

1. Making worlds, telling stories, claiming voice: theoretical considerations

Before introducing the key concepts of this study – worldmaking, storytelling, voice, cultural citizenship, postmigration and postmigrant society – let us recall the argument that forms the backbone of this book. Artistic and curatorial practices wield significant potential in the *formation of cultural citizenship* among refugees and asylum seekers as well as in deepening the comprehension of refugeedom within host countries. Artists and curators can mobilize art's capacity for creating worlds and stories, i.e. for *worldmaking* and *storying*. In this study, these key concepts are understood within the overarching framework of *representation*, a multilayered and capacious term that denotes the imagining and portrayal of refugeedom, the practice of speaking *for* and *with*, the provision of access to participate in society, to have a voice and to self-representation.¹ Representation and voice, I want to argue, are integral to cultural citizenship, and in the visual arts, worldmaking and storytelling offer powerful ways of supporting the formation of cultural citizenship.

Worldmaking and worlding

Let us start with *worldmaking*. To begin with, the suffix ‘-ing’ shifts the world from a being to a doing, a generative process that sets up a world (Palmer and Hunter 2018, n.p.). Worldmaking and worlding are both concepts used within the realm of social theory, cultural theory, philosophy, anthropology, sociology and cultural

1 ‘Representation’ is a key concept and multifaceted discourse in art history and art theory. Theories of ‘representation’ abound, not only in these areas but also in fields such as philosophy, political theory, anthropology, literary studies, cultural studies, visual studies, film and media studies, photography studies, gender studies, postcolonial studies, critical race and whiteness studies, and beyond. To venture into this rich and ramified theoretical legacy and the long tradition of critique of representation and the usage of various modes of representation for critique and subversion is beyond the scope of this study. Seminal contributions to the field include: Mirzoeff 2011; W.J.T. Mitchell 2005; Hall 2003; Summers 2003; W.J.T. Mitchell 1994; Barthes 1977.

studies, but also in more specialized areas such as postcolonial studies, art history, feminist materialism and ecofeminism. Both worldmaking and worlding denote a particular blending of the material and the semiotic that dismantles the boundaries between subject and environment (Palmer and Hunter 2018, n.p.). Whilst related and sometimes conflated, these terms emphasize various aspects of how societies construct and understand their realities. 'Worldmaking' refers to the processes through which individuals and groups construct their social realities, including their beliefs, norms, values, symbols, institutions and infrastructures. It involves the active creation and shaping of the world as it is perceived and understood by individuals and communities. Worldmaking thus hinges upon processes of *representation*, as seen, for instance, in the creation of myths, rituals, art, literature and other kinds of cultural production: they can all be seen as acts of worldmaking that imbue meaning and significance into social and cultural life.

My understanding of worldmaking is indebted to art historian Marsha Meskimmon's thoughts on art's potential as a means of worldmaking. She posits that art has an extraordinary potential for imagining anew the world as we know it. My analyses draw on Meskimmon's profound insight into how art's 'materialising force' can be used to express imaginaries and engender the inclusive yet critical public spaces necessary for transversal dialogues to take place (Meskimmon 2017, 34; see also Meskimmon 2011, 192–195; Petersen 2023, 102). As the philosopher Nelson Goodman pointed out in *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978), the basic substance of worldmaking is always a 'remaking' of pre-existing worlds, and it is fundamentally connected with knowledge production: there is no human world without words and other forms of representation. 'A world is built out of others', argues Goodman, '[w]orldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already at hand; the making is a remaking' (Goodman 1978, 6–7).

The meaning of 'worlding' deviates slightly from that of 'worldmaking' and refers to the practices and processes through which individuals and communities actively engage with and *inhabit* the worlds they have made. It involves not only creating worlds but also living within them, negotiating their meanings and navigating the social relations embedded within them, all of which produce a sense of belonging to those worlds – strong and flourishing, weak or troubled. Worlding manifests itself perhaps most conspicuously in the ways meaning and power relations are produced and enacted through everyday practices and social interactions, involving, amongst other things, language usage, dress codes, cultural practices and social gatherings – which can all be seen as acts of worlding that shape and buttress particular identities, social realities and 'memberships' (as in identification and a sense of belonging with a community).

In postcolonial studies, the term 'worlding' was first introduced and developed into a critical tool by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who used it to explain how colonized space is transformed into 'the colonized space' for the 'natives' by their colonial

masters through representational practices such as cartography, writing and travelling around the colonized territory. In 'The Rani of Simur: An Essay in Reading the Archive', Spivak argues that the British colonizers engaged in 'worlding' the Indian native world for the colonized inhabitants. Through the power to imagine, record and control, the colonizer forced native Indians to invest their own imagination and desires in the colonized space according to the colonizer's representation, and they eventually came to see their native land and own world as imagined by the Other: 'He [the colonizer] is worlding *their own world*' (Spivak 1985b, 253; emphasis in the original). Arguably, Spivak's analysis of 'worlding' in the colonial regime finds an uncanny infrastructural parallel in how today's European border and migration regime, the global refugee regime and the political and media discourses serve as an apparatus of representation that instils in refugees and asylum seekers a perception of themselves as they are imagined by the Other, i.e. as victims and threats. The art projects discussed in this book provide counter-narratives, i.e. alternative narratives that subvert or question the narratives imposed by domination, thereby interrupting this imposed 'worlding' of the worlds of forcibly displaced people. Borrowing the cultural studies scholar Roger Bromley's words, each one of these projects is 'a bid to force recognition from those in power' (Bromley 2021, 84).

The notion of 'worlding' has also been used as a new materialist lens on human–non-human enmeshment (Palmer and Hunter 2018, n.p.). In her influential book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Donna Haraway has reimaged such processes of human–non-human worlding by introduced the fictive *n*-dimensional space, 'Terrapolis'. Etymologically, this mongrel word combines the Latin *terra* for earth with the Greek *polis* for city or citizens, and designates a world of mutual relations and interdependencies in which 'companion species' (a category which enables Haraway to refuse human exceptionalism without invoking posthumanism) engage in ongoing processes of 'becoming with' one another. Here, nature, subjects and objects are not pre-existing entities but come into being through their 'intertwined worldings' (Haraway 2016, 13). Importantly, in the present context, for Haraway, *worlds and stories are interlinked*: worlding is also storying, and Haraway's Terrapolis is both a world and a story, a feminist 'speculative fabulation' (Haraway 2016, 10).

Synthesizing Nelson Goodman's insight that worldmaking is always a remaking, which starts from the worlds already at hand, with ecofeminism – in particular Haraway's theories of embodied knowledge, epistemic location, response-ability and 'entangled worldmaking' – Marsha Meskimmon has developed the concept of world-making into an eye-opening perspective on art's imaginative and affective potential. I draw on her compelling argument that art's potential for worldmaking and ability to participate in processes of social change have important implications for rethinking normative and dangerously exclusive constructions of citizenship beyond the nation-state (Meskimmon 2020, 53; see also 2, 19–20, 73). Meskimmon suggests that

worldmaking, both in and beyond the arts, can support the process of building and rebuilding a sense of belonging to the world. Meskimmon's eminent, historically contextualized analysis of Sheila Levrant de Bretteville's public art project in Los Angeles, *Biddy Mason: Time and Place* (1989), produced with the non-profit organization The Power of Place, provides a model example of art's ability to 'materialize a mode of worldmaking'. Here, Meskimmon demonstrates how a work of art about a 19th-century enslaved woman, who won her freedom in court and became a pillar of the germinating African American community in Los Angeles, may establish 'a new and different discursive space' for imagining '*worldmaking belonging* as an ongoing and perennial process of *dwelling with others*' (Meskimmon 2020, 66; emphasis added). Meskimmon's analysis and theorization of the connection between worldmaking, inhabiting (i.e. worlding), belonging and art thus offer important clues to why art's worldmaking ability is so often harnessed in art projects concerned with forced displacement and other forms of fragile existence.

In sum, both worldmaking and worlding involve the active construction and negotiation of social realities and a 'becoming with'. On the one hand, the meaning of 'worldmaking' is inclined towards the active, creative construction of these realities, and this process involves the creation and interpretation of cultural production, narratives and systems of signs that give coherence to social life. 'Worlding', on the other hand, emphasizes the embodied, affective, performative and relational lived experience and the practice of inhabiting and engaging with a world. Importantly, both worldmaking and worlding must be understood as open-ended. They are 'ongoing and perennial' processes influenced by historical, cultural, social and environmental contexts and the changes they undergo. Lastly, but importantly, the scholarship discussed here is a strong support for the claim that representational practices are vital instruments of worlding, from colonial archives (Spivak 1985b), to the arts (Goodman 1978, 5, 11–12, 18; see also Meskimmon 2020, 53), to storying the world otherwise in order to enable us to inhabit it differently, in intertwinement with our 'companion species' (Haraway 2016, 10). Coupling this discourse on worldmaking and worlding to the discourse on prefiguration in social movement studies, Chapter 3 will unpack the novel idea of art as a space for prefigurative worldmaking, or as I term it, an art of prefiguration.

