

## **Migrants Performing Citizenship: Participatory Theatre and Walking Methods for Research**

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This chapter introduces a participatory arts-based research project with migrant families, reflecting on how we might think of this research as an act of citizenship. It argues that by working together with migrant mothers and young girls, as well as organisations that focus on the rights of migrant and Black and Minority Ethnic people, we can co-produce knowledge that challenges social exclusion and racist and sexist subjugation of migrant girls and mothers. This project has the potential to not only generate new knowledge and insights, but it also illustrates that participatory arts-based research can be considered an act of citizenship. This is because it contests existing forms of citizenship that inscribe privileges, and brings into being new modes of rights and rights-claiming subjects.

There is currently increased interest in creative and participatory approaches to research. This is in part due to the decolonial challenge to extractive and procedural research practices, which treat research participants' knowledge as 'raw material' for academics to 'interpret' and add value (Tilley 2017). While such decolonial critiques have been formulated with a view to challenging the ways in which indigenous communities have been targeted by the intertwining of colonial and research projects (Smith 2012), they also more broadly challenge the ways in which academic knowledge production is tied up with colonial conceptions and interests (e.g. Bhabra 2014; Mignolo 1999). Another reason for the increasing engagement with creative and participatory research approaches comes as a result of the recognition of the sensual and affective aspects of knowledge (Ahmed 2013). Furthermore, there is a need to

explore how social research methods can address embodied knowledge (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008; Vacchelli 2018). As creative methods are particularly apt at ‘resisting binary or categorical thinking’ (Kara 2015:14), these methods are also helpful for questioning and challenging the strict delineation of categories of ‘researchers’ and ‘research participants’ and the categorization of ‘migrants’ versus ‘citizens’, a key concern of our research project (Jeffery et al 2019).

This chapter, then, contributes to debates on creative methods, including arts based methods and those used within a socially transformative framework (Kara 2015). Specifically, we explore the potential of participatory theatre and walking methods as acts of performative citizenship, bringing together different groups of research participants, arts practitioners, researchers and policy and practice.

First, we describe the Participatory Arts and Social Action Research project on which we draw (PASAR). Second, we move on to discuss how we theorise performative citizenship to better understand the lives of migrant families. Third, we show how the arts based methods of participatory theatre and walking used in this project can be fruitfully combined with theories of performative citizenship. Fourth, the chapter illustrates how our intergenerational and policy oriented work with migrant families has enabled new conceptions of how migrant families can enact citizenship. The chapter concludes by summarizing the benefits of arts based participatory methods for researching and enacting citizenship.

### **The Participatory Arts and Social Action Research Project**

The Participatory Arts and Social Action Research project (PASAR <http://fass.open.ac.uk/research/projects/pasar>) aimed to gain a better understanding of how Participatory Action Research approaches engage marginalised groups in research

as co-producers of knowledge. Funded by the National Centre for Research Methods/Economic and Social Research Council, PASAR combined walking methods and participatory theatre to create a space for exploring, sharing and documenting processes of belonging and place-making that are crucial to understanding and enacting citizenship. Participatory Action Research, based on the principles of inclusion, valuing all voices and action-oriented interventions (O'Neill and Webster 2005; O'Neill et al 2019), can contribute to the enactment of citizenship in two ways. Firstly, by co-producing knowledge together with research participants, research can engage participants as citizens. Secondly, when researchers and participants work together to challenge the marginalization of research participants and make rights claims, research can become a citizenship practice.

The project created a model for bringing together practitioners and marginalized groups to engage with each other through creative and innovative methods for researching migrant families' citizenship, specifically, arts based participatory methods of walking stories and theatre. The project developed methods and methodological knowledge of participatory theatre and walking methods. To do this, we included three strands in the project. Firstly, we employed participatory methods with migrant parents and young people, exploring issues of intergenerational communication (strand 1). Secondly, we employed participatory methods with families affected by the No Recourse to Public Funds Policy (NRPF) to facilitate conversation of participants with policy-practice (strand 2). Building on this, the final strand (strand 3) developed training tools for social science research (cf. O'Neill et al. 2018).

In strand 1, we undertook three months of parallel weekly arts based workshops with a group of mothers and a group of girls. We then brought both groups together, so that they could show each other the scenes they developed, enabling a reflexive

dialogue across generations through performance. In strand 2, we explored how theatre and walking methods can be used to research a particular policy issue and engage with policy makers and the people affected by the policy. We invited migrant mothers who are affected by the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policy to explore and reflect on their experiences through theatre and walking methods. Later in the process we organized a workshop in collaboration with Runnymede Trust that brought policy makers and practitioners into dialogue with the research team and mothers with no recourse to public funds. Here the participants presented their experiences through a short theatre performance piece. By showing their experiences, they gained a degree of control over how they presented their experiences. This facilitated a more equal level of discussions with attendees, who were practitioners, such as workers in local authorities and third sector organizations and policy makers, such as a member of the House of Lords. This short performance served to highlight the detrimental effects of the policy, and enabled participants to share their personal experiences in a way that allowed dialogue with practitioners and policy makers on a more equal footing (for more detail on methods see below).

