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INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

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Creative engagement with migration

ABSTRACT

This article introduces a special issue on arts-based engagement with migration, comprising articles, reflections, poems and images. The introductory article starts by exploring the ethical, political and empirical reasons for the increased use of arts-based methods in humanities and social sciences research in general, and in migration studies in particular. Next, it evaluates participatory methods, co-production and co-authorship as increasingly well-established practices across academia, the arts, activism and community work. It then considers how the outputs of such processes can be deployed to challenge dominant representations of migration and migrants. The authors reflect critically upon arts-based

KEYWORDS

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representation

1. In this introduction we use the terms 'migration' and 'migrant' broadly, to include diverse forms of movement.

methodological practices and on the (limits to the) transformative potentials of using arts-based methods to engage creatively with migration. Sounding a cautionary note, they concede that even collaborative artistic expressions have limits in overcoming unequal power dynamics, conveying experiences of migration and effecting long-term change in a context in which discourse on migration is dominated by short-term political decision-making, and punitive policies force migrants into precarious forms of existence. While the prospect of influencing the political sphere might seem remote, they advocate for the role and power of the arts in instigating, shaping and leading change by inspiring people's conscience and civic responsibility.

Introduction

Migration has multiple and shifting causes and consequences in places of origin and destination alike.¹ It involves the movement of people in challenging political, social and economic circumstances. It implicates numerous institutions, authorities and agencies within and across borders at local, national, regional and international levels. It is a longstanding and global phenomenon, and yet politicians and policy-makers often continue to advocate for and implement isolationist and short-term approaches to migration. At once material, ethical and representational, contemporary migration demands responses not only from governments, political organizations and advocacy groups, but also from artists, writers and others concerned with the sociopolitical implications of representation. A strong trend in migration studies challenges pathologizing and polarizing stereotypes, deconstructing the popular discourses which categorize migration and migrants according to moral continuums: from (political) forced displacement to (economic) voluntary migration (Jeffery 2017; Palladino 2017), for instance, or from passive victims to dangerous agents (Rotter 2016; Woolley 2014).

Social scientists and arts and humanities scholars alike increasingly engage with artistic practice as a means to illuminate migration, and this introduction addresses the questions of how, why and to what ends. Of the four co-editors of this special issue, two (Jeffery and Rotter) are social anthropologists trained in the social science tradition, and two (Palladino and Woolley) are humanities scholars of postcolonial and transnational literature. The idea for this special issue emerged from our interlinked recent RCUK projects, which shared a commitment to exploring the potential of participatory arts-based methods for creative engagement with migration. A range of project activities – workshops, exhibitions and knowledge exchange forums – facilitated dialogue between social scientists, humanities scholars, creative practitioners, voluntary sector organizations working with migrants and migrants themselves. The varied contributions to this special issue – academic articles, reflections on creative practice and poems – advocate for the potential of combining participatory, collaborative and arts-based creative methods for researching migration. From an ethical/political perspective, such methods can offer a more agentive role for migrants to shape the research process and outcomes; from a methodological perspective, they can improve access to marginal/unrepresented groups; and from an empirical perspective they can enable researchers to generate different kinds of data, such as sensory,

performative and explicitly co-generated forms. Several of the contributions show that participatory arts-based methods can also offer new ways of representing and addressing the diverse challenges of migration: its causes, such as persecution and global inequalities, and its consequences, such as individual and collective trauma; the practical and legal barriers to movement which create dangerous journeys and precarious forms of existence for migrants; the reception and settlement of migrants by host communities and states; and the often complicated relationships between migrants and their countries of origin and of residence.

We start by exploring the ethical, political and empirical reasons for the increased use of arts-based methods in humanities and social sciences research in general and in migration studies in particular. Next, we evaluate participatory methods, co-production and co-authorship as increasingly well-established practices across academia, the arts, activism and community work. We then consider how the outputs of such processes can be deployed to challenge representations of migration and migrants. As Bishop reminds us: '[i]t is to this art – however uncomfortable, exploitative, or confusing it may first appear – that we must turn for an alternative to the well-intentioned homilies that today pass for critical discourse on social collaboration' (2006: 183). We end, however, on a cautionary note, conceding that even collaborative artistic expressions have limits both in overcoming unequal power dynamics and in conveying experiences of migration.