Narrative and voice

I move on now to the idea of storying and its close relative, narrative – concepts that have primarily been developed in literary studies and narratology. Thanks to literary and cultural theorists such as Mieke Bal and Roger Bromley, to whom I return

below,² these areas of study have also been opened up to the study of non-textual material and applied as analytical lenses across many different fields. Thus, Mieke Bal's endeavour to 'make the case for narrative's omnipresence in culture' has served as a methodological guiding light for the present study (Bal 2021, ix).³ In literary studies and narratology, narratives are understood as systems of signs that create coherence and significance through the arrangement of these elements. In doing so, they create a story. Narratives need a medium to materialize, which can encompass oral, written and visual media. The range of media which afford storytelling are not confined to traditional formats such as novels or films, but not all media are amenable to narratology's literature-based terminology. This is the case for visual art not based on film/video. Mieke Bal's general distinction between three layers of meaning of a narrative is helpful here. Bal uses the common word *text* as a medium-independent term for the different media or systems of signs through which a narrative materializes, i.e. 'to indicate artefacts in any medium' (Bal 2021, 7). The text is the material carrier of a *story* – the content of the text. A story produces 'a particular manifestation, inflection and "colouring" of a *fabula*' (also known as a plot). A *fabula* is 'a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors'. The three layers are thus intimately interconnected, as the text inflects the story, and the story inflects the *fabula* (Bal 2021, 4).

In contemporary visual arts, narrative extends beyond text-based or linear storytelling. It encompasses how visual elements are arranged to suggest a sequence of events (i.e. a *fabula*) but also how visual elements can evoke memories – often in fragmentary glimpses – or convey complex socio-political or personal themes. Visual narratives can be explicit, as in a series of images that depict a storyline, sometimes even incorporating text as in cartoons and graphic novels, for example – or implicit, where the narrative is inferred through the often non-linear interaction of symbols, motifs, abstract means and the viewer's interpretation, as is the case

2 In addition to Mieke Bal's influential classic study of narratology and its transferability (Bal 1985, 2021), other important contributions to the transfer of insights from literary studies to cultural and visual studies include Barthes 1977; Bromley 2000; W.J.T. Mitchell 1994.

3 Mieke Bal is also the editor of another seminal contribution to the study of narrative beyond the medium of literature: the four-volume publication, *Narrative theory: Critical concepts in literary studies*, first published in 2004. The first volume considers a range of theoretical models for the analysis of narrative style; the second is dedicated to theories and exemplary analysis of larger artefacts, emphasizing plot and structure; the third volume transfers narratological tools to the domain of politically and socially oriented critiques of culture; and the fourth introduces interdisciplinary methods that facilitate the application of narrative theory to objects not traditionally considered primarily narrative (Bal 2007).

with much installation art.⁴ Mieke Bal, who is also a video artist and often uses her own works to explain her theoretical points, provides deep insight into the temporality of visual narratives, especially the tensions and incongruous encounters between different temporalities and moments in time that video narratives and cinematic experiments can stage, thanks to their rich potential for exploiting what Bal terms ‘the fundamental messiness of chronology’ (Bal 2021, 103). In Chapter 6, I will return to Bal’s thoughts on temporal complexity and use her concept of *heterochrony*, which refers to the idea that time is not linear and single-stranded but multiple and heterogeneous (Bal 2021, 100–101), to explore refugee narratives of trauma, loss and waiting in which the articulation of time is key.

Mieke Bal’s concept of *focalization* is also helpful as a tool for reading visually oriented texts such as films and video installations. Borrowing the term from the visual domain to incorporate it into narratology to replace what literary scholars call ‘perspective’ or ‘point of view’, Bal defines focalization as ‘a narrative inflection of imagining, interpreting, and perception that *can*, but need not, be visual “imaging”’ (Bal 2021, 37–38). Bal’s narratological three-level structure (text, story, *fabula*) is modelled on fiction in literary form, and she cautions against transferring it uncritically without thinking through how these levels sit within other media (Bal 2021, 7). This point also applies to the concept of focalization. Bal herself suggests that a set of differences between linguistic and visual texts should be considered. Firstly, focalization is the actual content of the text, so if a text consists of visual signifiers – lines, dots, light and dark, spatial effects, etc., not forgetting composition – the focalization is ‘already a subjectivized, interpreted content’. Secondly, linguistic narrative has an external focalizer who can embed an internal narrator-focalizer in the narrative text. By contrast, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, visual narrative usually depicts such an internal focalizer. Because they are ‘figured’ or ‘imaged’, Bal argues, ‘the reality status of what such internal focalizers see differs according to the imagined vision of the external focalizer who embeds them’ (Bal 2021, 14).

Also relevant to this book’s exploration of the storying of refugeedom is Bal’s observation that memory can be understood as ‘a specific form of focalization’. Memories are often aspects of stories, conveying events from a character’s past that are thoroughly shaped by the character’s perception and imagination. As memories are often multitemporal as well as multidirectional, memories in narrative ‘texts’ often complicate the sense of history as a chronological sequence of events and unsettle any expectation of a linear, coherent narrative (Bal 2021, 6–7).

With a view to the polyphonic discourse and heterogeneous material examined in this book, a narrative can be defined broadly as the organization of events,

4 For comprehensive, theoretically informed studies of installation art and how artists use space and viewer interaction to construct narratives, see Petersen 2015; Bishop 2005. For a narratological consideration of video art and video installation, see Bal 2013, 2021.

experiences and settings into a structured and meaningful representation which may, but does not have to, involve characters, and which is not necessarily linear and straightforward but more likely fragmented. Because of its capacity to 'express' fragmentation and the silences of what is too traumatic to be told, contemporary visual art and media are particularly adept at 'recounting' refugees' stories, as explained by Bromley in his book on narratives of forced mobility in contemporary culture. Bromley's primary objects of analysis are the narrative media of fiction films, novels, memoirs and documentaries. His interest in narrative includes not only how filmmakers and writers seek to act as 'critical historians' to produce narratives about displacement that critique power and give expression to 'those who have been abused' and offer 'an alternative legibility' (Bromley 2021, 72–73), but also the asylum system's demand for *credibility*, i.e. that the often traumatized claimants are capable of narrating a convincing and coherent story about personal persecution and flight that fulfils the criteria for the granting of asylum. Here, Bromley turns to cultural memory and trauma studies, and more specifically to *The Trauma Question* (2008) by Roger Luckhurst, who describes trauma as 'anti-narrative' and 'a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge' (Luckhurst, quoted in Bromley 2021, 75). Looking at Fernand Melgard's award-winning documentary *La Forteresse* (2008) about the claimants and staff in a Swiss centre for registration and processing of newly-arrived refugees and migrants, Bromley effectively uses the interviews the staff carry out with claimants to show how narratives of traumatic experience are marked by incoherence and gaps, making it virtually impossible for some claimants to produce the required verifiable and accurate account of the events leading to their asylum claim (Bromley 2021, 75–76).

The term 'storying', on the other hand, is commonly used to refer to the *process* of constructing or interpreting stories from events, experiences or visual stimuli. Storying is an active and dynamic process that emphasizes the creation or reconstruction of meaning through the act of storytelling. In literary and cultural studies, storying is associated with the ways in which individuals and cultures use stories to make sense of the world, often highlighting the role of narrative in identity formation, cultural memory and social communication. In contemporary visual arts, storying can be considered the practice of crafting narratives through visual media, or the process by which audiences engage with visual works to produce their own narratives. As Marsha Meskimmon has pointed out, storying, especially storying with and through art, is not merely reflecting the world, but part of its making: 'Storying is intimately intertwined with how we come to know, imagine and inhabit a world in which many worlds fit [...]' (Meskimmon 2023, 9).

Both 'storying' and 'narrative' are intimately connected to the multifaceted concept of 'voice', bridging fields such as literary studies, cultural studies, post- and decolonial studies, critical race studies, along with feminism and activism. Across these disciplines, 'voice' serves as a powerful metaphor for agency, identity, and the

articulation of perspectives and claims to recognition, especially those of marginalized groups. Basically, 'voice' refers to the expression of an individual or collective identity through language and narrative, or other forms of communication. In literary studies, 'voice' typically denotes the distinct style, tone and perspective of a narrator or character within a text. Here, and in cultural studies, voice can, for instance, be examined through the critical lens of who is given the opportunity to narrate within certain power structures, how this affects the story's meaning, and how the text reflects issues of both power and representation (Hall 2003; L. Ahmed 2012).

