

THE MIGRANT INSTITUTE

INTER
VEN
TIONS



Perspectives #1

MIGRANT DRAMATURGIES NETWORK

June 2020

#1

Bridget Anderson (University of Bristol)

Immigration and arts – creating a mess

The UK's immigration system takes a human capital approach that is framed by an emphasis on productivity and skill. The aim is to attract 'the brightest and the best' and to dissuade or prevent entry of those perceived as not benefiting the UK. Despite the pandemic recognition of the importance of the contribution of low waged workers, many of whom are in practice migrants, the current Immigration Bill reinforces this approach. While it is claimed that it is 'historic', establishing a new a post-Brexit 'points based' immigration system, the principles it espouses, 'laying the foundations for a high wage, high skill, high productivity economy' are not new. The critical difference is that these principles will also apply to EU citizens and are likely to be applied even more stringently – though what is in practice planned is not contained in the Bill itself which gives considerable power to the Home Secretary to decide. What follows is therefore written on the basis of the current immigration system, and its principles are unlikely to change. It is intended as a provocation to encourage new thinking on people and movement that recognises the power and the limitations of labelling.

The system for admitting non-citizens for income-generating activities rests on a vision of the employment relationship and an understanding of skills that is out of kilter with developments in UK practice, and that is unsuited to many kinds of service provision and with the creative arts. There are two routes of entry for workers: Tier 2, for long-term work visas, Tier 5 for short-term work visas of up to two years (12 months for a Creative and Sporting

Visas). Both types of visa require a certificate of sponsorship from a licensed employer – except for entertainers entering to perform at particular named ‘permit free festivals). Tier 2 also has a minimum income requirement and visa holders must generally earn over £30,000 a year and have the equivalent of £945 in a bank account for 90 days before application. Exceptions are possible for jobs on the Shortage Occupation List (SOL) which is a list of occupations where there is a shortage, which are skilled, and where it is deemed ‘sensible’ to respond by opening the jobs to non-UK citizens. Recommendations for jobs to go on the SOL are made by the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) a Home Office advisory body comprised of economists.

Creative workers tend to be regarded as exceptional, but I would rather argue that the challenges of adapting the UK immigration system to their ‘particularities’ is indicative of deep structural difficulties and assumptions of the system whose implications extend beyond creative workers. Most obviously, the measurement of contribution via ‘skill’, and the measurement of ‘skill’ through earnings and the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). While creative workers such as software development and clothing designers may find these measurements applicable, many others are in low waged, project-based work that does not bring in a regular income. ‘Gig work’ may have originated in the creative sector, but as we know it is no longer restricted to that sector. The nature of work is changing, including a shift to sub-contracting, self-employment and nonstandard employment contracts, the rise of part time, temporary forms of work, and portfolio careers. The immigration system, relying on sponsorship and a standard employment relationship with a single employer, does not reflect these changes, even though many of those at the sharp end of these changes are in fact non-citizens. The creative arts remind us that the standard employment relation is not only formally narrow, but it also fails to capture

the self-expression and self-realisation that is part of some people's experience of work, and might be key to why they tolerate lower wages and insecurity. There are parallels here with the work of low waged care workers for example.

When it comes to skills identification there is some latitude granted to the creative industries in terms of qualifications are the only industries where people who have a qualification below RQF Level 6 (Bachelor's Degree) are eligible to apply to Tier 2, in large part due to the recognition of the difficulty in capturing all creative skill sets through the RQF framework. But the problem of RQF measurement extends beyond the creative industries. The COVID crisis has exposed how many of the jobs on which all our everyday lives depend, the hospital cleaners, supermarket shelf stackers, retail workers, drivers, carers and agricultural and food processing workers are low waged, 'low skilled' and undertaken by BAME people and migrants. Across Europe and North America, non-citizens account for a substantial share of employment in many sectors designated as essential including health and care services. A job that is not recognised as skilled may require considerable experience, and it is wrong to assume that anybody can do 'low-skilled' work - put an academic in a strawberry field next to experienced fruit pickers and see how long it will take them to reach the standard and efficiency of their co-workers.