Arts-based methods

Arts-based methods can complement traditional social science methods, opening up new channels of communication and insight (see Cole and Knowles 2011; Kara 2015). To start with, social science methods tend to privilege language, whereas arts-based methods might better equip researchers to capture aesthetic, emotional, sensory and tacit experiences that cannot easily be expressed in words (Gauntlett 2007; Eisner 2008; Bagnoli 2009; Ball and Gilligan 2010). In interview settings, visual arts-based methods can help the interviewer to be more responsive to participants' interpretations and preoccupations (Bagnoli 2009). In focus group settings, visual arts-based methods may have the potential to evoke stronger empathetic responses amongst participants than verbal and/or written communication alone (Bagnoli 2009; Guruge et al. 2015). Moreover, and of particular relevance for research on migration, visual arts-based methods can help overcome linguistic barriers between researchers and participants and/or amongst groups of participants (Guruge et al. 2015; O'Neill et al. 2018), thus both enhancing the quality and rigour of the research, and helping to foster social connections and inclusion. From the perspective of migrants, participation in the arts offers 'the opportunity to review, revise, and reconstitute the often scattered shards of memory, culture and identity that [they] carry with them. The artistic act may then become one of discovery' (Ahmed 2011: 11). Arts-based projects can also provide avenues for migrants to meet and/or develop deep bonds with others, make themselves 'present' in urban landscapes, and challenge the instrumental terms that categorize and manage asylum seekers as 'humanitarian burdens' or 'needy victims' who use up scarce 'resources' (McAllister 2011: 9, 12; see also Timmermans 2011; Stewart 2011).

2. Recent such collaborations include: *Arts for Advocacy*, *Material Stories of Migration*, *Open Book*, *Refugee Hosts*, *Refugee Tales and Researching Multilingually at Borders*.

Arts-based methods through which researchers have engaged with migrants in intercultural and multilingual settings include: drawing, painting and collage (Bagnoli 2009; Evers 2011; Guruge et al. 2015; Sabeti this volume; Stavropoulou this volume); photography and filmmaking (Bachelet and Jeffery this volume; Stavropoulou this volume); performance arts (Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008; O'Neill et al. 2018; Bachelet and Jeffery this volume; Saradha this volume); and walking (O'Neill and Hubbard 2010; O'Neill and Perivolaris 2014; O'Neill et al. 2018; O'Neill et al. this volume). We agree with Cahnmann (2003: 34) that rather than being constructed in opposition to traditional practices, the literary and visual arts should be viewed as offering 'ways to stretch our capacities for creativity and knowing, creating a healthy synthesis of approaches to write in ways that paint a full picture'; in our case, of understandings of and responses to migration.

Due to the power of poetry to move and challenge audiences in affective and intellectual ways, and to reflect on human experience (Prendergast 2009: xxii), poetic inquiry has become popular amongst qualitative social scientists as a means for 'analysing social worlds and generating different ways of knowing about these worlds and their place in it' (Sparkes et al. 2003: 155; see also Glesne 1997; Richardson 2000; Eisner 2001; Manning 2018). Poetic inquiry essentially involves the researcher sifting through texts – research poetry, data poetry, poetic representation, poetic transcription, poetic narrative, ethnopoetry, found poetry, autobiographical poems and so on – and 'intuitively sorting out words, phrases, sentences, passages that synthesize meaning from the prose' (Prendergast 2009: xxiii). Sparkes et al. (2003: 155) suggest that producing and sharing poetic representations can help researchers become attuned to others' experiences, offer a different lens through which to view data and oneself, and make explicit the role of the researcher in constructing the prose and thus in constituting knowledge. As exemplified by Cahnmann's poems about her research on multiracial, low-performing schools in the United States, an approach which incorporates the 'poetic craft' allows researchers to 'communicate with more liveliness and accuracy when representing data' and to disseminate to wider and more diverse audiences (Cahnmann 2003: 34).

The significance of narrative and storytelling, of emotion and feeling, and of the transformative power of visual and textual languages has been valorized in the context of social research. The practice of detailing, contextualizing and engaging narrative as a knowledge base reveals how representations are deeply entangled with experiences of migration and border crossing. As Cole and Knowles put it, 'the use of the arts in research is not for art's sake. It is explicitly tied to moral purposes of social responsibility and epistemological equity' (2008: 62). The last decade has also brought about a shift in how arts and humanities scholars access, approach and engage with what is known as a 'text'. Drawing on arts-based and social science methods, arts and humanities scholars have added to the traditional and crucial practice of critical analysis of representational forms, by also engaging with the social process of eliciting narratives. The increasing importance of attending and contributing to the production of the 'text' is reflected by recent projects in which arts and humanities scholars and artists work alongside social scientists and practitioners.² The practices of co-production and co-authorship have been instrumental in eliciting new narratives and in challenging the established and hierarchical forms of knowledge productions that are often associated with an elitist intelligentsia.