The participatory theatre aspects of the project were led by Erene Kaptani, the research fellow and experienced theatre practitioner and drama therapist, who also trained team members in the early stages of the project. The idea of collaboration was very much at the heart of this project and we discussed our approach, limitations, challenges, opportunities and pitfalls with our partner organizations who also critically engaged with the design and process of the project. We worked closely with Counterpoints Arts, an arts organization promoting work by migrant artists and about migration. Film maker Marcia Chandra also accompanied the project throughout its different phases. We also worked closely with Renaisi, a family support organization

and Praxis, a migrant support and advocacy organization, who were both crucial in recruiting participants and, providing advice to participants where needed. Finally, we collaborated with Runnymede Trust, a race equality policy organization, in particular on our policy workshop involving shared dialogue with practitioners and policy makers about the project (see below for more detail) and a briefing paper (Reynolds et al 2018) for social researchers (for more detail on collaborations see O'Neill et al 2018). All of the resources produced during these collaborations, formed part of the project Toolkit (O'Neill et al 2018). We will now discuss in more detail how theories of performative citizenship can help understand the experiences and practices of belonging and participation of migrant families.

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### **Theorising Migrant Families' Performative Citizenship**

Citizenship is often seen as the relationship between states and individuals, encompassing formal rights and duties. In our work we take a wider, sociological approach to citizenship, which looks at citizenship as including participation and belonging. Citizenship is complex, entailing inclusionary processes of redistribution of resources, but also exclusionary processes of boundary making. Although the criteria of who is regarded as a citizen, a legal resident, or an undocumented migrant are regulated through law, historically, criteria delineating who constitutes a full citizen is not simply given, but subject to struggles (Turner 2008).

Formal citizenship is important, especially for migrants, as their stratified migration statuses determine whether they are entitled to reside in a country, and which social and economic rights they have in that country. However, it is also important to look at how migrants who may be excluded from particular rights nonetheless shape understandings and practices of citizenship. Therefore, following Ruth Lister, we

conceptualize citizenship ‘as a more total relationship, inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and a sense of belonging’ (Lister 2008:50). We also draw on the concept of ‘enacting citizenship’, which focuses on the transformative and creative performativities of citizenship, rather than the status or habitus of existing citizenship practices: ‘acts of citizenship’ are ‘those acts that transform forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being political by bringing into being new actors (...) through creating new sites and scales of struggle.’ (Isin 2008:39). This means that our focus of analysis is on the potential of acts to rupture given definitions of the political community and narratives of citizenship, challenging the exclusionary and hierarchical practices inherent in immigration regimes.

In our research we explored the experiences of migrant women as mothers and young girls from migrant families. Therefore, it was particularly important for us to understand how intersections of gender, age, ‘race’ mothering, ‘and migration status shaped migrants’ citizenship practices. Racialized migrant women are often not recognized as legitimately embodying a citizen subjectivity: their belonging to the nation of residence is seen as tenuous, and their social positioning is that of racialized, gendered Others who are often relegated to a precarious status (Standing 2014), engaging in poorly paid and unskilled employment, which further casts them as ‘incompetent’ citizens (Erel, 2016).

Feminist citizenship scholars have pointed out that women are positioned ambiguously within national and ethnic collectivities: while often seen as symbolizing the nation, they are marginalized from the body politic. Citizenship was historically constructed as the entitlement of men, who were seen as representatives of their families (Yuval-Davis

2011). The paradoxical positioning of women vis-à-vis citizenship hinges on the way in which their mothering role is at once central to their citizenship practice and at the same time serves a justification for marginalizing women from politics. Women's 'political duty (like their exclusion from citizenship) derives from their difference from men, notably their capacity for motherhood.' (Pateman 1992: 19). While women as mothers are central to the making of citizens, this contribution is naturalised, seen as part of the private realm of the family and therefore not recognized as inherently political.

If the contributions of women nationals who are constituted as the racial-majority tend to be overlooked in discussions of citizenship, the positioning of black and racialized migrant women is even more complex. Often seen as cultural outsiders to the nation, black and racialized migrant women are positioned as a potential threat to the social and cultural cohesion of the nation (Lentin 2003; Tyler 2010). They are suspected of transmitting the 'wrong' cultural and linguistic resources to their children, with migrant mothers often blamed for a supposed lack of 'integration' of their children (Reynolds et al 2018) or even their political radicalization (Ryan and Vacchelli 2013; The Times 18 January 2016).