There are also questions about the nature of work itself and when work is in the labour market. This is well rehearsed in debates about gender and domestic labour, and there has been a long political movement calling for 'wages for housework'. The question of whether paid sexual labour is or can ever be considered work is also extremely contested. But there are other areas where work is imagined out of the labour market and not subject to employment law such as interns, working holidaymakers, volunteering, prison-labour, apprenticeships. What connects these types of work is that

they are work where the labour is imagined as of benefit to the worker and not simply a matter of exchange. Parts of the creative industries are also often so imagined, which is one reason why it is difficult to analyse 'labour demand'. On the other hand, when all creativity is turned into work this can mean people are seen as in breach of conditions - consider the case of the woman who was refused entry on a visitor's visa because she had given her occupation as 'artist' and was carrying paints with her, so the immigration officer claimed this meant she would be 'working' while in the UK and this would be illegal.

In the creative industries, as in other sectors, there are many non-citizens who are not on Tier 2 or Tier 5 visas but who are nevertheless working perfectly legally. This includes EU citizens, people on dependant visas, and people with a status related to asylum. These people do not show up in 'migrant worker' categories, but rather they are 'migrants' who work. There are also people who have permanent residence or UK nationality but who were born outside the UK, and who are sometimes labelled 'migrants' and sometimes not, depending on context and politics. This raises a broader question for researchers, activists and civil society more generally: when and why does being a 'migrant' matter? Does it matter because of legal status, because of linguistic or cultural background, because of experiences of racism and xenophobia? The answers to these questions will vary by context and depending on who and why they are being asked. We might also ask what is particular about being a 'migrant' artist? The value of this question is it points to the ways in which being a 'migrant' is not a negative but suggests a different take on the world and one which everyone, migrants and citizens alike, can benefit from.

#2

Vicky Angelaki (Mid Sweden University, SE)

A view from the other side, or notes on narratives

As I type these words, the world is gripped by a pandemic that knows no borders; in order to enable humanity to transition to its next, post-pandemic stage, individuals and countries have had to work globally and collectively in ways that appear to have fostered a new form of solidarity - one that we could not have foreseen; one that has made urgent demands on how we live our lives today. Under the strangest of conditions, we appear to have become united.

But that's not all there is to say about this - and indeed the broader ramifications of the current stage in humanity's history will not be revealed to us for quite some time; to make assumptions and to hazard guesses appears irresponsible, even naïve. I will not be attempting to do this.

But I will make a reference to an article I was reading earlier today, and which I found interesting. This is it:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/14/how-coronavirus-is-reshaping-europe-in-dangerous-ways>

There has been a lot of dialogue regarding what the current crisis may mean for the next stage in Europe's history. I find such articles particularly interesting, especially when they come out of UK-based press outlets - whichever their political affinities. The accompanying note for Charles Grant's piece reads: "From green backlash to reimposition of border controls, pandemic is accelerating tensions that could unravel the EU". Somehow, journalism coming out of the UK, now outside the EU narrative,

appears to be stoking at best concerns and at worst fears for what the aftermath of the virus will be for Europe. Grant identifies six trends that may spell change: deglobalisation; nation-first politics; tighter borders; green backlash; East-West tension; North-South tension. Valid points are raised, but this is not the point I seek to make here – my point is that such positions are premature (Grant does recognise that “it’s too soon to judge the full impact of the pandemic”), and I am also mindful of the timing given the context of the UK’s historical transition. So I have considerable reservations. A narrative of a Europe breaking, or worse yet, broken, is problematic when the problem is as slippery as the pandemic; the reinstatement of borders can become troubling (this will depend on the next stage), and it merits discussion, and we need to be seriously concerned as to any prospects for its political misappropriation. But I suppose what I’m trying to say is I’m growing a bit weary of narratives of a fragile Europe coming out of the UK.

I lived in the UK as a highly skilled migrant of European origin (from an EU member state) for 15 years. As I type this, the UK is finding itself embroiled in a political crisis (Cummings etc.) that is frankly largely unimaginable to me in the context of many other European political scenes, however fraught; I find that I am watching, as an outsider now, narratives of marginalization and censorship unfolding in a European democracy that, growing up in Greece, often emerged, on news outlets, as one of the beacons of democracy – even when it got things wrong, as it sometimes indeed appeared to do (but that’s a matter of subjective opinion, I suppose).

I have thoroughly criticised British neoliberalisms elsewhere in my work and will not do so here. But it is worth noting that what has been transpiring since the build-up to the 2015 GE strikes me as quite exceptional, as, indeed, the country has, in my opinion, transitioned to uncharted waters.