Listening to the stories of others requires openness to the other. As regards the stories of refugees, Roger Bromley suggests that identification based on precarity may also play a part: 'Refugees symbolise precariousness, a liminality, which serves as an unsettling, unwelcome reminder of how many lives in the privileged West are now also potentially remaindered. Refugees occupy the borderland between abandonment and value now shared by many.' (Bromley 2021, 7–8)

'Voice' takes on a broader, more politicized meaning in fields that sometimes intersect with activism, including cultural studies, post- and decolonial studies, critical race studies and feminism (particularly Black and transnational feminisms with their focus on amplifying voices that have been historically silenced or marginalized, and also within white feminism) (Moya 2011; Spivak 1985a, 1985b). Here, voice represents the act of speaking out, particularly by those who have been historically subjugated, and it may serve as a tool for empowerment and advocacy: voice is about reclaiming agency and asserting presence in public and cultural discourses. It is often linked to the struggle for recognition, rights and justice, where marginalized groups use voice as a means of resistance to challenge dominant narratives, expose inequalities and to end the silencing and demand change. The centrality of voice to such struggle is captured well in the Black lesbian feminist writer Audre Lorde's famous assertion 'your silence will not protect you', highlighting the importance of speaking out as a form of resistance and survival.⁵ However, when seeking to recentre and analyse marginalized voices, it is important to bear in mind that the circumstances in which a person or group enacts voice co-construct the voice, and that voices are always mediated. This is crucial when discussing refugee voices – also the mediated forms they assume in artist-led projects, given the highly regulated and exclusionary orders in which refugees find themselves, especially in the early phase of flight, reception and asylum seeking. In *Refugee Voices: Performativity and the Struggle for Recognition*, media and cultural studies scholar Rob Sharp pays acute attention to these constrictions in his

5 The phrase 'Your silence will not protect you' comes from Audre Lorde's essay titled 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action' (1977); the essay is included in several of her books, e.g. the collection of essays *Sister Outsider* (1984) (Lorde 2019, 30).

fieldwork-based study of two British community centres in Cardiff and Tyneside. Building on significant cross-disciplinary evidence, Sharp asserts that social exclusion continues after a refugee has been granted asylum, and that ‘the media is a powerful route through which this occurs. More than one study has shown that manifestations of hostility and abuse towards migrant groups can be attributed to how media form public opinion’ (Sharp 2024, 3). Sharp refers to a major study by the media and communications scholars, Lilie Chouliaraki and Rafal Zaborowski, of how the European media covered the 2015 refugee crisis, focusing on how refugees were narrated in the news and how their voices were contextualized. They found that the European news media performed a ‘symbolic bordering’ through a linguistic practice that worked in tandem with the European territorial borders. The media regulated the symbolic construction of refugees and ‘managed’ the voice of refugees through a hierarchical distribution of voice that caused ‘a triple misrecognition of refugees as political, social and historical actors, thereby keeping them firmly outside the remit of “our” communities of belonging’ (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017, 613; see also 15). This is backed by Pries and Bohlen’s assessment from 2024 that, compared to other social groups capable of lobbying and making claims in the political systems, ‘forced migrants themselves have little or no voice at national or international level; at best they have civil society organizations raising their voice’ (Pries and Bohlen 2024, 23). Evoking Hannah Arendt’s understanding of the very ‘act of speaking’ as a political act in its own right, Chouliaraki and Zaborowski stress the gravity of this misrecognition of refugees:

Voice is, we have argued, instrumental in endowing the refugee with personhood and historicity – and hence with the potential for recognition. Who speaks and in which capacity, or “voice as narrative”, defines whether and how their words will be listened to in publics as the words of an equal, or “voice as value”. [...] The marginalization of refugee voice [...] works by ignoring the stories of those it does not already regard as part of “us” while, in doing so, it reconstitutes and re-legitimizes their exclusion. (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017, 629–630)

Building on Bal and Bromley – both exemplars of how deep insights can be gleaned from coupling narratological and migratory perspectives – Chapter 4 will demonstrate that, like literature, visual art can be a powerful tool for storying a *new belonging* and producing *genealogies of ‘where we came from’* (Bal 2021; Bromley 2000, 2021)

Although my book focuses on a different cultural arena than Sharp’s study, my argument nevertheless runs parallel to his compelling one that “‘new’ forms of refugee voice, mediated by organizations beyond mainstream media, mainly in the charitable, cultural and human rights sectors, are more important than ever’ (Sharp 2024, 3). Like Sharp’s case studies, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this book examine participatory projects and the opportunities they offer refugees for representing

themselves through what Sharp designates *creative mediation*, i.e. various forms of assisted or mediated self-representation that often prioritize the participant's sensorial, emotional or subjective experience, and which may provide 'critical, opportunities to counteract more mainstream exclusions of voice' (Sharp 2024, 4). Moreover, Sharp seeks to answer a critical question that is also pertinent to my case studies: 'Numerous participatory projects promise refugees a voice, but to what extent do they actually fulfil this promise? [...] We cannot simply assume, that by virtue of their stated benevolent purposes, that these projects work in the way they claim.' (Sharp 2024, 4–5)

Sharp is primarily interested in voice through refugee self-representation in the contexts of creative projects, so he coins the term 'performative refugeeeness' to explain how refugees might negotiate the expression of their voices and the complex and often contradictory opportunities they have for voice within exclusionary social systems (Sharp 2024, 13). It is Sharp's contention that the interrupted, affective, messy and ephemeral voices of marginalized individuals and groups can shed nuanced light on the links between voice and the narration of the self – i.e. giving an account of one's life and its conditions through storying (Sharp 2024, 5–9). Building on the critical theorist Laurent Berlant's influential book *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Sharp suggests that an intimate public's process of 'listening together' can produce a kind of affective 'pre-emotive intensity' and 'social mutuality', providing opportunities for feelings of solidarity. However, Sharp adds that in such contexts, silences may also occur as 'a form of political protest' that rejects the conditions on which voice is offered normatively or refuses to speak on particular topics to contest the construction as primarily a refugee (Sharp 2024, 11–12). Thus, Sharp's concept of performative refugeeeness – i.e. of the construction and reconstruction of the subject (as a refugee) through 'the citation and repetition of discourses, which it repeats or breaks from in various ways'⁶ – rests upon a conceptualization of voice as not univocally empowering, but also disruptive and disrupted, collective, ambiguous and sometimes hesitant.

Gatrell et al. add to Sharp's concern about the constrictions on refugee voices a consideration of the adaptability of refugees to the international refugee regime. Seeking to recentre refugees in modern history by recovering and analysing their voices, Gatrell et al. scrutinize letters and petitions sent to authorities within the refugee regime, such as the League of Nations in interwar Europe and the UNHCR after the Second World War. They conclude that the 'rhetoric' of these letters 'demonstrates that refugees proved adept at absorbing the language of the refugee regime and projecting it back as a means of legitimating their claims' (Gatrell et al. 2021, 85).

6 Sharp 2024, 12. Sharp's concept builds primarily on Judith Butler's influential conceptualization of performativity, which draws on John L. Austin's similarly influential theory of performative speech acts (Butler 1991; Austin 2020).

Importantly, the authors argue that it was not only the regime that gave structure to refugee voices but also the sociocultural environments and diaspora networks in which refugees were embedded: 'Each expression was shaped, limited, enhanced, mediated, modified or silenced by external circumstances' (Gatrell et al. 2021, 92). Notwithstanding this, the authors also emphasize that refugees who enact voice are resourceful people who know how to solicit the advice and assistance needed to navigate the system (Gatrell et al. 2021, 86). Both Sharp's and Gatrell et al.'s observations clearly indicate how unwise or premature it would be to make a straightforward correlation between the articulation of unmediated 'voices' and unconditional individual or collective empowerment.

