society welcomes refugees, the psychological adjustment of refugees is easier, and their ‘psychological health’ improves.

However, the in-depth interviews revealed that, in practise, the audience of the two shows is quite small, which means that the counterdiscourse does not have such a big impact. Therefore, this is not the only goal of Refugee Radio and Our Voice. Their second goal is to mentally and socially support refugees. They provide mental support through counselling and training sessions, but also by letting refugees share their stories on the radio, which is empowering, liberating, and signals that they are worth it to be heard. Furthermore, like ethnic community media in general, they help community-building: refugees can talk on the radio about issues that need to be improved in the community, they get empowered as political actors, and they get to know other refugees. The latter aspect is part of what Adelman (1988) calls ‘social support’: being surrounded by a network of family and friends. Meeting other volunteers, presenters or listeners helps refugees to create such a network. This reduces stress and uncertainty, and increases their self-esteem and a sense of identity, which in turn boosts their integration in the new country. However, in order to measure the actual effect of these radio shows on the wellbeing of refugees, future research from the perspective of the participating refugees is necessary.

To conclude, refugee representation in ethnic community radios is inspirational in many ways: by letting refugees participate in creating the media coverage about them, they shine another light on who refugees are, both as a group and as individuals. It is important to help radio shows like Refugee Radio and Our Voice increase their audience in order to spread that human, multilateral refugee image more widely (cf. Recommendations). However, even apart from the representation, ethnic community radio plays a crucial role for the wellbeing of refugees. Some respondents even indicate that it is not so much the influence of the representation on the host society that is important, but the effect that creating the show has on the participating refugees. The medium is, thus, a goal in itself: even if not many people are listening, the radio show is important to welcome refugees in a community, let them tell their story, give them more confidence and make them feel valuable. The refugee image that ethnic community radio cascades, is a significant asset, but even without it, the importance of ethnic community radio in the refugeedom, the life of refugees, cannot be underestimated.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings that are listed in the conclusion reveal that ethnic community media represent refugees in a careful, diverse way, which differs on several levels from the representation in mainstream media. Other media, both big mainstream media organisations and smaller local stations, could learn from this approach. Below are some specific recommendations regarding the media representation of refugees, inspired by the two case studies and the literature on ethnic community media:

* Make sure that refugees are represented, and not just in a small news item every now and then, but give them enough airtime;
* Involve refugees in this representation. This means letting their voice be heard as interviewees, but also representing refugees behind the screens, as employees or volunteers producing the news items, or as an advisory committee. Treat them as actors, not as passive media objects;
* Take on an unprejudiced attitude and let the interviewed refugees (partly) guide the conversation. This means letting them introduce topics, take on the roles from which they want to talk, and share their own perspectives and opinions.
* Represent refugees not as a mass, but as individuals who have different backgrounds, stories, nationalities, professions… This will contribute to a less generalised and more diverse representation, since various people with different experiences are given the microphone;
* Discuss a variety of topics, both within the refugee experience (e.g. the reasons why they fled, the asylum process, the refugee camps, migration laws…), but also more generally about them as human beings (e.g. their interests, dreams, daily life…). This means looking at them from many different frames, thereby showing that they are multi-layered, versatile people, of whom being a refugee is but one characteristic. Note that the more time the interviewees are given, the more perspectives they can introduce;
* Take into account the terminology that the (interviewed) refugee thinks is most suitable to refer to his situation.

Moreover, it is not only important to implement these representational practices in other media, but also to support ethnic community radio shows by refugees, because they inherently produce this kind of (counter)representation. One way to make ethnic community radios more impactful and help them find more employees and volunteers is to provide more financial support, for example through grants and donations (cf. 3.5.5). However, another, more feasible, option is to collaborate with universities. Both in the United Kingdom and in Germany, universities have set up community service projects, in which students apply their knowledge and skills in practise, thereby supporting local or international organisations. For example, journalism students could make radio shows together with refugees in local radios stations. These students may not necessarily be refugees or even migrants themselves, so it remains important that the refugee radios attract refugee staff, but the commitment of the students provides more helping hands and it can have the effect that more people listen (e.g. the students’ family and friends). In addition, the students from the host community come into contact with refugees and their stories, which possibly makes them look at refugees in a different, more human and individual way; an image which they in turn will spread in their environment.

