

Institution: University of East London (UEL)
Unit of Assessment: 23
Title of case study: Migration, Refugees and Belonging
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research conducted at UEL as part of an ESRC-funded participatory project exploring identity, performance and social action among refugee communities in London has enhanced cohesion within the participating communities, and supported the transfer of specialist expertise and skills from academia to local community and artistic organisations. The latter have benefitted both from the development of innovative methodological research tools and from researchers' support for their subsequent adoption in work with different communities. The research has also contributed to the development of new artistic and cultural resources, including a Verbatim and Forum theatre play. The communication of key research findings through this and other forums has increased public engagement with, and sensitized audiences to, issues relating to the everyday life experiences of refugees in Metropolitan London.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Since the 1990s, UEL has built a cluster of teaching, research and archival resources in the area of migration - particularly forced migration - and belonging. The Refugees Research Centre was established in 2004 and expanded in 2009 to form the Centre for Research on Migration, Refugees and Belonging (CMRB). Directed by Professor Nira Yuval-Davis and Professor Philip Marfleet the Centre has achieved high standing in both academic circles and related communities and organisations involved in various collaborative work with the Centre. UEL's expertise in this area has been supported by the development of close and embedded relations with refugee and other migrant communities in London by staff and post-graduate students; many of those communities have given their archives to the Centre and organised activities relating to its work.</p> <p>The impacts described here are underpinned primarily by work conducted by the CMRB between 2005 and 2008 as part of the ESRC "Identity, Performance and Social Action: The Use of Participatory Theatre Among Refugees" (IPSA) project. The project was directed by Professor Yuval-Davis (joined UEL in 2003). The Senior Research Fellow was Erene Kaptani, an associate member of the Centre. The CMRB's history of forging and sustaining personal and collective embedded relationships was central to the success of the IPSA research project. Rather than relying on more conventional interview techniques, the IPSA project explored the utility of a combination of participatory theatre techniques which would expose the dialogical nature of the construction and politics of identities and belonging. The key techniques considered were Playback - improvisational theatre based on stories told by audience members - and Forum theatre - in which real problems are staged with fictional characters in an unsolved form, the audience being invited to suggest and act out solutions. The principal project aims were to develop participatory theatre techniques as a social science research method [1, 2], and to develop theoretical insights on the dialogical performativity and performance of social identities [3, 4]. The project particularly explored social issues relating to refugees' experiences both of settling in London and of becoming integrated within the twin processes of inclusion/exclusion [5, 6].</p> <p>Project partners included four local refugee groups, each of which provided 15-30 participants. Those groups were: the Kosovan Shpresa youth programme; the Kurdish Alkevi Community Theatre group; the Somali Women's Group (Stratford); and participants of a mixed Migrants counselling training course in Hackney. During 2006-7 two Playback Theatre sessions and four Forum theatre workshops were run by the research team for each of these groups in their regular meeting places. During the Playback sessions participants were asked to tell stories from their lives, focused on settling in London, which were immediately recreated by a group of Playback actors. The Forum theatre workshops, which built on some of the stories brought out through the Playback sessions, asked participants to work on building characters and a scene (reflecting one or more of the Playback stories), providing opportunities to highlight their feelings both of hope and despair, and to develop debates about strategies of empowerment and conflict resolution. Follow-up individual interviews with a sub-sample of those groups were used to gather feedback on the</p>

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impact of and insights provided by the sessions. Key findings of the research highlighted the need to treat 'refugees' as a non-homogenous category whose differential access to economic and social capital mediates their settlement processes and encounters with the state and local communities. They also highlighted the importance of community organisations as a significant source of support in settlement and integration in refugees' precarious existence. Refugees were shown to develop multi-layered senses of belonging: longing for and/or loyalty to their country of origin co-exists with a sense of local belonging which is often pragmatic or ambivalent as a result of racialisation or exclusion. Even when state policies are aimed at inclusion and integration, lack of case sensitivity can make them counterproductive.

3. References to the research

1. Kaptani, E, & Yuval-Davis, N. (2008), 'Participatory theatre as a research methodology', *Sociological Research On Line*, vol. 13, no. 5. doi:10.5153/sro.1789
2. Kaptani, Erene (2007), 'Theatre and Research Exchanges' *Interplay Playback Journal* December, Vol. 12(1), p.12-13: http://tinyurl.com/qxyred_j
3. Yuval-Davis, N., (2009) 'Identity, Citizenship and Contemporary, Secure, Gendered Politics of Belonging', in A. Denis and D. Kalekin-Fishman (eds.), *The ISA Handbook in Contemporary Sociology*, 29. London: Sage. pp. 29-42. doi: 10.4135/9781446214626
4. Yuval-Davis, N., (2010) 'Theorizing identity: beyond the "self" and "other" dichotomy', *Patterns of Prejudice*.pp. 261-80 doi: 10.1080/0031322X.2010.489736.
5. Yuval-Davis, N. and Kaptani, E. (2010), 'Performing Identities: Participatory Theatre among Refugees', in M. Wetherel (ed.), *Theorizing Identities and Social Action*. London: Macmillan. pp. 56-74 doi: 10.1057/9780230246942
6. Yuval-Davis, N. (2011), *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations*. London: Sage. ISBN: 9781412921299