Voice and cultural citizenship

In the context of this book, it is important to understand that 'voice' plays a crucial role in theories and practices of citizenship, especially when moving beyond legal definitions and the rights afforded to individuals by a state to consider instead citizenship as a lived experience, a cultural practice and a form of social and political engagement – or what some scholars term *cultural citizenship*. Scholars in citizenship studies have expanded the legal definition to incorporate these broader contexts and have coined helpful terms to distinguish what the feminist social policy scholar Ruth Lister terms 'substantive' citizenship from 'formal' legal citizenship. Similarly, the sociologist Rogers Brubaker has emphasized that informal ways of belonging are significant for the formation of citizenship: 'Nation membership in an informal sense [...] is administered not by specialized personnel but by ordinary people in the course of everyday life, using tacit understandings of who belongs and who does not, of us and them. These everyday membership practices of identification and categorization, and of inclusion and exclusion, are often at variance with codified forms of official, formal membership.' (Brubaker 2015, 134) It could be added that these sociocultural practices also encompass artistic and activist practices of solidarity with refugees and migrants that may well be at variance with the official *denial* of formal membership.

Lister's distinction between formal and substantive citizenship addresses the tension inherent in the concept of citizenship: a person may be formally included but socially and culturally excluded, or vice versa (Lister 2003, 43; see also Petersen 2023, 10). The concept of citizenship thus operates on different cultural, social and legal levels to govern the understanding of who belongs to society in ways that create not only citizens but also non- or partial citizens. This is very much the case for social outcasts and foreigners, especially refugees and irregular migrants. To draw attention to the existence of different modes of citizenship internal to the nation-state, Lister introduces the twin concepts of *citizenship* and *denizenship*. Whilst citizenship

denotes legal and political membership of a state, denizenship refers to those who do not have formal citizenship in their country of residence but a legal and permanent residence status (Lister 2003, 49; see also Schinkel 2010).

In a comprehensive literature review, the anthropologist Alejandro I. Paz notes that citizenship has, since the 1990s, been developing into a major subject in anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, political theory and sociolinguistics. In these fields, the exploration of citizenship largely plays out along two dominant lines of inquiry: the first centres on the mutual recognition of citizens as citizens; and the second, the interpellation by state apparatuses of citizens, denizens and even non-citizens (Paz 2019, 78). The contrasting accounts of 'cultural citizenship' by anthropologists Renato Rosaldo and Aihwa Ong have been particularly influential in thinking 'citizenship' and 'culture' together, and in shaping how studies in citizenship have evolved along the lines of *mutual recognition* versus *interpellation* (Paz 2019, 79). Rosaldo's concept emerged as part of his attempt to address how Latinos sought inclusion through public recognition in the US context, and to overcome the limitation of concepts such as assimilation, pluralism and citizenship *tout court* in foregrounding 'the struggles of subaltern populations to have their public culture recognized as a means to act as citizens' (Paz 2019, 80; Rosaldo 1994). Interestingly, Rosaldo specifically mentions artistic and cultural events, such as the unveiling and/or struggle over art in public space, as an example of 'a classic act of cultural citizenship', and the participation in such events as capable of transforming people who occupy subordinate social positions from 'voiceless vulnerable individual to full-fledged citizen' (Rosaldo 1997, 36–37). In contrast to Rosaldo's understanding of cultural citizenship as the demand of disadvantaged subjects for full citizenship, Ong is more interested in enforced assimilation processes and how they impose on minoritized subjects ways of belonging that are dictated by dominant cultural criteria. Accordingly, Ong uses Foucault's theories of power and biopolitics to examine the range of technologies and sites of power involved in constituting the personhood of deserving citizens, while simultaneously marking and excluding those who did not match the norm. Acutely aware of the complexity of becoming a citizen, she defines cultural citizenship as '*a dual process of self-making and being made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society*' (Ong 1996, 738; emphasis added).

Recognition and interpellation, top-down practices of disciplining and bottom-up practices of empowering subjects are obviously not mutually exclusive but should, rather, be seen as interwoven and sometimes competing processes of shaping individual and collective citizenship. This was demonstrated by the sociologist Gerard Delanty's study of how the 21st century has seen practices of 'disciplinary' citizenship rolled out in the UK – as well as in many EU Countries, including Denmark – involving, amongst other things, citizenship classes with tests on language, history and culture for immigrants wishing to apply for citizenship.

As Delanty points out, this ‘governmentalization’ of citizenship risks reducing learning citizenship to individual learning of ‘the official values of the polity and as interpreted by public officials’ (Delanty 2010, 599). While acknowledging that such policies can be beneficial and can enhance mutual recognition in culturally diverse societies – a point also stressed by the sociologist Jan Pakulski (Pakulski 1997) – Delanty argues that individual learning processes do not automatically convert into a collective learning, i.e. ‘cultural’ citizenship, because collective learning processes operate on different levels. Cultural citizenship as a learning process involves common experiences, forms of cultural translation and discourses of empowerment. As Delanty explains, the capacity and power to create meaning and construct narratives by gaining control over the flow of information and cultural processes are important components of cultural citizenship as an active process (Delanty 2010, 602). Both the ‘disciplinary’ learning of the country’s civic values and citizenship and the informal learning processes of ‘cultural’ citizenship are therefore important to the formation of citizenship in plural European societies that are being (re)shaped by global immigration (Delanty 2010, 598–601).

Delanty’s distinction between the disciplinary and the cultural aspects is illuminating, as is Paz’s distinction between recognition and interpellation as dimensions of substantive citizenship. Returning to Ong, she foregrounds the interpellative power of state institutions to establish the normative personhood of deserving citizens. Ong uses the term *cultural citizenship* to refer to ‘cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory’ (Ong 1996, 738). In the context of this book, it is important to understand that this interpellative power is also exercised by the migration, asylum and integration regimes of the EU and its member states that suspend rights for some groups.

By contrast, Rosaldo emphasizes the potential of mutual public recognition to overcome exclusions and differentiations, as well as of public acts of communication to mobilize sympathy and solidarity (Paz 2019, 79–80). Many of the art projects discussed here resonate with Rosaldo’s approach as they centre on refugees as protagonists to make them subjects of visibility and voice. As Paz reminds us: ‘We should take care not to forget that even highly marginalized subjects communicate as citizens.’ (Paz 2019, 87)

The concepts of voice and cultural citizenship could thus be productively thought through together. The English term *cultural citizenship* and the Danish term *medborgerskab* are often used in the discourse on democratic participation in culture and society. They are among the concepts that have been introduced to address the broader sociocultural practices of citizenship (Delanty 2010; Pakulski 1997; Villumsen, Rugaard and Sattrup 2014). *Medborgerskab* can be translated as ‘co-citizenship’. As opposed to the ‘cultural’ inflection of the English term, the Danish

term highlights coexistence, participation in society and mutual recognition within a committed community, rather than the interpellative power of state institutions emphasized by Ong, although the disciplinary dimension is obviously not absent from Danish practices, including cultural institutional practices. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the 2014 publication *Rum for medborgerskab* ('Space for Cultural Citizenship'), which resulted from a collaboration between ten museums and cultural institutions exploring how these institutions could 'contribute to cultural citizenship in their exhibitions, performances, education and organization' and provide 'democratic spaces for learning' (Villumsen 2014, 9). Notably, the publication was prefaced by the then Minister of Culture, Marianne Jelved, who stressed the educative and transformative potential:

Art and culture can pose new questions to our ways of understanding life, society and human relationships. In doing so, museums and cultural institutions can create the framework for the democratic experiment where citizens have the opportunity to challenge and be challenged by particular understandings of our time. They can open up new ways of seeing and acting in the world. (Jelved 2014, 8)

Cultural citizenship, or *medborgerskab*, must be seen, then, as a generative component of substantive citizenship comprising both mutual recognition and interpellation by state apparatuses. As such, the concept is a helpful lens that enables me to consider two distinct levels as intertwined: 'cultural citizenship' can bring into focus the sociocultural and discursive marginalization of people denied full substantive and/or formal citizenship rights in a democratic culture. At the same time, the term refers to the many and differentiated ways in which citizens, denizens and non-citizens can access and participate in the 'cultural life' of society, including the arts, and the way they contribute to sometimes consolidating and sometimes challenging hegemonic notions of citizenship – or as Ong would have it, the normative personhood of deserving citizens.⁷ In this context, 'voice' becomes a key component of how individuals and groups articulate their rights, assert their identity, express their membership in a community and engage in the public sphere. Thus, to speak and be heard is an essential component of the practice of citizenship and of active participation in a democratic society. In the next chapter, I will return to Jan Pakulski's understanding of cultural citizenship as linked to claims for cultural rights for minoritized groups, symbolic presence, dignifying representation and recognition without marginalization. What is important to the overarching framework of this study is Pakulski's points that cultural rights

7 I have elaborated on the concept of cultural citizenship and art's potential elsewhere; see Petersen 2023, 11–12.

are more in the form of negotiated claims than institutionalized, or even legal, entitlements. The granting of rights is thus often the outcome of political struggle:

The bestowing and granting of rights should be viewed as a complex process, in which the content and scope of *claimed* rights for protection, recognition, provision, etc., on the one hand, and the content of rights that are *recognised* as legitimate by the state and effectively *sanctioned* on the other, may differ. In fact, asymmetry between claimed and sanctioned rights is more typical than is close correspondence. [...] In processual terms, claims to rights are made by important actor-claimants and these are then negotiated and re-negotiated by elites and through public fora. (Pakulski 1997, 73; see also 77)

As the quote indicates, Pakulski's theorization of cultural citizenship has a certain emphasis on governmental processes and state recognition (or lack thereof), which is why he stresses the power of elites. What is interesting with regard to a study of the power of the arts, is that he places equal emphasis on public fora, which is also where people encounter the arts. To conclude, in this study the term *cultural citizenship* is used to refer to how citizenship is enacted at a sociocultural level and to the ways in which the arts partake in the construction and dissemination of hegemonic notions of citizenship and civic norms, as well as harbouring a critical potential for subverting such hegemonic structures by seeking to rethink and transform the norms and practices of cultural citizenship that constantly draw and redraw the boundaries between insiders and outsiders. It is argued that in so doing, art can play a formative part in fostering a more inclusive sense of cultural citizenship and of belonging as a citizen.

A postmigrant framework

An important stepping stone to the present volume is my book *Postmigration, Transculturality and the Transversal Politics of Art* from 2024. It unpacks a framework of postmigrant thought and develops a concept-driven approach to art and migration that also form the theoretical backbone of this study. *Postmigration, Transculturality and the Transversal Politics of Art* was dedicated to the slow work of interdisciplinary transfer of postmigration and migration studies to art history and to developing conceptual tools for cultural analysis of visual art, along with other forms of cultural production. The present study is first and foremost committed to exploring refugeedom as a planetary 'matter of concern' (Latour 2004) in a specific national and regional context, while also drawing on and adding new analytical perspectives to the methodological and conceptual groundwork of its predecessor. *Worlding and Storying Forced Displacement: Contemporary Art and Refugee Experience in Denmark* can

be read together with the earlier volume, but also entirely independently from it. To facilitate the latter form of reading, this section briefly introduces some key definitions necessary for the independence of this volume.

Postmigration – or in German, *das Postmigrantische* – was first harnessed as a critical term on the Berlin cultural scene around 2005, primarily by people engaged in so-called postmigrant theatre (Langhoff 2012; Sharifi 2020). Around 2010, it gained ground in German academia from where it quickly spread to academic environments abroad, especially in northern Europe but also France and the UK, along with Canada, i.e. countries whose populations – like Germany – were struggling to accommodate the slow but profound societal changes that immigration from many corners of the world had brought about since the end of the Second World War. *Postmigration* quickly became a travelling concept in the humanities and social sciences and an extraordinary enabler of productive transdisciplinary dialogues that have breathed new life into many of the longstanding critical discussions revolving around ‘migration’. One of the markers of what must now be considered a distinct field of *postmigration studies* is precisely its transdisciplinary character.⁸

A general distinction can be made between three common ways of using the concept of *postmigration* as a scholarly lens or methodology through which to examine migration-related issues and phenomena, referring to *actors*, *societies* or *perspectives*, respectively. These can be understood as three discursive strands of postmigrant thought emerging from German scholarly debates. The concept is used, firstly, to refer to subjects – usually long-settled immigrants and descendants of these immigrants. In the scholarly discourse, they are often designated ‘postmigrant generations’ (Yildiz and Hill 2017; Yıldiz 2010), a label which reveals that refugeehood, exile and the subjectivity of displaced persons has hitherto held a marginal position in postmigration studies, although I would argue that postmigrant methodologies have a significant potential to address such matters.

Secondly, the term refers to a societal condition. The conceptual shift of emphasis from a *postmigrant generation* to a *postmigrant society* that took place in the early 2010s involved a significant methodological change – from singling out a social group, to widening the analytical perspective to encompass complex transformations in society affecting many different groups, both with and without a migrant heritage. The concept of a postmigrant society, most comprehensively theorized by the political scientist Naika Foroutan in her book *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft: Ein Versprechen der pluralen Demokratie* (‘Postmigrant Society: The Promise of a Plural

8 The following account is based on Petersen 2023, the Introduction (pp. 5–9) and Chapter 1. Influential contributions to the theorization and study of postmigration and postmigrant societies include but are not limited to: Sievers 2024; Schramm, Moslund and Petersen 2019; Foroutan 2019a; Foroutan, Karakayalı and Spielhaus 2018; Yıldiz and Hill 2015.

Democracy') (Foroutan 2019a), is based on an ethical stance that understands migration to be a structural characteristic of society, thereby countering the widespread misconception that migration is an exceptional and recent form of social existence. Thus, the prefix 'post' is not intended to historicize the fact of migration, as migration is obviously ongoing and not at all 'over'.

Accordingly, the sociologists Vassilis S. Tsianos and Juliane Karakayalı have defined *postmigrant society* as referring to 'the political, cultural and social transformations of societies with a history of post-colonial and guest worker immigration', i.e. societies 'structured by' past and present experiences of migration (Tsianos and Karakayalı 2014, 20). Also contributing to the relevance of a postmigrant understanding of society to a study of contemporary art on refugeedom are the transitional implications. *Postmigrant society* designates a plural society still very much in the making, struggling to divest itself of old Eurocentric, colonial and monocultural structures (Petersen 2023, 7). The collective process of coming to terms with globalization- and migration-induced transformations to society is a difficult one, so postmigrant societies are conflict-ridden and highly polarized societies – and matters related to 'migration' constitute one of their most controversial and conflict-prone areas. Yet, Foroutan is adamant that they also generate new alliances defending plural democracy. In addition to such new alliances, Foroutan associates the 'interaction dynamics' of plural democratic societies with struggles for recognition, negotiations of sociocultural norms and structures, along with ambivalence and antagonisms as sociocultural features resulting from pervasive hybridization and pluralization processes and the backlash they generate (Foroutan 2019a, 60).

As pointed out by the anthropologists Regina Römhild and Manuela Bojadžijev, the initial generational, actor-oriented approach entails a risk of 'migrantizing' the individual or group under study, even when the laudable objective is to afford visibility and recognition to those labelled as 'migrants' (or 'refugees'). Römhild and Bojadžijev argue that the pitfalls of migrantization invariably introduce a hierarchical separation between 'us' and 'them', which can only be avoided by adopting a perspective that declares all members of society to be somehow affected by migration (Bojadžijev and Römhild 2014, 18–19). Recalling Michael Rothberg's concept of the implicated subject, this means that all members of society are implicated in the postmigrant condition (obviously in diverse ways, and with different outcomes).

Römhild's guidelines on postmigrant analytical approaches are tremendously helpful for the study of elitist forms of cultural production such as the fine arts. In her influential article 'Beyond the Bounds of the Ethnic: For Postmigrant Cultural and Social Research', first published in German in 2013, Römhild uses the term *migrant* as an inclusive category comprising both 'voluntary' and 'forced' migration, in order to make some general methodological points. She argues that migration studies conducted as 'research about migrants' – often with an emphasis on those

living in the social ghettos of the underprivileged – risk producing a ‘migrantology’ that merely reproduces the divide between majority and minority. She suggests ‘a shift in perspective that would “demigrantise” migration research while “migrantising” research into culture and society’ (Römhild 2017, 70). To bring about this critical shift, she recommends two strategies: *studying up* and *studying through*. *Studying up* would require a social expansion to include groups of privileged migrants in the overall picture, such as transnational professionals, mobile creatives and students – all of which include artists, it could be added (Petersen 2017, 85–112). This shift would need to be coupled with a heightened attention to the hierarchy of forms of (im)mobility and (im)mobile subjects. *Studying through* should start from society’s negotiation of migration instead of making migration and migrants themselves the object of study, thereby shedding light on society’s institutions, policies and cultural practices, etc., from the perspective of migration and the diversity it produces (Römhild 2017, 71–72). In a similar vein, the social anthropologist Janine Dahinden has argued that the topic of ‘migration’ should be integrated ‘transversally’ into other disciplines, and that scholars should develop a ‘reflexive attitude’ by first studying the broader social and cultural processes and then move on to examine and assess the role of migration and ethnicity within them (Dahinden 2016, 2212–2213 and 2220). Although I concur with Römhild and Dahinden’s overarching strategy to shift the emphasis onto society at large to avoid ‘migrantization’, I also acknowledge that the ambition of this book to examine art on refugeedom arguably requires a certain focus on displaced people, including artists who have a background of forced displacement themselves that somehow surfaces in their artistic practice. So the ‘migrantizing’ focus on generations, groups and individuals cannot be completely avoided.