The cultural practices and resources of racialized and migrant communities are often marginalized and excluded from public representation. Therefore, when racialized migrant mothers, as part of their 'kin-work', transmit such cultural resources to their children, this does not only serve to connect them with kin and family members, it is also an aspect of equipping them with the cultural identities to resist everyday racism (Reynolds et al 2018). This transmission of culture to between generations, which Hill Collins (2009) terms 'culture work', is essential for resisting and challenging racism. It is an important part of racialized migrant women's mothering work and a

critical aspect of challenging racism, it is therefore inherently political and should be counted as an aspect of citizenship (Reynolds, 2005, Kershaw 2010). While mainstream public and political debates often cast migrant families as either outsiders to citizenship or not fully competent citizens, a performative notion of citizenship can help us to change perspective (Erel et al 2017). In our research we have not asked how migrant families need to integrate in order to fit into existing notions of citizenship. Rather, we have posited that by bringing up children, contributing economically, socially, culturally and politically to the places in which they live, migrant families are already changing what community, belonging and participation means. Therefore, what we need to ask is how we can learn from their practices to gain a new understanding of what citizenship should mean in theory, politically and in practice in a multi-ethnic context.

This resonates with Isin's (2017:51) proposal that a performative notion of citizenship allows us to focus on how 'people creatively perform citizenship rather than following a script'. It is in this sense that, through their acts, people construct citizenship and attach meaning to rights. Furthermore, a focus on performativity also allows us to recognize that it is not only citizens 'in the conventional sense of members of a nation- state', but also those who are legally or socially constituted as full or partial outsiders who can constitute citizenship through making rights claims. It is the claiming of rights that people perform citizenship, whether these rights are already constituted or whether it is in the act of claiming them that they are brought into being (cf. Erel et al 2018).

Before discussing the performative methods employed to explore migrant families' citizenship, we want to highlight the ways in which migrant families' citizenship practices can be seen as performative. When, despite racist and exclusionary



immigration regimes, migrant families live, work, and engage in community building, they claim the right to participate, reside and belong. By claiming such a right to belong and participate for themselves and their children, migrant families bring into being new understandings of who can and who cannot be part of their locality, city and nation. Furthermore, by bringing up a multi-ethnic new generation of citizens, migrant families change our understanding of who can legitimately form the social and cultural community on which the polity is based. With this participatory arts based research project, we set out to learn more about how migrant families practice, imagine, reflect on and theorize their citizenship.

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### **The methods: participatory theatre and walking as engagements in performative citizenship**

In this section we describe the research design and methods, in particular highlighting how participatory arts and action research methods can challenge existing knowledge on migrant families. We argue that participatory arts-based methods helped us to foreground participants' own knowledges, which are often in conflict with and challenge official discourses on migrant families as problematic and potentially threatening social and cultural cohesion. By articulating their own experiences in their own terms, positing which issues they would like to focus on in the theatre scenes and walks, participants shaped not only the research, but also began to share their experiences with each other, reflecting on their social positioning collectively and developing collective 'subjugated knowledges' (Foucault 1980). In this section we will focus on how this enabled dialogues across generations (strand 1) and dialogues between researchers, migrant mothers affected by an exclusionary immigration policy, and practitioners (strand 2). These methods, we suggest are important in allowing us to

enact new understandings of citizenship, both through the arts based work, but also through the empirical and theoretical research insights.

The research took place in London in 2016-2018, where we worked with three groups of participants. As stated earlier, in the first research strand we explored how participatory theatre and walking methods can help us to understand the experiences of migrant mothers and girls from migrant families and how these methods can help to generate an intergenerational dialogue. The research team took part in participatory theatre practice, led by the research fellow who was also an experienced theatre maker and drama therapist. We worked with two groups of 16 migrant mothers and 12 young girls from Year 8 (13 year-old secondary school students from two different schools in North London). The groups were recruited through our research partner organisation, Renaisi, which runs activities for migrant families in schools.

A Renaisi worker advertised the research workshops in the school, which the children of the migrant mothers' group were attending. This worker continued attending all of the sessions, participating in the exercises and creative scenes. While much of the research did not require a high level of English skills, where necessary, she helped by interpreting during the workshop sessions. After running 11 weekly sessions, we concluded with an event, where both of the groups (the mothers group and the girls group) showcased their performance-based creations to each other. The majority of the group members in both the mothers' and young girls' groups were from Muslim cultural backgrounds. The central questions explored in the workshops were: 'What does it mean to live in London as a migrant mother?' and 'What does it mean to be a young girl from a migrant family living in London?'

The second strand of research took place over the course of four months, during which time we worked with a group of 20 mothers affected by the No Recourse to

Public Funds Policy (which we explain in detail below). Our partner organization, Praxis, a migrant rights advice and advocacy organization helped us recruit participants. This strand aimed at exploring the effects of the No Recourse to Public Funds policy on the mothers and their families. It simultaneously explored how the idea of ‘legislative theatre’ (Boal 1998) could be used to allow those affected by the policy to voice their experiences and views of the policy to practitioners and policy makers. For that purpose we brought two social workers into the workshop space for a number of sessions, allowing participants to share their experiences, critiques and frustrations with them and reflect together on how this policy pushed families into poverty and destitution. We then produced a short play which was shown at the policy workshop to practitioners and policy makers (including social work professionals, migrant and family support organizations, race equality and children’s rights organizations) and at the Houses of Parliament (facilitated by MP Kate Green the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on migration).