Having observed this change from within for a very long time, I am now observing this from afar.

When, in early 2016, I submitted the MS for my monograph *Social and Political Theatre in 21st-Century Britain: Staging Crisis* (2017), I felt confident that I could use ‘we’ when I talked about Britain, its society, its theatres. I felt embedded. By the time I was going through my proofs later that year, such a profound change had taken place that I found myself surprised at that ‘we’ that I had so confidently used, writing in late 2015. It was becoming very clear to me that I was part of a different ‘we’ now. That first-person plural was a floating signifier – but what never floated for me was my European identity. That part was watertight.

I am one of the many highly skilled migrants who left the UK before Brexit and also largely, though not exclusively, because of it – even this morning, in a conversation with a family member, I was expressing my relief to be watching from afar – but also my sadness, my disappointment, a niggling feeling.

Europe is not perfect, this we know. But as someone representing a generation that benefited from open borders and that performed its internationalism proudly and extensively, I have always felt that my passport is my identity in more ways than one. I was grateful for my mobility long before I came to fear it may be compromised – because of Brexit – and long before it actually was – because of travel restrictions related to the Coronavirus. But I must also recognise that what in the 1990s and even the first years of the 21st-century felt as a right, not to be questioned, has begun to feel considerably more as a privilege from 2010 onwards, more fragile; a thing you want to protect more fiercely. With mobility gone, what would define my generation? If we are no longer Europeans, what would it mean

to go back to our constituent parts? Could we even do that? Do we remember?

In my new hometown in the middle of Sweden, and right on the coast, it is a quiet afternoon. Our lives have changed during the pandemic with normality suspended, but we have continued without a lockdown, which has meant much less exposure to views of masks in everyday life. I am using 'we' again. When I go for my daily walks, I see sea and endless sky. When I walk on the vast bridge extending across the water, I see signs pointing to Stockholm, but also to Trondheim. I have never felt less confined (even in the current situation) and less of a migrant - and I would like to think that, in the next stage of being-together in Europe, we may ask frank questions about the defining feature of what it is that constitutes us: to me that has always been choosing to co-exist, rather than to split apart.

I don't know what the next day will bring. I hope it will be 'radical' gratitude.

#3

Myria Georgiou (LSE, UK) and Koen Leurs (University of Utrecht, NL)

Smartphones as personal digital archives?

Recentering migrant authority as curating and storytelling subjects

This presentation discusses the migrant smartphone as a personal digital archive. Specifically, it addresses the smartphone as a complicated technology of forced migration: a device that accompanies those who move, but which also records and catalogues digital traces within life contexts of conflict, uprooting, migration and resettlement.

We have all come across images of migrant phones, a symbol of journeys but also of media representations of migration. We have seen the smartphone as a battered device with cracked screen; a shared, sturdy family smartphone; a carrier of precious memories captured in photos and videos; the most expensive thing some migrants have ever owned. These are glimpses into the differentiated but deep entanglement of the smartphone and storytelling in the context of migration. The smartphone as a technology of migration has attracted media attention, which peaked during the 2015-16 so-called “European migration crisis”. Headlines that demonised and praised the smartphone as a luxury and a lifesaver respectively circulated across the world. Media stories that integrated migrant’s own user-generated-content (UGC) into war and migration reporting became momentarily ordinary (Chouliaraki, 2017; Risam, 2018). Eventually, media interest in the smartphone as a witnessing device and in the migrant as

storyteller faded. But the smartphone, unlike the loudness and temporariness of media interest, remains a complicated technology of mobility: a device that accompanies those who move, but which also traces, records and catalogues transnational digital footprints within the life context of conflict, uprooting, migration and resettlement.

We conceptualize smartphones as personal digital archives: migrants' curation of their own stories on their own portable devices. Personal digital archives, we argue, reflect the migrant gaze and constitute mobile subaltern subjects' record of forced migration. We develop this discussion based on research we have conducted across five sites across Europe over five years. We feel it is important to understand precisely how smartphones become personal digital archives that acquire three important roles in the life of migrants: symbolic, affective, and material. By focussing on personal digital archives, we recenter the authority of migrants as witnessing subjects of their own life stories. We want to show how migrants are not only spoken about in the media, but they speak with different voices in relation to their diverse experiences themselves. Their archives as autonomous migrant records provide a powerful basis to reflect upon and contest mainstream western journalism cultures, which too often reduces migration to a spectacle and the migrant to a dehistoricized figure with little agency or voice.