The 2005-2008 "Identity, Performance and Social Action" project was supported by a **£208,000** research grant awarded by the **ESRC (RES-148-25-0006)**. It was assessed by the ESRC in the end of project report as 'good research', indicating that it was of international quality.

4. Details of the impact

The participatory nature of the underpinning research helped to ensure its beneficial impacts on contributing individuals and organisations. The access and trust offered to the project's research team by these organisations - which are usually closed to outsiders - are indicative of the significance of the project specifically, and of the CMRB more generally, to them. **Increased community participation and cohesion via co-research:** At the end of the research in 2008, special meetings were organised with each of the participating research communities to share the results and disseminate a video produced during the research sessions for them to use for their own purposes. The participants received special certificates, some awarded by MP Diana Abbott as part of a Hackney Migrants' Day. Several hundred participants, including community theatre specialists, policy makers, community activists and academics also engaged with the project's final conference on '*Theoretical, Methodological and Political Implications of Doing Research Among Refugees*' (2-8 March 2008). In addition to theoretical and academic papers, the conference included presentations by some of the research participants, as well as Forum workshops aimed especially at the activists and policy-makers in attendance. About 20-30 people attended each workshop, which included enacted scenes relating to refugees' encounters with local authorities, schools and social security.

Both during that conference and informally and in gathered testimonies, the co-ordinators of the participating refugee groups expressed their appreciation for the mutual respect and reciprocal relationships established between the research team and their own members [a]. They also acknowledged the transformative impacts of the IPSA project on participants from within their groups, and on their own capacity to effectively administer the services they provide. The impacts were often a result of breaking taboos around discussion of issues such as sexuality and family

relations via their transformation from individual issues to shared and collective ones. As the coordinator of the Kosovan youth group explained: “[As a result of the IPSA project] we realize more about youth identity and the need to co-create long term processes of engagement and participation using applied arts.” The encouragement of and support for participants’ reflection on issues within their own community, as well as the wider society and the state, also affected their professional lives. As a worker from the advice trainees’ group explained: “I’ve been working as a group leader for ten years...after my engagement in the participatory theatre I viewed social relations differently’. Her own work changed but she was also “able to articulate that with my colleagues” [a]. Furthermore, the project supported participating community groups in setting up their own, sustainable group projects. The Shpresa group, for example, used the project as a platform to establish an ‘Albanian X-factor’, using a combination of Albanian and British rap and fashion in a participatory project which has now been running for several years.

Provision of new methodological tools improving the provision of services by community organisations across and beyond London: The reach of the research impacts has been extended beyond project participants and local arts organisations to other community and support organisations across and beyond London via their use of our participatory theatre methodology. The CMRB has received requests from numerous community organizations for permission to use (and for its provision of support in implementing) the methodology. It was, for instance, widely recognised as an effective tool for disseminating information about and raising awareness of carers’ issues (Enfield Carers Centre); homelessness among Roma (Roma Support Group); and issues of advocacy for mental health users (Studio Upstairs). At Elders Voice it was used in 2010 to support the development of ‘Belonging in Brent’ an intergenerational project in a multi-ethnic area of London and involving Afro-Caribbean and Irish elderly people and youth [b]. The organisation employed IPSA’s Senior Research Fello (Kaptani) to work with them in using the methodology to support “older and younger adults to come together to share their stories and insights in a non-threatening collaborative and enjoyable way”. Within the Migrant Rights Network, the approach was used in community work with other migrants groups including Enfield carers centre, Arachne Greek Cypriot centre and Cecil Housing Trust [b]. The reach of the impacts of the research methodology has been enhanced by reference to it in various published resources supporting community development, policy, social work and education [c].