Thirdly, in conjunction with the conceptualization of postmigration as a common cipher for the many ways in which migration plays into the sociocultural pluralization and polarization of democratic societies, postmigration has also evolved into a diversified set of analytical perspectives, each inflected by the needs in the specific field where the postmigrant perspective is used. When the concept is used as a critical lens to study specific phenomena, such as visual art or theatre emerging from postmigrant contexts, it must be coupled with concepts and analytical tools that are operational in the field in question (Petersen 2023, 9). Lastly, it should be mentioned that in recent years, a fourth approach is beginning to take shape, especially in the institutional arena of museums, in the field of history, and in curatorial, museum and heritage studies, where professionals, often in dialogue or collaboration with citizens of migrant backgrounds, have begun to trace, collect and write – or if necessary, rewrite – the histories of migration that have previously been considered marginal to the established narratives of national history. In Europe, this germinating genealogy thus works towards the recognition of the historical roles of labour, of postcolonial and forced migration (Petersen 2023, 48–49).

To conclude, these four strands of critical postmigrant thought and the methodologies associated with them all centre on matters of concern to contemporary plural democratic societies. Accordingly, I understand 'postmigration' to be what the anthropologist David Scott has called a *problem-space* – that is, a specific historical period with its own 'ensemble of questions and answers' (Scott 2004, 3–4). A problem-space generates its own discourses and generates a particular horizon of goals to be achieved. The concept of a problem-space resembles the concept of a *historical conjuncture* as developed in cultural studies as a tool for doing conjunctural analysis. Both concepts imply that a contextual consideration of the historical configuration and the social circumstances is paramount to gaining a critical and profound understanding of the object under study. They also require a methodological self-reflexivity which acknowledges that the questions asked (and by implication, the theoretical frame within which the questions are formulated) determine which conjuncture or problem-space presents itself to the analyst (Petersen 2023, 7).

Crucial to the present study is the understanding that research into migration and integration (also of refugees) forms part of what Dahinden calls 'the nation-state migration apparatus' and routinely adopts the 'national container' as the principal reference system for empirical research and theorization. Oftentimes, this 'methodological nationalism' becomes a blind spot, along with the fact that the distinction between migration and non-migration is ultimately the *raison d'être* of migration studies. Furthermore, the field's selective focus on 'migrants' has the unfortunate side-effect of contributing to normalizing the discourse of migration-related difference, which makes ethnic categories so powerful in everyday life (Dahinden 2016, 2209–2210).

As Dahinden explains in her insightful analysis, historically, the migration apparatus is inseparable from 'the logic of the modern nation state and its institutional and categorial effects'. An institutional state migration apparatus (in Foucault's sense, comprising an ensemble of discourses, institutions, rules, laws, administrative measures and scientific statements) developed and was, from the beginning, entangled with the nation state and nationalism. The very idea of migrants as different from citizens, and 'the perceived need for nation states to manage this difference' by measures such as border controls, visa regimes and migration and integration laws, was institutionalized by nations as they institutionalized themselves as states. Importantly, this apparatus was, and is, not only structural but also linguistic and ideological. Dahinden explains:

Such state infrastructure, however, does not merely regulate mobility in a technical sense; it also creates the label 'migration' and other migration-related categories. The category of 'foreigner', for example, only makes sense within a nation-state logic, namely in dialectic with the term 'citizen'; the label 'migrants'

solely acquires significance in relation to 'non-migrants'. And the category 'people with a migration background' can only be thought of in relation to a supposedly natural multi-generational rootedness within a national territory. (Dahinden 2016, 2209)

Dahinden's analysis suggests that nationalism involves a politics of closure that constructs and codes the national culture as coherent through taxonomies of racial, ethnic, cultural and national difference, which draw the internal and external boundaries of culture and identity. How, then, can art function and operate against such a powerful politics of closure? And how can the limitations of the 'national container' be minimized when studying the relations between displaced people and the country where they have resettled? A postmigrant perspective is helpful here, thanks to its potential to dismantle the binary between migrants and non-migrants, majority and minority, and to open them up towards each other, emphasizing entanglements alongside frictions. However, due to the national orientation of the postmigrant perspective, it has to be coupled with a transnational perspective that is responsive to the logic of objects and people (including artists) on the move. It can open up the 'national container' and address the ways in which forced displacement and migration bring the national enclave into close proximity with the wider world. While a postmigrant perspective tends to focus on issues and phenomena related to the transformative impact of immigration on a nation state, a transnational perspective aims to expand, transgress or decentre national space.⁹ A transnational perspective, and the transcultural perspective that is often integral to it, makes it possible to look beyond the nation-state, to explain how art travels and to examine translocal connections, networks and forms of exchange, collaboration and solidarity.

For the purpose of this study, the general terminology of postmigration should be supplemented with a few concepts drawn from my book *Postmigration, Transculturality and the Transversal Politics of Art*. The concept of postmigrant public spaces is particularly helpful when examining what art – both so-called public art and participatory and activist projects – can accomplish in the public arenas of postmigrant societies. Public spaces are defined broadly here and understood to comprise both material and symbolic dimensions and various forms of public discourse, dissent and protest. They can be physical as well as media spaces, and I would include institutions such as museums despite the economic barrier of entrance fees. The concept of postmigrant public spaces refers, then, to sites of dissent and democratic participation where the conflicts of postmigrant societies are negotiated, while at the same

9 For a more elaborate discussion of the difference between the two perspectives and why the postmigrant perspective needs to be coupled with a transnational perspective, see Petersen 2023, 64–65, 89–95.

time marking its theoretical foundation in postmigrant thought by indicating that its analytical lens on public space is 'postmigrant' (Petersen 2023, 165).

I understand postmigrant public spaces to be plural and sometimes conflictual, and at other times convivial domains of human encounter shaped by former and ongoing (im)migration in an interplay with new and old forms of nationalism and racism. In their capacity as public spaces, they can accommodate multiple publics and counterpublics. Building on the ideas of the literary scholar Michael Warner, I suggest that a public is not a preformed audience, nor a clearly defined community. A public '*exists by virtue of being addressed*'; that is, a public is 'a special kind of virtual social object enabling a special mode of address' (Warner 2005, 67, 55; emphasis in the original). Put differently, publics come into existence by being addressed, for example by an artwork or a participatory art project. As publics and counterpublics are not coterminous with public spaces, postmigrant or otherwise, they can be seen as protean formations of participants that exist and coexist within them (Petersen 2023, 190).

The concept of the postmigrant imaginary is related to the collective images of society, self and world that are circulated in postmigrant societies, and shared in its public spaces. I have developed this concept in a dialogue with writings by Kobena Mercer, Ato Quayson, Girish Daswani, Vijay Mishra, and others, who have theorized transcultural imaginaries as boundless, or theorized diasporic imaginaries as those of ethnic diaspora groups with a mindset moored to the country of origin. The postmigrant imaginary, as I define it, is never unbounded and never pure; it is the product of people living together in a country where different groups of migrants have settled, and where people live in proximity to difference. Hence, the postmigrant imaginary does not exist prior to the transformative contact in the receiving country and its conditions of 'throwntogetherness' (Massey 2005, 149).

When exploring refugeedom, it is important to note that the postmigrant imaginary does not substitute the diasporic imaginary. It coexists with it. However, in contradistinction to the diasporic imaginary, the place that matters most in the postmigrant imaginary is 'here', not 'there'. Historical narratives generated from within a postmigrant imaginary concern the historical struggles and genealogies that have produced the multi-ethnic society, not the various places from which its inhabitants hail. Thus, in contrast to the diasporic imaginary, co-ethnic identification is not constitutive of the postmigrant imaginary because it is not structured by affiliations to discrete ethnic communities, but by new transversal alliances. Furthermore, the postmigrant imaginary does not set itself against the national; on the contrary, it actively seeks to renegotiate, redefine and pluralize national affiliations while at the same time setting itself critically against the nationalist monologic version of collective belonging (Petersen 2023, 100–103). In this book, the concept of the postmigrant imaginary is a springboard to the idea

of an anticipatory or prefigurative politics central to the arguments pursued in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Any work of art harbours an *implied mode of reception*, shaping the way the audience or recipient is addressed. For this reason, works of art can sometimes make us look at the world differently by aligning our perception with the mode of attention and alternative perspective they convey (Tygstrup 2017, 150). Thanks to art's potential for *imagining and imaging otherwise*, they can even help us envision what the current transformations of society and the planet may lead to, by mobilizing art's 'prefigurative' potential to create blueprints of society (Petersen 2023, 9–10). As Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will demonstrate, one way of doing this is by gesturing towards a society in which refugees and asylum seekers are not regarded as outsiders to society but as fellow citizens and denizens living within it.