The research workshops were based on a combination of participatory theatre (principally forum theatre) and walking methods (Kaptani and Yuval Davis 2008, Erel et al 2017, 2018, O’Neill and Roberts 2019, Reynolds et al. 2018). Our use of participatory theatre draws on Augusto Boal’s body of work on Theatre of the Oppressed (2000). Forum Theatre is one key tool of the Theatre of the Oppressed, where participants are invited to show a particular situation of oppression or a dilemma they have experienced themselves. Once they have shown this dilemma, other participants are invited to step onto the stage, replace the protagonist, and change the course of action. This can be thought of as a ‘rehearsal’ for social change outside of the theatre stage (Boal 2000, Ganguly 2010). Building on Brecht’s Epic Theatre (1964), which aims for social transformation, rather than to achieve emotional identification of

spectators with the characters, Theatre of the Oppressed goes further by transforming the role of audiences as passive spectators, instead inviting them to take centre stage. Boal (2000: 98) broke down the boundaries between actors and spectators, audience and the 'sacred space of the stage' to allow participants to become 'spect-actors'. This form of theatre developed as part of wider social movements and campaigns, for example, for literacy and land reform in South America. Boal elaborated a body of exercises and techniques to mobilize participants with the explicit aim of social change. This was achieved by training the participants in basic theatre skills. Using the body as a tool for expression, a series of games and exercises helped the participants to become conscious of how they use their bodies in everyday life. The exercises allowed them to build new ways of moving, acting and using the voice to represent characters other than their own.

Participants could use the theatre scene as an arena to rehearse challenging inequalities of power. Participants' interventions were about trying out different solutions and experiencing the steps necessary for social change. While interventions may not be successful in achieving the spect-actors' aims fully, they can nonetheless lead to a changed situation. Firstly, trying out a different course of action can allow the group to make visible and reflect on different factors playing into the oppressive situation. Secondly, it can allow participants to share with each other experiences of their own challenges to such oppressive situations. Thirdly, it allows the group to reflect on the social construction of reality, underlining that social realities are not simply given, but enacted and are also subject to change. Finally, all these processes taken together, can encourage participants to try out interventions in real life, realizing that even if they do not fully achieve their aims, they may be able to change an aspect of their experience or that they may contribute to incremental social change.

With regards to walking methods, walking as a methodology helps us to understand peoples 'routes and mobilities' and that 'social relations are not enacted in situ but paced out along the ground' (Ingold and Lee 2008). As (Clark and Emmel 2010) describe, walking interviews can be useful to understand how interviewees 'create, maintain and dissemble their networks, neighbourhoods, and communities'. Drawing on O'Neill (2012:74) we see walking as an arts based, *ethno-mimetic* method that forms part of a biographical research approach that enables "a deeply engaged relational way of attuning to the life of another that evokes knowing and understanding" for when "walking with another we can engage in an embodied and corporeal way and attune to the narratives and lived experiences of research participants". Taking a walk with someone can open a space for dialogue and communication in reciprocal ways because the "physical embodied process of walking, remembering, sensing – attuning – is constitutive and the relational shared process opens up a discursive space that can also be a reflective space" (O'Neill 2014:76).

These participatory arts-based methods, forum theatre and walking methods, are not only helpful in understanding the everyday lives of participants, they are also generative, so that knowledge is not simply retrieved, but constructed in collaboration between arts practitioners, researchers and participants; it is 'collaboratively made' not found (O'Neill 2008, O'Neill et al 2019; Jeffrey et al. 2019). Arts based approaches reflect 'the multidimensional, complex, dynamic, inter-subjective and contextual nature of human experience' (Cole and Knowles 2011 cited in Jeffrey et al. 2019:7; cf. Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008), and as such are particularly useful in challenging stereotypical racist representations of migrants. Through its collaborative ethos, arts based participatory research is also well placed to destabilize the boundaries between researcher and participant as authors of knowledge, and therefore, can provide space

for migrants to tell stories of their own choosing and gain more authority in the framing and representing their experiences, views and knowledges (Jeffrey et al 2019). Our participatory arts based approach, thus aimed at creating what Fals Borda (1999) terms ‘symmetrical reciprocity’ in participatory action research, where participants are viewed as subjects contributing to knowledge production alongside, ‘with’ researchers (for together we are greater than the sum of our parts). The participatory arts based methods created a visceral and emotional process that captured anger, fear, pain and hope. These feelings were part of the migrant mothers’ and girls’ everyday interactions with other members of society, and within their communities and families.

We combined participatory theatre and walking methods based on Erene Kaptani’s (2008; 2016; 2017) and Maggie O’Neill’s (2012; 2017) participatory arts for social research practice. The group work with the adults started with two sessions of Playback Theatre (Fox, 1979), where personal experiences are shared and played back by professional actors and a live musician<sup>1</sup>. The workshops then proceeded with theatre and group exercises leading to Forum Theatre, as described above. In our analysis we observed that participatory arts-based methods were important for exploring the potential of racialized migrant mothers to enact citizenship. As researchers we worked together with participants to understand social oppression, making it visible from the perspective of the participants and exploring how it can be challenged.