Furthermore, collaborations with local non-profit organisations, social services, refugee reception centres or the municipality could be set up. A respondent of Our Voice (Appendix 4) states that they have some “partnerships with (…) integration schools”, which are “German language schools”, who send refugees to Our Voice for internships. However, she concedes that this does not happen so often because the system is very difficult. Still, it seems worthwhile to further develop such a collaboration. For the radios it is a win because it will expand their community of volunteers and listeners, and for the refugees it is a win, because they learn something new, get distracted from their fears and uncertainties, meet new people, and can spread their message.

However, many cities or villages do not have a local community radio for refugees, or even for ethnic minorities more generally. Therefore, it is also necessary to set up new refugee radio shows, like Refugee Radio and Our Voice. Again, social services or refugee organisations can play a role in this, by collaborating with the local (community) radio station. The local radio station can provide the equipment and the technical radio training, and the social services can find refugees to participate, they can guide them in the mental process and set up community activities. However, it is crucial that refugees are also involved in the construction of a new refugee radio show from the start. The stakeholder involvement (i.e. the active involvement of the participants in setting up a new (local) initiative) provides insight in what refugees think is important, it unveils the risks and possibilities of the programme, it strengthens the bond with the community, and it increases the future participation of refugee employees and volunteers.

In addition to these practical recommendations, this dissertation reveals some areas in which future research is needed. First, not much research is done yet about ethnic community media by refugees, and especially about their representational strategies. This dissertation is an exploratory analysis, but it would be interesting to do a larger study which examines more radio stations in order to verify and refine these insights. Second, this dissertation suggests that ethnic community radio plays an important role for the refugee community, because it spreads a different, more direct image of them, but also because it provides mental, social support, thereby fostering their wellbeing. Still, further research from the perspective of the participating and listening refugees is needed in order to see to what extent that potential is actually fulfilled. Finally, radio is losing ground for other, faster types of media, such as social media. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate how refugees are represented on social media platforms nowadays.

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# APPENDICES

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**General**

1 What are your tasks, function in the radio show?

2 How big is the rest of the team and who does what? (e.g. editing, presenting, selection of music…)

3 Are there also/only refugees among the staff?

* If yes, did they receive any training?
* Do they also participate in decision-making practices?

4 What are the main topics of the show? (e.g. music, food, migration, life in the UK/Germany...)

5 Who does the selection of the topics/guests? Is there a logic behind this?

* Do you actively think about diversity when choosing topics/guests?

**Refugee representation**

6 You give a voice to refugees in your show. How?

* Why is this important?
* What are the effects?

7 What terms are preferred: migrant, refugee, asylum seeker…? Why?

8 In the representation of refugees, are you aware of using recurring frames? (e.g. perhaps not ‘threat’ but ‘victim’, ‘successful refugee’, ‘integrated refugee’)

9 What role do the refugees mostly get in their representation? (e.g. active vs passive, individual vs group member, more complex/diverse…)

**Counterdiscourse**

10 How do you look at mainstream media representation of refugees?

11 What makes this radio show different from mainstream media?

* Do you actively combat myths, stereotypes? (implicitly/explicitly?)
* Do you have a different focus? (e.g. more positive)

**Vision & goals**

12 What is the target audience of the show?

13 How would you describe the radio show? Can you call it ethnic, community radio?

* How does that matter?

14 Are you aware of any limitations in your refugee representation or are there things that you want to work on?

15 What are the goals of Refugee Radio/Our Voice?

## INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

Due to the length of the in-depth interviews, the transcriptions are included in a separate document.

1. Of course, not all mainstream media represent refugees in a negative way since there are many differences between individual media outlets. Based on previous research and on in-depth interviews with ethnic community radio makers, this dissertation will present a general overview of the representation of refugees that is often – but not exclusively - present in mainstream media. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. BFD is the abbreviation of Bundesfreiwilligendienst, which is a paid civil engagement year in Germany. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The bold font was chosen in order to clarify which show is being talked about and to make the comparison clear. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Desert Island Discs* is a BBC Radio 4 show, in which one guest tells his life story by means of eight songs. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This dissertation mainly uses the term ‘refugee’. It is used in a neutral way, without wanting to disperse particular positive or negative opinions. Furthermore, the term is not used to refer to a specific status, but as a general term for all the people who had to leave their home country. In addition, we aim to differentiate between refugees and migrants as their situation is different, but this is not always possible and sometimes the two terms merge. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Note again that mainstream media is a generalisation. Of course, there are national and individual differences between the specific media, but these results refer to the general trends in refugee representation in big media organisations and public broadcasting services that are noticed by several studies and by the respondents of the two case studies. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)