A feminist intersectional lens is indispensable to my case studies. As the art projects discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 exemplify, an anticipatory or prefigurative politics of refugee rights is often a transversal politics stemming from solidarity between people who are positioned differently in society in regard to citizenship, social and cultural privilege, racialization, access to public platforms, likelihood of being heard, and so on. The feminist concepts of transversal politics and epistemic communities are particularly helpful in addressing the challenge of explaining how initiatives by artists, activists and cultural professionals can build coalitions with individuals of diverse positionalities and group affiliations, who by responding to these initiatives' 'address' become part of their public or a circle of committed participants. These concepts were first developed by feminist theorists in the social sciences such as Alison Assiter and Nira Yuval-Davis. Through Marsha Meskimmon's outstanding work on transnational feminisms (Meskimmon 2020, 2023), I have entered into a dialogue with the work of Assiter and Yuval-Davis. Meskimmon's aesthetically inflected use of the concepts of transversal politics and epistemic communities has transformed these social science concepts into what Mieke Bal has called 'travelling concepts' (Bal 2002), making feminist inroads into art history and cultural analysis not unlike those made by the concept of infrastructure that has gained momentum in these fields in recent years (Daugaard, Schmidt, and Tygstrup 2024a). What these three concepts share, I would argue, is a critical potential to examine and describe the role that artists and cultural professionals play in the building of coalitions and social movements committed not only to feminist agendas and gender issues but also to other struggles for social justice, climate justice and profound institutional and structural change.

An awareness of epistemic location and political positionality is central to the concept and practice of transversal politics as they are based on the idea that everyone speaks from somewhere to somewhere else, and that compatible values and affective solidarities can nevertheless cut across differences in positionings and identity. Meskimmon links this understanding closely to the proposition that

transversal politics can be a mode of coalition-building that engenders networks and environments of knowledge-sharing, i.e. epistemic communities, beyond essentialized identities and traditional party or identity politics. Importantly, she stresses that they can act materially to change the social imaginary (Meskimmon 2020, 7, as well as 1, 31, 40, 105; see also Yuval-Davis 1999, 96; Petersen 2023, 132–133, 136). Both concepts will be further unpacked in Chapter 2's analysis of postmigrant coalition-building. For now, let it suffice to say that the term *postmigrant transversal politics* is used in this book to designate a transversal politics that centres on a common cause connected to the problem-space of postmigration, and more specifically, the struggle for refugee justice and equal access to cultural citizenship for people of refugee backgrounds in a plural democratic society.

'Placing' refugees in postmigrant societies

Any study of art that takes migration and refugeedom as its subject should be thoroughly historically contextualized. In continuation of the introduction to postmigrant thought and postmigrant societies, this section considers the question of how to understand the place of refugees in European postmigrant societies. After some overarching remarks on European responses, I consider what has been described as a 'paradigm shift' in Danish refugee policy.

In a seminal study of how EU member states responded to the 2015–2016 increase in refugees seeking protection in Europe, the German sociologist Ludger Pries makes the following observations on how immigration and asylum policies have shaped and will continue to shape the self-perception, ethics and policies of Europe:

How Europe and the international community will deal with the challenges of refugees and their protection will affect the future of the people directly concerned but also in the longer term the self-conception of the EU as a political project. It will define for the twenty-first century, if and how global society and its nation-states stick to the humanitarian commitments they defined during the twentieth century. Especially in the German case, the massive welcoming and the clear signal to the refugees that they had arrived safely in Germany also opened a historic window for society to arrive at a more sustainable concept of itself. Many people, especially younger persons and those with migration roots, declared that this was the first time they felt proud of the country they lived in. (Pries 2018, 2)

Pries suggests that 21st-century international migration, whether 'voluntary' or 'forced' migration, should be understood not only as a spatial movement but also as a transnational social movement, directing demands at the country of

reception and the international community. Pries describes this social movement as transnational, to stress that it is characterized by an increase of social relationships, networks and social spaces that cut across several nation-states (Pries 2018, 5). The German-based, Syrian-born artist Khaled Barakeh's installation *MUTE – A Muted Demonstration*, representing a group of Syrian protesters and displayed in 2022 in front of the Danish Parliament (see the Prologue), is an example of how an artistic practice can be linked to such transnational social movements and their claims. As Pries explains,

These movements of migrants and refugees do not direct their demands and expectations towards the ruling elites of their own countries in the first place but towards the international community and, first of all, the rich countries. When their demands for social participation, recognition and dignity cannot be fulfilled in their countries of origin, they turn towards those powers that make corresponding promises of participation and about which they have reliable information. The reconstruction of the refugee movement of 2015 shows that it was much more than the spatial movement of desperate individuals. In fact, it is a complex network with the refugees at its centre, who are – in spite of their difficult position – interconnected actors capable of taking decisions. (Pries 2018, 47)

Parallel to the German 'welcome culture', albeit on a smaller scale, Denmark saw civil society volunteers get involved in more or less spontaneous collections of clothes and money, with food schemes and transport of asylum seekers, etc. (Rytter et al. 2023, 31–32; M.B. Jørgensen and Olsen 2020). By contrast, on a governmental level, the response in Denmark was rather different from that of Germany. The policy of changing Danish governments has been to limit the access to asylum. In their introduction to the 2023 anthology *Paradigmeskiftets konsekvenser. Flygtninge, stat og civilsamfund* ('The Consequences of the Paradigm Shift: Refugees, State and Civil Society'), the anthology's editors, anthropologists Mikkel Rytter, Sarah-Louise J. Mortensen, Susanne Bregnbæk and Zachary Whyte, outline the major changes to Danish refugee policies. In 1983, the Danish government passed a very liberal Immigration Act and Denmark was seen as a model country championing human rights and humanist ideals. In the intervening four decades, however, it has had some of the most restrictive refugee laws in Europe. It has become difficult to obtain asylum and family reunification, and Denmark has attracted international criticism with the decision to revoke Syrian residence permits. Moreover, there have been various symbolic 'celebrations' – such as when the former Minister for Immigration and Integration Inger Støjberg (then the Liberal Party *Venstre*) had a 'tightening counter' set up on the Ministry's website, counting the increasing number of legal tightenings implemented during her time as minister.

Rytter et al. are, therefore, right to conclude that ‘since 1983 there has been a gradual pendulum swing from one extreme to the other’ (Rytter et al. 2023, 13). They argue that a virtual paradigm shift has taken place in Danish refugee policy since 2015, comprising a range of legal and administrative changes which all pursue the objective to minimize the number of people seeking asylum in Denmark. This culminated in February 2019, with the introduction of the new law L 140 and the resulting changes to the Immigration Act, the Integration Act and the Repatriation Act. This law shifted the decades-long focus on integrating refugees into Danish society to a repatriation agenda. As a general rule, residence permits for refugees and family reunification must now be revoked, or not extended as soon as possible, unless this conflicts with Denmark’s international obligations. The political ambition to repatriate refugees to their country of origin was clearly signalled by the removal of the word ‘integration’ from the Integration Act, replacing it with ‘repatriation and self-sufficiency’ (Rytter et al. 2023, 9).

Already in February 2019, when L 140 was adopted, the Refugee Appeals Board and the Danish Immigration Service had opened up the possibility of revoking Syrian refugees’ residence permits based on the new rules for revocation and a fresh (and later controversial) country report on the security situation in Syria.

In August 2020, the Ministry of Immigration and Integration opened The Danish Return Agency (*Hjemrejsestyrelsen*), responsible for the processes and logistics of repatriation. Less than a year later, in June 2021, Denmark’s first Repatriation Act came into force. As explained in the Prologue, the consequences of these changes became apparent in the spring of 2021 when 453 Syrian refugees had their residence permits revoked or were denied extension, due to what was seen as an improved security situation in the Damascus area. These revocations also spread fear and uncertainty among other refugees. The situation led to demonstrations across the country, where a section of the Danish population took to the streets in solidarity with the refugees (Rytter et al. 2023, 9–10).¹⁰ Khaled Barakeh’s *MUTE – A Muted Demonstration* was intended as a critical intervention into this political situation.