In our project, and drawing on these techniques we asked participants to share stories of when they experienced a problem, conflict or dilemma relating to being a migrant mother or a girl from a migrant family. It is important to recognize that participatory theatre methods do not offer any simple solutions, but are valuable in highlighting conflicts and the obstacles to effectively claim rights when recognition as an equal is withheld. Some of the strategies the participants rehearsed can be applied in

real life everyday encounters. Others are perhaps more suited to the fictional space of the theatre. Yet, by enabling participants to explore their experiences and different strategies for dealing with conflict situations, the research methodology created a space for making visible and reflecting on specific situations, as well as the structural inequalities and power relations that underpinned them. It also gave participants an opportunity to try out different strategies of challenging oppressive situations, making visible the ways in which social realities are constructed and can also be changed. In this way the group built up a collective repository of strategies for challenging exclusion, the denial of access and respect.

The participatory theatre methods are valuable tools in raising questions, and initiating collective reflections. We underline that in participatory theatre, it is important to address structural power relations because the technique of forum theatre can otherwise become too individualized, focused on individuals' ability to deal better with oppressive situations rather than challenging the oppressive systems and structures themselves, as has been highlighted by theatre and social justice activists. As contemporary forms of oppression are complex, the workshop facilitators need to take care not to simplify social relations in suggesting that a conflict involves only the protagonist and antagonist (cf. Pratt et al 2007). It is problematic to reduce a system of oppression to the character of the 'antagonist' (oppressor). Furthermore, the forum theatre technique, if not facilitated carefully, may risk putting the onus for improving a problematic situation on the 'protagonist' (oppressed) (cf. Hamel 2013). Thus, it is crucial to embed forum theatre in a critical and emancipatory discourse of social transformation that highlights a range of different power relations on many levels, from structural, institutional, group and personal. Otherwise, the forum theatre technique can run the risk of reproducing neoliberal 'victim blaming' rhetoric on social inequalities.

Another risk is that strategies for intervention can emphasise the protagonist's need to conform to social norms, rather than challenging the oppressiveness of these social norms. Thus, while Theatre of the Oppressed holds the potential to empower participants to try out alternative modes of action and behaviour, it is important to embed personal development within a broader process of analyzing, highlighting and challenging social inequalities.

During the workshop process, we combined the aforementioned participatory theatre methods with arts based walking methods, drawing on Maggie O'Neill's research practice (O'Neill and Roberts 2019). As highlighted above, combining walking and participatory theatre is particularly fruitful, as both methods are embodied, performative, relational and reflective. They are also sensory and allow for multiple modalities of experience to be shared. (cf. O'Neill & Hubbard 2010). Both participatory theatre and walking methods constitute what Back and Puwar (2012:6) term live methods, 'creative, public and novel modes of doing imaginative and critical sociological research'. O'Neill's use of walking as method and our use of it is inspired by artists who use walking as part of their practice, such as Misha Myers, Clare Qualmann and Dee Hedden. This was then combined with Kaptani's approach to mapping (cf. O'Neill 2018 for detail). As part of the workshop process, we invited migrant mothers and girls to map their everyday routes and we walked with them, following their maps either in pairs (mothers with no recourse to public funds) or collectively (migrant mothers and migrant girls). We also explored the spaces and landmarks on their maps and associated positive and negative emotions attached to these spaces and landmarks using theatre based methods. The mothers and girls created images individually, in pairs and collectively, taking the stories from their everyday experiences, routes and mobilities into the theatre space. By taking the mothers and



girls' walks into the theatre space, we conceptualise the combination of walking and theatre methods as a mixed methods process. On the one hand, the theatre methods bring the social world into the theatre workshop space to rehearse enactments of citizenship. On the other hand, by undertaking walks with researchers, the participants bring their own sociological imagination into the neighbourhoods and localities in which they conduct their everyday lives. The importance of bringing together movement and mapping in the participatory theatre workshops was to foreground and interlink place, space and personal narratives in exploring citizenship. A theatrical scene can only exist in a specific physical place of a street, office, home or school. At the same time different spatial practices are becoming visible when the personal narrative is performed. Furthermore, by imagining an everyday route, making the movements and taking our workshop partner along in our everyday route we start to make meaning of our actions which are also validated and developed by the partner's witnessing. Images where bodies are included, placed, 'sculpted' and moved in the workshop's space can transfer the everyday experiences of places and interactions to the workshop space, in a way, that the one dimensional mapping of routes drawn on a paper would not achieve. In addition, movements of the everyday brought into the workshop space can generate feelings, unspoken thoughts and a physical intelligence, that usually is not included, although always present in social interactions, including in the acts of citizenship (Thrift 2003; Grant 2017; Yarrow 2012).

Participatory theatre and walking in combination as a research method can be mobilized for enactments of citizenship to reflect on shared experiences, building community and belonging. They can also lead to the articulation of collective subjugated knowledges to challenge pathologizing or oppressive representations of migrant families. Furthermore, as we will show in the following section, research using

such methods within a socially transformative framework can become a way of constituting migrant families as rights claiming subjects.