Development of new artistic and cultural resources engaging public audiences with issues relating to the research: In 2008 the Kaptani worked with research participants and research team actors to write, produce and stage a Verbatim Theatre play titled ‘Suspended Lives’, based on scenes and interview extracts collated in the original research project. Recognising the importance and relevance of the play, a local London theatre venue, Tara Studios, invited the team to perform there as part of their ‘Displacement Week’ programme (2-4 October 2008) and brought in new audiences of community centres, refugees and young people [d]. Each performance was followed by Forum workshops and attracted full house audiences. The play was subsequently commissioned by Harrow Migrant and Refugee Forum for inclusion in its Refugee week (27 June, 2009), and by Rich Mix for delivery as part of its Identity and Migration season (2-4 July 2009). Over the course of a total run of 7 performances, the play engaged more than 500 members of the general public with the important socio-political issues that it raised. Although these audiences were not canvassed at the time, feedback on the performances suggests their particular impact on audience awareness of and engagement with issues relating both to migration and to individuals’ experiences of that process. According to the theatre programmer who invited ‘Suspended Lives’ to present the play at Tara Studios, “the interactive workshops with the audience and the public debate following the play were important for using theatre as a medium for citizenship” [e]. One cast member (a participant from the Kurdish group) reported that audience members spoke of how the play made them realise that there were issues about the refugee community that they had never thought about before [e]. As such, ‘Suspended Lives’ played an important role in disseminating the research findings and providing audiences with deeper insights to the lived experiences and multi-layered identities of refugees living in London.

The participatory approach developed through the project has also supported the work of art organizations such as Studio Upstairs, Tara Arts, Rich Mix, the Geoffrey Museum, and the

Museum of Manchester. Here, it was used to support an exploration of issues of community inclusion by providing a way “to broker and facilitate an open and honest conversation between the institutions and community participants in a way in which the community members would not be at a disadvantage” [f].

Contributions to policy discussion and debate: As well as a general public audience, policy makers constituted an important target for dissemination work relating to the project. In January 2007 the UEL Identity and Social Action research programme (headed by Prof. Maggie Wetherell) made a submission to the Integration and Social Cohesion Commission based on the contributions of all the research projects in the programme. That submission informed the Commission’s final report, released in June 2007 [g], but since used to develop myriad strategies and policies relating to community cohesion and partnership. In addition, members of the research team presented their findings at three conferences organised by the programme specifically for policy makers working in the field of migration, social cohesion and belonging. The integrative, participatory methods and specific insights developed through the research have also been used internationally: recent examples include its use by AKMA, a Greek organisation working with newly arrived Afghani refugees to Lesbos. In 2009, Prof. Yuval-Davis was appointed as a consultant to a local authority in Sweden leading the ‘Youth in Action – Democracy Project’, an EU-funded project. Drawing on her experience in developing the dialogical approach to participation and integration used in IPSA, Yuval Davis advised on transversal dialogue and integration politics. The project was subsequently declared the 2013 best European practice example by Sweden’s National Youth Agency [h].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

a. Testimonials from project participants on the longer-term impact of the research project are available at <http://tinyurl.com/nuxo4ro>

b. Testimonials highlighting the importance of using the methodology to raise awareness among communities and service providers are available at <http://tinyurl.com/nuxo4ro>

c. Examples of resources which refer to the research and/or its theoretical approach to community development, policy, social work and education include:

- Gregson, N., Watkins, H., Broughton, L. & Mackenzie, J. (2012), Building Bridges Through Performance and Decision- making: Schools, Research and Public Engagement, Antipode, Wiley Online Library reading tools Vol 44 (2) pp. 343–364 DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8330.2010.00839.x
- Horghagen, S. & Josephsson, S. (2010), Theatre as liberation, collaboration and relationship for asylum seekers, Journal of Occupational Science, Taylor & Francis Vol.17 (3) pp 168-176 DOI: 10.1080/14427591.2010.9686691
- Smith, L., DeMeo, B. & Widmann, S. (2011), Identity, Migration, and the Arts: Three Case Studies of Translocal Communities, The Journal of Arts Management, Taylor & Francis Vol. 41 (3) pp. 186-197 DOI:10.1080/10632921.2011.598418

d. Details of the ‘Suspended Lives’ play is available from the Tara Studios website - <http://tara-arts.com/whats-on/suspended-lives-2009>

e. Testimonials highlighting the play’s particular impact on audience awareness of and engagement with issues relating to migration and individual experiences are available at <http://tinyurl.com/nuxo4ro>

f. A statement from the former Deputy Director of Manchester Museum about the use of the research methodology to support a major action based evaluation on museums and community inclusion is available at <http://tinyurl.com/on28w92>. Final report available at <http://tinyurl.com/nbh9p87>

g. Integration and Social Cohesion Commission report available at <http://bit.ly/oSiw2J>. The UEL submission is cited at end note 20.

h. A statement provided by the Equality Coordinator of Lund local authority in Sweden about the use of the research to support the ‘Youth in Action – Democracy Project is available at <http://tinyurl.com/nphhgdI>