Participation, co-production and co-authorship

Participatory methods emerged in development studies as an attempt to incorporate marginalized voices in the decision-making processes that determine the form and outcome of development initiatives (Nelson and Wright 1995; Gardner and Lewis 1996: 112). Drawing on insights from development studies, the participatory turn across the social sciences, arts and humanities privileges 'the collective production of knowledge in the midst of "action"' (Bell and Pahl 2018: 106). At the same time, migration studies scholars have called for more inclusive, participatory and ethically accountable research *with* rather than *about* migrants (Temple and Moran 2011). According to O'Neill (2008), combining participatory research with artistic practice can be a means of shifting knowledge production from what is 'found' to what is 'collaboratively made'. Similarly, for Cole and Knowles (2011: 124), 'knowledge advanced in arts-informed research is generative rather than propositional and based on assumptions that reflect the multidimensional, complex, dynamic, inter-subjective and contextual nature of human experience'. Proponents of participatory arts-based methods share a commitment to 'planning and conducting the research process with those people whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study' (Bergold and Thomas 2012: 2). They are guided by principles such as carrying out research in a democratic social and political context; providing a 'safe space' where participants feel able to disclose their personal views and experiences without fear; explicitly considering how the participants are to be defined, identified and included; and ensuring that participants have a sufficient degree of involvement in decision-making at every stage of the research (Bergold and Thomas 2012: 6–10). Thus participation and collaboration increasingly refer to the entire lifetime of a project: from collaborative identification of the problematic, to participatory research methods, to collective analysis and co-creation of the research and/or creative outputs.

The article in this special issue by Maggie O'Neill, Umut Erel, Erere Kaptani and Tracey Reynolds concentrates on the benefits of participatory, arts-based and ethnographic methods which they characterize as ethno-mimesis – 'a theoretical construct, a process and a methodological practice that leads to sensuous knowing' – in conducting research with asylum-seeking women and mothers with no recourse to public funds in the United Kingdom. There is an impassioned call for researchers and activists across the social sciences, arts and humanities to work with migrant women and marginalized communities to contribute to and activate change. They lay out a theoretical framework for collaborative, democratic and egalitarian research with social justice and social change at its core. By focusing on the artistic products of the research, rather than the methodological process itself, they reveal the multiple ways in which necropower and necropolitics penetrates into and structures the everyday lives of women migrants: creating a geography of unsafe spaces, invisibility and surveillance, humiliation and dehumanization, racialized exclusion and material deprivation. But also, crucially, the authors show the women's ability to create a collective space of trust and cooperation in which to share their stories, build capacity and work to change the policies that keep them 'at the borders of humanity'.

In their article, Sébastien Bachelet and Laura Jeffery share a commitment to participatory research, but they raise questions about how and at what stages it can be achieved by critically reflecting on a participatory arts-based project that aimed to enhance engagement and advocacy concerning migration in Morocco. They undertook participant observation of 'photographic encounters' – shooting,

selecting, editing, preparing and exhibiting photographs and films – at two creative workshops and exhibitions with migrants, Moroccan citizens and artists. They suggest that if photography is a powerful participatory tool, then participant observation of photographic encounters offers insights into how people decide what to capture and how they collectively negotiate such decisions. An important insight from their ethnographic material is that despite best intentions and plans, participation is not always assured: researchers must make concerted efforts to identify and address barriers to participation throughout the creative process, such as ensuring that participants are able to develop and apply skills, are reimbursed for their time and travel and can exercise agency in the directions taken during the creative process. They argue that participatory arts-based methods, such as creative workshops, can help to confront the pre-existing stereotypes held respectively by individuals from Moroccan and migrant backgrounds, who otherwise might not have much occasion to meet. As one of the participants commented, photography and filmmaking ‘gathered us. It gave us another vision. We need something that gathers us together’. Bachelet and Jeffery warn, however, that process should not be valued over product. Exhibiting the products of the workshops offered an additional opportunity for broader audiences to participate in photographic encounters, holding the gaze of the project participants displayed on-screen and physically in the space of the exhibition. This type of curation (discussed in more detail by Yvon Langué in this issue) has transformative potential, challenging the separation of and hierarchical relationships between migrants and citizens.