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### **Performing Intergenerational Citizenship**

After having worked for three months with a group of migrant mothers and a group of girls from migrant families in parallel, exploring their experiences of everyday life in London, we brought both groups together. The aim of this was to allow them to share their experiences with each other through arts-based methods. Each group was told that we were working towards a number of short scenes that each group would show to the other. Both the mothers' and girls' groups were initially excited but also slightly apprehensive about what it might be like to share their work. Some of the mothers were worried that the young girls may not understand their English spoken with an accent, or even look down on them for their limited language skills. In turn, some of the girls were concerned that the mothers may conform to their ideas of a 'strict mother' and may be judgemental of their views and experiences. Each group was also worried that their acting skills may be under scrutiny.

The apprehensions each group had towards the other are not just idiosyncratic, but based on wider social discourses on migrant families, surmising an intergenerational conflict, where migrant mothers in particular are seen to be committed to the culture and language of their country of origin, while young people, in particular girls, are seen as more keen to adapt the cultural practices they find among their peers in the UK. This is often cast in public debates as a 'culture clash', a conflict over integration versus cultural distinctiveness (The Times 2016, Henry 2007; Hinsliff 2002). Instead, we found that both groups brought up similar topics they saw as important to the workshops: they were concerned with issues of safety in their neighbourhoods, enjoyed

going shopping or to the park with their families and friends, and were struggling to juggle and negotiate time dedicated to family, leisure, work and schoolwork. They also were concerned about how to maintain relations with family members abroad, and with access to health services.

While these were shared concerns, the mothers and girls also, of course, had their distinct perspectives on these issues, coloured by their age and life course. For example, while many of the girls found it difficult to negotiate with their parents for time to socialise with their friends, mothers were often concerned about the time their children spent on social media rather than on school work. In subsequent interviews, it emerged that for both the mothers and girls, one of the important insights from the intergenerational day was to be able to see the issues they faced in their everyday lives from the perspective of the other. An example for this is one of the scenes the mothers' group chose to share on the day. They called it the 'Embarrassment Scene' (<http://fass.open.ac.uk/research/projects/pasar/videos/intergenerational-day>).

The scene is based on the experience of Nabila, one of the mothers. Nabila recounted that she is very tolerant of her own children because as a young girl growing up in London she herself had been 'wild', going to parties and concerts with her friends, coming home late and wearing fashionable – rather than traditional – clothes. Her own mother, though she had no personal experience of this life style, spoke with Nabila and trusted her. Although Nabila's mother worried, she allowed Nabila to go out late with her friends. In contrast, Nabila's older brother felt embarrassed by her appearance and behaviour, trying to talk her out of her friendship with this peer group. Nabila shared in her story that she felt that it was her mother's trust in her that allowed her to reassess her life and later on focus more on her education and decide to get married. This development, she felt, was an important factor in reconciling her with her brother. Her

brother, on the other hand, now gives his daughters more freedom as he has seen that Nabila – who enjoyed this freedom as a young girl – has become a ‘good person’. This scene was first played out in the mother’s group and then we rehearsed it to show it to the girls during the ‘intergenerational day’.

Nabila’s story addresses the question of what it means to be a migrant mother in London by looking at how her experience of being mothered affected her own mothering practices. In this sense, she is constructing a connection between three generations: her mother’s, her own and her children’s. This relational aspect of Nabila’s identity as mother (and daughter) is important as it addresses public debates on migrant families. These debates often cast mothers and daughters as antagonistically caught up in an intergenerational conflict. For migrant families these conflicts are thought to be exacerbated by different uses of ethnically specific cultural resources, and these intergenerational conflicts are often thought to be ethnicised in that the mother’s generation is seen as potentially preventing the daughters’ generation from integrating by overly emphasising the language and cultural practices of the home country. Nabila’s story contradicts such a simplistic view of migrant families by pointing out that people may inhabit both the roles of mother and daughter, and showing how mothers and daughters, even where they disagree, can find successful ways of negotiating these differences. The role of the brother who criticised Nabila for not wearing traditional clothes shows another model of negotiation of differences, closer to the antagonistic one. However, Nabila’s mother’s intervention into this conflict also shows that even such antagonistic relationships are nuanced. Furthermore, in Nabila’s story we are made aware of the fact that such relationships change over time.

When we showed this scene to the girls’ group on the intergenerational day, there was a sense of recognition among the girls. The girls could particularly relate to

the theme of different, potentially conflicting views among daughters and mothers on going out late, a topic they felt defined the experience of being a girl from a migrant family. They thought that their parents, feeling unfamiliar with the culture and surroundings in London, were particularly protective of their children. The girls, while not always agreeing with their parents, emphasised that they appreciated their parents' concerns. When watching the scene they giggled in recognition and made appreciative sounds when Nabila's mother gave permission for her to go out, while gasping at the brother's reaction. In the discussion they expressed their appreciation of the close and supportive mother-daughter relationship.