Rytter et al. conclude that the legal and administrative changes have profoundly transformed the relationship between refugees, the state and civil society. Without

10 As Rytter et al. note, a significant component of this situation is that the number of asylum applicants who have their residence permit revoked is relatively low, and even less are actually deported: ‘Some of the refugees referred to departure centres end up disappearing on their own. A report from Refugees Welcome states that “of the 653 people who had left Kærshovedgård during the centre’s first three years, 74 had left or been deported, 78 had been granted a residence permit, and 419 were registered as no-shows”. It is assumed that those who did not show up have either gone underground in Denmark or have travelled on to another European country in the hope of having their case and protection needs assessed there.’ (Rytter et al. 2023, 32)

necessarily referring to them explicitly, many of the artworks discussed in this book in effect respond to this change of policy and the transformation from a sociopolitical climate of hospitality to one of inhospitality:

The paradigm shift refers to both concrete legislation and a symbolic change in attitude. A key point here is that the communicative and symbolic parts of the paradigm shift are crucial to both its political goals and its consequences. Overall, we understand the paradigm shift as a political attempt to actively mobilize temporariness and uncertainty as part of Denmark's deterrence policy towards refugees. [...] This has created a tension between the part of the Danish reception policy that seeks to integrate refugees and, for example, help them find work, and the part that prioritizes providing relatively poor conditions for refugees to deter other migrants from heading for Denmark. One of the innovations of the paradigm shift is the way it upsets that balance and effectively incorporates large parts of integration policy into deterrence policy. (Rytter et al. 2023, 11)

For refugees in the country, the most palpable effect of this policy has been the pervasive sense of precariousness resulting from all refugee residence permits being made temporary and subject to reassessment every one to two years. As the sociologist Stinne Østergaard Poulsen has suggested, the previous 'linear' movement towards a permanent residence permit has been replaced by temporal 'loops', where refugees are repeatedly being returned to the starting point and kept in uncertainty about whether they can stay in Denmark and with their everyday lives transformed into a hybrid stage between asylum and integration (Poulsen 2023, 47–49).

The idea of temporary protection was, however, already introduced in the 1990s with the adoption of the so-called 'Yugoslav Law' for the approximately 20,000 Bosnians seeking refuge in Denmark. In Chapter 5, we will return to some of the artists who, like Nermin Duraković (see the Prologue) have a background in the Yugoslav diaspora. As regards asylum policies, there are some important learning points from that time. The insecurity resulting from temporariness until they were granted residence was stressful for many refugees, both individuals and families, and it subsequently turned out to be exceedingly difficult anyway for Bosnian refugees to return after the end of the Yugoslav Wars. They were often stigmatized as traitors because they had fled the country, and oftentimes their homes had been demolished, their possessions stolen or their houses taken over by new residents. As Rytter et al. have said, the history of the Bosnian refugees demonstrates 'Danish society's ability to accommodate and incorporate new groups of citizens who, over time, become a fully integrated part of Danish reality' (Rytter et al. 2023, 21).

Worldmaking denizens and the postmigrant condition of togetherness-in-difference

To grasp the nature of citizenship in situations when permanent residence and legal citizenship are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain, it is helpful to turn to Marsha Meskimmon's experimental concept of the worldmaking denizen as an antidote to the misconception that non-citizens are not part of the society in which they live and are forever deemed strangers and outsiders. Meskimmon uses the term *denizen* as a tool to rethink citizenship beyond the nation-state. For her, and for Ruth Lister, the term denotes a long-time resident who has developed a mutable but enduring sense of belonging to a new country and community through processes of world-making, but who may not hold legal citizenship in the receiving country or have cut all ties with their country of origin – an expat, for example, or an exile or refugee (Meskimmon 2017, 25; see also Meskimmon 2011; Petersen 2019, 369). The speculative figure of the 'worldmaking denizen' thus bends the notion of the national citizen in new ways by underscoring how the subject comes into being through performative dynamics and intersubjective relations to others (Petersen 2019, 378).

Seen from Meskimmon's feminist-materialist perspective, denizenship is centred on embodied, intersubjective activities of belonging where differences are acknowledged but not perceived as fixed. It is an open-ended process of finding one's place in the world rather than a status (which would limit the meaning of 'denizen' to its legalistic reference to naturalized or resident persons with lesser rights than citizens): 'As a process, worldmaking denizenship focuses on participation and the continual action of making oneself at home through different collectivities able to be formed and changed in and through transversal dialogues over time and across spaces.' (Meskimmon 2017, 33) Meskimmon draws on Nelson Goodman's understanding of worldmaking, according to which the building of a 'world' always begins from what is already there: 'the making is a remaking' (Goodman 1978, 6). Meskimmon's insistence that the denizen and the world are not preformed but 'emerge in mutuality' is particularly helpful when exploring refugee resettlement in new host countries (Meskimmon 2017, 26). She develops the denizen into an inclusive category that rejects dualist thinking (citizen versus non-citizen) to become a bridging trope. Her suggestion that all members of society, irrespective of their social and legal status, and their descent, should be seen as engaged in postmigratory worldmaking, and hence as denizens, is eminently useful when seeking to understand how refugeedom is lived and how transversal alliances are forged in postmigrant societies (Petersen 2019, 381). As Meskimmon writes: 'In our worldmaking and our postmigratory dwelling, we are all of us denizens whether cast as "citizens" or "migrants"' (Meskimmon 2017, 33). As an experimental figure, the denizen thus enables us to explore how works of art and cultural representations

articulate postmigratory experiences of what cultural studies scholar Ien Ang has called the ‘condition of togetherness-in-difference’ (Ang 2001, 17).

To conclude, the artworks discussed in the following chapters must be understood as emerging from within the conjuncture of the recent transformations to Danish and EU refugee and asylum policies described above. Based on his study of refugee migration to Europe in the mid-2010s, Ludger Pries has suggested that *arriving* as an open process of social integration is key to understanding refugee resettlement. Starting from the definition in the German-language *Duden* dictionary, he unfolds a spectrum of meanings of what ‘to arrive’ (*ankommen*) can imply: ‘to reach a place, to come to a place; [. . .] to find appeal, resonance; [. . .] to affect someone [in a certain way], to touch them; to be important [to someone], to be of significance’.¹¹ Similar to Meskimmon’s notion of the worldmaking denizen, Pries’s definition of arrival conveys that arrival is not a passive state after landing somewhere, but rather an open process of interaction between those arriving and the place where they arrive (Pries 2018, 150–151). As the sociologists Ana Mijić and Michael Parzer note, ‘Pries positions himself against assimilation theory concepts and understands “arriving” as an open-ended (and often years- and decades-long) process of being taken in’ (Mijić and Parzer 2023, 3). Emphasizing that refugees’ process of arrival is usually more complicated and prolonged than that of other migrants because the primary cause of migration was the desire to escape from a life-threatening situation and find protection and security elsewhere, Pries defines arrival thus:

An arrival in the above-mentioned sense of a one-sided forced assimilation is very costly and harmful for those affected. Therefore, arrival should not be understood in an assimilationist sense as “finally finding a new home” or “irrevocably knowing where one belongs”. Arriving is *always an open-ended process* where the arrivals feel initially secure and accepted. Arrival implies the acceptance of the rules of the host but never any further and all-encompassing declarations of loyalty or disassociation explanations. Arrival means primarily to be received decently, accepted, respected and understood, and to get a chance to participate in the community of arrival. Arrival also means to share, to be able to express oneself and to disclose joy and sorrow. Arrival can only be successful when all those concerned share the same rights and when it is based on mutual acceptance. (Pries 2018, 152; see also 154–155; emphasis in the original)

Arrival can thus be understood as a process of worldmaking and co-habitation, or *co-existence* as Christine Ross calls it (Ross 2022), involving complex processes of mutual perception and the (re)constitution of the interrelationship between self and other.

11 The Duden dictionary, quoted in Ludger Pries, *Migration und Ankommen: Die Chancen der Flüchtlingsbewegung*. Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag 2016, 131. Translation quoted from Mijić and Parzer 2023, 3.

To this, I would like to add that refugees' arrival involves both making and storying their world anew. Art can assist in this, as the following chapters demonstrate.

This chapter's outline of the discourse on postmigration and postmigrant theory gives us a sense of the heuristic potential of postmigration as a framework for exploring artists' engagement with the storying and worldmaking of people with a background of forced displacement, and how this framework can be enhanced by feminist theory. This chapter has thus provided the necessary theoretical underpinnings of the book's proposition that art's capacity for *worldmaking* and *storying* can be deployed to support practices of cultural citizenship. Such practices are vital to building *a sense of having arrived* among people with a background of forced migration settled in a country that has increasingly limited their possibility of developing precisely such a sense of belonging, participation and access in order to express themselves.