The proliferation of participatory practices is also ‘part of a cyclical paradigm shift *within* the field of art, even as the nature of this shift involves an increasing permeability *between* “art” and other zones of symbolic production’ (Kester 2011: 7, original emphasis). In contrast to contributions which explore the deployment of arts-based approaches in academic research, the British-born Mauritian poet Saradha’s poetic inquiry in this special issue reflects the use of participatory social science methods by artists and attests to the value of a participatory approach for artists advocating for migrants. If poetry emerges from difficult emotions such as guilt and complacency or complex subject positions such as being between places, languages and homes, and if poetry can act as a vessel for expression, it also has its limitations. This is apparent in Saradha’s reflection on the ‘mediocre poem’ she wrote in 2011: ‘using the 1st/2nd person via secondary sources without venturing out past my front door. My father said “it was not my best”. Yes, it was clumsy, unethical’. Through her subsequent deployment of methods of poetic inquiry, which involved participating in cultural heritage and creative workshops with the displaced Chagossian community, she found herself ‘closer to their lives than I could have ever imagined’. This form of engagement was not unproblematic, raising uncomfortable questions about power and representation. Given that displaced people are already occupied with a daily struggle to secure their rights, does the poet have a duty to advocate on their behalf, or rather to support displaced and dispossessed people themselves to represent their plight? In the end, the evidence of the power of participation rests firstly in the poems themselves (discussed later), which document the Chagossians’ specialized knowledge and attest to their resilience, and secondly in the poet’s personal voyage: ‘[t]his floating population has been ship and anchor and a safe harbour to begin to consider my own cultural heritage. The Chagossians have been carrying me through place, language and home’.

Poetic inquiry can also inspire the artist or researcher and participants to experiment with a more collaborative approach to writing that ‘challenges traditional relationships’ between putative categories such as researcher and participant,

3. See: <http://thebelongingproject.co.uk>.

claiming that participants are just as entitled to shape the representation of their experience within the wider work, and indeed are partners in the poetic process. This collaborative process, a type of coproduction, fits within the tradition of transformative research for social justice.

(Manning 2018: 745)

Such collective creativity and co-production is evident in the five women’s group poems published in this special issue that were elicited and composed as part of a collaborative process aimed at empowerment. The Belonging Project works with community groups and cultural establishments across Scotland to run creative writing workshops and readings that explore themes such as: ‘journeys, what we carry with us (and what we leave behind), how we start anew and what it means to belong, alongside similar stories and experiences of refugees and migrants’.³ Facilitated by poet Marjorie Lotfi Gill and photographer and documentary filmmaker Heshani Sothiraj Eddleston, the Belonging Project involves the dual processes of eliciting narratives – in the forms of discussion and sharing of experiences among the women – and writing and shaping those experiences into group poetry.

The collective poems selected for this special issue were produced by women from different countries who are involved in Maryhill Integration Network and Shakti Women’s Aid, two organizations that offer safe spaces for women to come together. The poems narrate departure, arrival and loss. Using metaphors drawn from domesticity, they foreground stories of resilient women, of home and of memory. As Bishop points out, ‘the creative energy of participatory practices rehumanizes – or at least de-alienates – a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalism’ (2006: 179–80). The recent turn in co-production has enabled an engagement with new epistemic paradigms that challenge dominant systems and ‘tease out forms of knowledge extant within communities that are often overlooked or undervalued by more traditional forms of academic research’ (Bell and Pahl 2018: 106). Such contributions not only destabilize knowledge, but also disrupt notions of authorship; indeed, ‘[i]f art is understood as an expression of autonomy and unity (the unity of authorial intention and of the work itself as a semantic construct), then any concession to contingency and multiplicity will be perceived as a transgression’ (Kester 2011: 3). The collective women’s poems interrogate single authorship and rip the aura of authorial authority, favouring more rhizomatic and democratic cultural processes. As such, these collaborative forms also ‘complicate conventional notions of aesthetic autonomy [and] mark a (cyclical) renegotiation of aesthetic autonomy via the permeability that exists between art production and other, adjacent, forms of cultural production and activism’ (Kester 2011: 9–10). For instance, in the case of poetry, in which authorship is normally neither questioned nor challenged, readers have expectations of stylistic power; thus, the collective, community artistic practice is perceived as a challenge and compromise to aesthetics. Instead, these new, collaborative forms forcefully destabilize normative creative processes – and academia itself – as a privileged site for the production

and dissemination of knowledge' (Bell and Pahl 2018: 107) which traditionally fosters and valorizes established and canonical cultural practices.