This example from our intergenerational work speaks to the importance of cultural citizenship as a means to represent one's own cultural identity, rather than being the object of mainstream, often stereotypical, public representations (Pakulski 1997). By creating a public (albeit a small one) where different representations of what it means to be a migrant mother and a girl from a migrant family could be heard, and new understandings of these subject positions could be developed dialogically, the project enacted a form of cultural citizenship. It is important to keep in mind that to fully understand the different aspects of citizenship we need to go beyond the relationship of individuals with the state, to explore rights claiming within the context of a range of social relations, on a number of different scales. For these women and girls, this centrally included the family, both co-resident and transnational, the locality and relationship with their schools.

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### **Migrant Families with No Recourse to Public Funds Enacting Citizenship**

The second research strand of the project explored how we can use participatory arts-based methods to enable a group of racialized migrant mothers to engage in dialogue

with practitioners and policy makers about a policy which deeply affects their everyday lives. The No Recourse to Public Funding (NRPF) policy means that migrants subject to immigration control are not allowed to access many benefits, tax credits or housing assistance. While this policy has been effective for decades, since the introduction of hostile environment policies in 2012, it has been widened to cover all migrants deemed 'subject to immigration control'. It now applies to a wider range of different statuses, such as those on spousal or student visas, migrants with leave granted under family or private life rules, and dependents of a person with settled status, as well as those without legal residence status (<http://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/information/Pages/who-has-NRPF.aspx> ).

Migrant families often become aware that they are subject to the NRPF policy when they encounter a crisis situation, such as family breakdown, unemployment, health issues or housing problems. At that point, they approach social services for support only to learn that, due to this policy, they are not able to access support such as social housing or social security. As a consequence, they often find themselves pushed to the margins of society as a result of poverty and racism. Many of these migrant families include young children, who are among the most vulnerable people affected by this policy. While the policy foresees some exceptional support to families with children – those without children are excluded from any public support – local authorities and social services providers often make it extremely difficult for these migrant families to substantively claim these rights (Flyn et al 2018, NELMA).

These precarious circumstances can make it very difficult for migrants to participate in reflection and critique of this policy, because all of their energies are focused on day-to-day survival. In our research project, we used the arts-based participatory methods to work with a group of migrant mothers affected by NRPF to

enable their collective voice to be heard. These methods were important as they allowed the women to share their experiences with each other and the research team, to develop collective knowledge, overcome stigma, and articulate a critique of the policy's detrimental effects. Together we developed short theatre scenes shared at a workshop with policy makers and practitioners. The theatre methods allowed the women to be actors, directors and story tellers, who could imagine and try out social interventions, rather than simply showcasing their vulnerabilities as a result of this dehumanising policy.

We developed a short theatre scene, which gave rise to discussion with workshop participants from public and voluntary sector organizations and activists, which is documented in a short video (Performance by the Mothers with No Recourse to Public Funds Group, <http://fass.open.ac.uk/research/projects/pasar/videos/policy-day>). The theatre scene is based on Elaine's experience, but was further elaborated to articulate the collective experiences of participants. Elaine had been working for many years for a large supermarket. As the Home Office required her to sign into the Immigration Reporting Centre, she needed to take time off every two weeks to do so. Her manager used his knowledge of her vulnerability to bully her and change her onto an unfavourable shift work pattern: from midnight to four o'clock in the morning, even though she had just had a baby. When she approached her union representative, they were not supportive, but instead, told her she should be glad to have a job at all as an immigrant! Her fellow workers also stigmatised her as a supposedly 'illegal immigrant' and she eventually lost her job. As her husband was unable to work for health reasons, she was not able to pay rent and subsequently the family, including her six-year-old son, had to live in houses of friends and acquaintances, surviving on their monetary support for four years. Elaine's experience shows how racism, anti-immigration

policies and austerity exacerbate the effects of racialized migration policies to render it increasingly difficult for migrant families to bring up their children in dignity (Erel 2018).

Theresa, another of the mothers who shared her experiences of this policy, has lived and worked in the UK for 20 years and, like all the women in our project who were either born in the Caribbean or West African nations, she expressed strong links with the UK because of colonial ties. Theresa's landlord increased her rent to a level she could not afford to pay on her low income as a care worker on a zero-hours contracts. When she was consequently evicted, she approached the council for accommodation only to learn she was subject to NRPF. The council therefore refused to help her, instead sending her on a circuitous route to a range of other organizations. When finally she approached our partner organization, Praxis, she was able to successfully claim her right to temporary accommodation because, despite its claims to the contrary, the local authority has a duty under section 17 of the Children's Act to prevent children from becoming destitute. However, this did not address Theresa's needs, as the accommodation was unsuitable. Along with her three children she was housed in a one bedroom flat, where she had to sleep in the kitchen due to lack of space. Furthermore, this accommodation was located in a different London borough from where Theresa had previously lived. As we learned, it is an increasingly common practice for local authorities to house families affected by NRPF out of borough (Flynn et al 2018). For Theresa, this meant she had to travel for over an hour to her youngest son's school.