Smartphone as material, affective, and symbolic personal digital archives

During our research with migrants and refugees at and inside Europe's borders over the last five years we heard stories, read testimonies and observed practices that reveal the complex value and meanings of the smartphone for migrants. We feel that it is important to analyse and reflect on the smartphone as a resource of knowledge and self-making, constituted through its material, affective and symbolic dimensions.

1. Material archives: The tangibility and portability of digital archives

The material exterior of the tangible mobile devices, as well as interior archived contents bear marks of living under conflict situations, separation and navigating difficult journeys, experiences of settlement, but also of non-utilitarian, banal everyday experiences including screenshotted funny face snapchat conversations among others. In many instances it were not the communicative or messaging functions of smartphones that informants brought up in interviews, but material characteristics. The importance for the commonly private, tangible, portable devices was in their existence, one of the few possessions carried on their bodies across borders offered proof of previous, regular life. The devices function as personal archives of important memories, including photos of people (sometimes deceased), stories, experiences and places visited. As Ali, a Palestinian aged 21 described us in Amsterdam, although he most often uses a new phone, he keeps his old phone with his old number, with old Whats' App groups and contents with him, it's: "one of the transitional things that used to be always with me... it's really old, and really like, it's not working properly, but that's the point of it."

2. Affective archives: the embodied emotionality of digital archives

The smartphone is an invaluable, even if risky technology. While experiencing risks and sometimes harm as a result of their use of smartphones, research participants repeatedly said that they cannot imagine life without them. As we found out, the smartphone has major emotional and affective affordances, ingrained in its capacity to create archives of affect. This means that it carries stories of individual and collective life on the move, of uprooting, suffering, resilience, regeneration, while being

intimately attached to one's body. War, trauma and uprooting as recorded in the digital archive constitute records of collective but also of individual her/histories and trajectories. Many of the personal and deeply emotional her/histories documented on migrants' phones are fully absent from archival and media representations of war and uprooting. But it is also important to note that the pocket archive is not only a record of life-changing experiences and the her/history-maker of the subaltern. It is also an affective record of ordinariness. Images of mundanity that archive everyday life after migration were often shared with us, chosen for their important meanings: images of certain immobility, calm, ordinariness.

3. Symbolic archives: the politics of digital archives

Migrant archives destabilise and decentre records of migration, “by shifting the power base of social history and taking it away from the traditional and institutional producers of media” (Garde-Hansen et al. 2009: 37). The first dimension of the personal archive's symbolic power is the diversification of both the archiver and the archive. The second dimension of this symbolic power is its performativity, as a tactical act of freedom but also as a risky pathway to surveillance and control.

Conclusions

Migrants' own digital archives do not fit in the neat and refined representational media grammar, but have a powerful ethico-political value: the stories of uprooting and resettlement that they record open up possibilities for documenting but also seeing the story and the storyteller beyond narrow imaginaries and aesthetics of western journalistic cultures.

#4

Alison Jeffers and Ambrose Musiyiwa (University of Manchester)

Listening to the voice of refugee heritage artists (working title)

Who? The partners

This is a collaborative research project with Community Arts Northwest (CAN) and Drama at the University of Manchester and the research will be carried out by PhD researcher Ambrose Musiyiwa. It is funded by AHRC through the Northwest Consortium Doctoral Training Programme.

Community Arts Northwest/Stella Barnes: Based in Manchester, and working extensively across the north west, CAN celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2019. Artists at CAN work with marginalized groups and under-represented communities across a wide range of arts practices and for the past 10-15 years have focused their activities on refugee artists and communities in particular. In 2004 Exodus was set up to be ‘a dynamic programme of participatory cultural production, working with refugees and host communities across a range of traditional and contemporary art forms’ (CAN/Exodus Website).

The Drama Department at the University of Manchester/Dr Alison Jeffers: The In Place of War research project funded by AHRC between 2004 and 2008 was located in the UoM Drama Department. Research included refugee theatre and arts as a significant strand of its work and Alison Jeffers, the PhD researcher on this project, went on to write *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis* (2012). Academics in the Drama Department have strong links with

CAN, helping to set up the Exodus project and working on and evaluating a number of refugee arts projects that were part of this project.