Despite the increasing number of families affected by the NRPF policy, there is little awareness of it. Thus, when we organized the policy day in February 2017, we encountered interest from a wide range of organizations. One of the pernicious effects



of this policy, we found, was that it increased the social isolation of families affected by it. Being subject to NRPF was seen as stigmatizing the family as being potentially ‘illegal’ migrants, and also opened those affected by it to economic and sexual exploitation, as many participants had found it difficult to talk about their status. Within a broader discursive climate, where migrants are seen as outsiders to the nation, it was furthermore made difficult to claim ‘the right to claim rights’ (Isin 2017:506). By using arts based participatory methods, the PASAR project was able to bring these migrant mothers into dialogue with practitioners, activists and policy makers. This happened using a range of formats, including keynote talks by Baroness Ruth Lister, a member of the House of Lords, and Colin Yeo, an immigration barrister; talks by the research team; the performance and discussion of the short theatre scene; breakout small group discussions between research participants and workshop attendees; and a closing roundtable.

The range of different interactions fostered by these different formats encouraged and permitted a range of ways for research participants to engage. Beyond simply showcasing their difficult situations, they were also part of discussions and exchanges. As a consequence of this event we were invited by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Migration to show a short play we developed together about their experience of NRPF at the House of Commons, and further took this short play to a range of events to highlight this problematic policy, including to migrant community organizations, statutory organizations, activist events and arts venues. We also developed a longer play performed at a theatre (<https://richmix.org.uk/events/me-i-just-put-british/>) and produced, with Counterpoints Arts and film maker Marcia Chandra, a short film ‘Black Women Act!’

(<http://fass.open.ac.uk/research/projects/pasar/videos>) which we were able to present at a range of community, arts and activist events and conferences.

While each of these occasions presented opportunities for different forms of engagement with different types of audiences and spect-actors, what became clear throughout these different engagements is that the research participants became increasingly articulate not only on the detrimental effects of the NRPF policy, but also about their right to claim rights. Isin (2017:506) distinguishes between two different aspects of performative citizenship. In the context of this project, they translate, first, to the struggle to challenge and end the No Recourse to Public Funds policy (making rights claims), and second, to ‘what that struggle performatively brings into being (the right to claim rights)’ (Isin 2017:506).. By claiming the right to claim rights, participants struggle against the injustice of this policy, which excludes them from taking part in the welfare state to which they themselves have contributed, as individual migrants, but also, they argue, through their colonial history. These racialized migrant mothers thus envisage rights ‘yet to come’ (ibid.).

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## **Conclusion**

The PASAR project explored the uses of participatory arts-based methods for creating understandings and representations of migrant families that can make visible their experiences and subjugated knowledges. We worked together as researchers, arts practitioners, participants and with our partner organizations to explore and challenge the marginalized positioning of migrant families in current debates on migration, characterised by a hostile climate to migrants.

We found that within a socially transformative framework, participatory arts-based methods can become enactments of citizenship. We saw how this arts-based

research ‘gathered’ (Jeffery et al 2019) women and young girls who had not previously reflected on their experiences and social positioning as a group. As such, it contributed to building a community in which their individual experiences were validated and they could articulate their collective, subjugated knowledges. This, in turn, was a precondition for claiming their right to represent their own stories and experiences, and in the process, make visible power relations and oppressions. By reflecting on these power relations and experiences of oppression through embodied, concrete situations, the participants and researchers were able to rehearse different strategies for intervening and challenging these power relations.

While we recognize that such challenges are not always successful and have their limits, we would underline that these are in fact processes where both participants and researchers work together to claim the right to claim rights, reflecting on and constructing new understandings of what can become a subject of political intervention, and who can become a political subject. These are the issues at the heart of struggles over citizenship. Furthermore, and in particular in relation to our work on the No Recourse to Public Funds Policy, we were able to mobilize these methods to engage a number of publics, including activists, practitioners and policy makers, as well as communities of other migrant families. By claiming centre stage to initiate and enter such debates about a policy designed to marginalize and silence migrant families, participants further enacted citizenship, claiming the right to equal participation.

Current immigration policy, including the No Recourse to Public Funds Policy, has cast racialized migrant families as outsiders to the nation who do not deserve the solidarity and care of welfare services to which citizens have access. Racialized migrant families are pushed into abject destitution and poverty by these racist policies, rendering it very difficult for them to participate in public deliberation, as they are

struggling to secure the survival of their families on a daily basis. Against this background, the theatre stage and interactions with audiences, spect-actors and interlocutors, became a stage for these families to perform themselves as equal citizens, a challenge to the roles into which current immigration policy had cast migrant families. In this sense, claiming space centre stage is also a way of envisaging a different, more just notion of citizenship.

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<sup>1</sup> We started the work with the girls' group with participatory theatre exercises, rather than Playback Theatre, as previous experience showed that it is difficult for young people to identify with adult actors performing their stories back to them.