Ambrose Musiyiwa is a poet, journalist and photographer. His poems have been featured in many anthologies. *The Man Who Ran Through The Tunnel* has been translated into more than 12 languages. His short stories, journalism and essays have been published in newspapers and magazines in the UK, Zimbabwe, the United States and South Korea. Ambrose also holds Masters qualifications in Law.

Ambrose has an enduring interest in the intersection between arts, activism, migration and community action. He has organised creative projects, including the Leicester Human Rights Arts and Film Festival and Civic Leicester, a community media channel highlighting conversation taking place in and around Leicester.

Ambrose edited *Leicester 2084 AD: New Poems about The City* (CivicLeicester, 2018), co-edited *Welcome to Leicester: Poems about The City* (Dahlia Publishing, 2016) and he is the author of the poetry pamphlet, *The Gospel According to Bobba*. He developed the poetry anthology, *Over Land, Over Sea: Poems for those seeking refuge* (Five Leaves Publications, 2015) which is being sold to raise funds for Doctors without Borders, Leicester City of Sanctuary, and the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum. He coordinates Journeys in Translation, an international, volunteer-driven translation project translating this publication into other languages and art forms.

What? The project

A body of literature has emerged in the last ten years which explores relationships between refugees, theatre and performance. However, despite this extensive body of literature and practice what has been largely absent to date is the voice of refugee artists. These artists may have migrated from a

context where their work has already been recognized with the intention to carry on with that work in their new location. Equally, artists who have already gained recognition (indeed, for some that may be their reason for having to leave) may migrate with the expectation of developing new forms of artistic expression using their uprooting as a way to renew, reinvigorate or change their practice. Young, emerging artists may not yet have had time to develop a career or body of work in their old home but, through participating in theatre projects in the new location, develop a desire to expand their creative talents and experience. Some female artists who have not been able to explore their creative skills fully in their home location through active repression, respond to the relative freedoms available in their new home location.

This research sets out to gain a better understanding by carrying out a detailed investigation into the practices of artists from a refugee background who are living and working in the UK by asking the following questions:

- What is the range, scope and ambition of performing arts practices carried out by refugee artists in the UK? What opportunities are available and what are the barriers for refugee artists who want to develop their work? How do refugee artists experience and navigate cultural and creative practices in the UK?
- How do refugee artists understand and articulate their practice in relation to their experiences of making art in the UK? What, if any, effect does their legal status have on the work that they make and the ways that they think about and understand their work?
- How do refugee artists understand and communicate their work when the very terminologies used to discuss it are difficult and contested?

When? Timescale

The research will begin in September 2020 and the project is funded for 3.5 years.

Academic impact

This research will complement existing scholarship but will also represent a new and significant voice in a field that has been dominated by hegemonic voices that are comfortably located within accepted structures of citizenship and belonging. Specifically, it will make an original and significant contribution to knowledge in the scholarly literature in applied and social theatre. In addition, it will be of interest to academic researchers working in migration more broadly particularly in cultural geography, humanitarian studies and in human rights research.

Impact on practice and policy

The unique perspective offered by this work has the potential to influence policy makers in arts and cultural settings. Research at this level will allow for a longer-term view of the issues raised, in contrast to the often short-term and disconnected glimpses offered by funding reports or short studies. It will also inform and educate arts organisations in the UK and beyond by providing an insight into their work from the perspective of refugee artists and communities that they aspire to work with.

<http://can.uk.com/>

<https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/alison.jeffers.html>

<http://ambrosemusiyiwa.blogspot.com/p/about.html>



MIGRANT
DRAMATURGIES
NETWORK

The Migrant Institute: Interventions Perspectives #1

© New Tides Platform Publication

Papers by: Bridget Anderson (University of Bristol, UK), Vicky Angelaki (Mid Sweden University, SE), Myria Georgiou (LSE, UK) and Koen Leurs (University of Utrecht, NL), Alison Jeffers and Ambrose Musiyiwa (University of Manchester, UK).

Published by New Tides Platform, Bristol (UK), June 2020

Editing, curation and coordination: Szabolcs Musca (New Tides Platform/ Migrant Dramaturgies Network)

To cite this publication:

Migrant Dramaturgies Network (2020): 'The Migrant Institute: Interventions', Bristol: New Tides Platform, June 2020.

www.newtidesplatform.org

Migrant Dramaturgies Network forms part of New Tides Platform (EU/UK)