Representation and its limits

In their introduction to a *Crossings* special issue on the arts of migration, Pearce and O'Neill (2011) acknowledge that there is 'no art without politics' (2011: 8), but attest that "'politics" need not be at the expense of "art"' (2011: 6). They encourage academics to 'resist the notion that art (especially "community art") is reducible to politics in any simplistic way' (Pearce and O'Neill 2011: 8); rather, 'so-called "community art" is often of long-term aesthetic and cultural as well as "therapeutic" value' (2011: 6). At the same time, however, artistic representations of ethnographic material can enable academics who challenge stereotypes about 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers' to reach a wider audience (O'Neill 2011: 30; Guruge et al. 2015). The contribution in this issue by Morocco-based Cameroonian curator Yvon Langué audaciously challenges the view that collective art has to be devoid of aesthetics or that its value rests more in its activist, political and therapeutic power. Instead, he calls for a 'widening of the borders of curatorial practice' to deal with the geographies and lexicon of mobility. His work on the *Migrations. Narratives. Movements.* exhibition (through the 'Arts for Advocacy' project described by Bachelet and Jeffery in this issue) recalibrates and reconciles the otherwise binary approach to art on the one hand and participatory co-creation on the other. His post-colonial curatorial practice allows us to 'rethink the image/visitor relationship'. One of his installations projected a film of bodies in movement onto the ground, and – through lighting – the film projection was overlaid with the audience's shadows: 'the viewer [became] an integral part of the play of bodies: performers' bodies and viewers' bodies were projected in the same composition'. The multiple and complicated levels of authorship attached to the exhibition (which involved project participants, researchers, artists, curator and gallerists) are realigned, normalized and evened out by complicating the interface between audience and work, viewer and image. This well-architected aesthetic choice in his curatorial practice sought to disorient viewers and to translate 'the specificities of emotions at separation and disorientation that accompany situations of departure and arrival in unknown places'.

In her article, Nelli Stavropoulou shows that in a context where there is considerable media coverage *about* migrants, a visual arts-based approach provides an ideal platform for migrants themselves to critically and self-reflexively represent their experiences of migration. By selecting forms of expression, developing their own interpretations and directing the flow of narrative, the asylum seekers who participated in Stavropoulou's project produced grounded critiques of the asylum determination process and of the social conditions of seeking asylum in the United Kingdom today. As one man put it: 'arts projects give us the chance to represent our side of the story. I am grateful for being able to tell what has happened to me'. Stavropoulou argues that in its focus on the symbolic, an arts-based approach can tap into forms of knowledge and expression that traditional verbal/textual based methods cannot; in the words of another participant, '[s]ometimes it can be difficult to explain things with language but with images you can leave an image of yourself'. The narratives and art works created by the participants highlight the disorientation, limbo, exclusion and secondary trauma they have experienced while waiting indeterminately for a decision on their asylum claim; the oppression of being

monitored, coerced and constrained by the organs of the state; the stigmatizing effects of the asylum seeker/refugee identity; and their efforts to construct new and empowering subjectivities and forms of self-representation which they hope will benefit others. Their testimonies confirm that through an arts-based approach they were able to develop their creative skills, contribute to the research process, actively participate in the production of knowledge and disclose experiences that might otherwise remain concealed due to lack of an appropriate 'safe space' for disclosure.

The poems by Marjorie Lotfi Gill in this special issue address the unspeakable, telling of the violence of displacement and the grief of the loss of home, language and childhood places. A sensorial account of past memories is narrated through intimate memories of one's mother and her spice box which left 'the smell of *khorest* / in the air', both left behind because they were unfit for travel in a suitcase. The memory and knowledge of making baklava – a blissful image of rosewater, butter and filo pastry – is unsettled by metonyms of violence that evoke a legacy of military destruction and debris: the 'crush of pistachio' is as 'fine as rubble'. The recent violent history of Iran is narrated as a delicate account of familial relations – broken and forcefully severed – in a genealogy of displacement: great-grandmother, father and the poetic I, a little girl who negotiates her difficult place between Iran in the past and somewhere else in the present. This almost irreconcilable split is conveyed in Gill's poetry as an oxymoronic juxtaposition of images where 'the staccato of sniper fire / was a call to prayer, / and the nightly track of tanks / a low toll of bell'. Here, the sound (and presence) of military power is translated into the comforting vibrations of minarets and church bells. 'The Wrong Person to Ask' dwells once more on the legacies of displacement; here the speaker reminds us of 'one kind of English [spoken] / at school and another at home' and of 'how I can have forgotten Farsi'. Language is lyricized as loss, and the poem (written in English) ends with a eulogy to a lost language, which once 'seeped across' the speaker's tongue.

Saradha's poems in this special issue draw on her involvement in 'CHAGOS: Cultural Heritage Across Generations', a collaborative intergenerational knowledge transmission project bringing together the forcibly displaced Chagossian community, researchers and heritage practitioners. Saradha's work is both a reflection on her own feelings of displacement as a UK born writer of Mauritian parentage and the Chagossian community's struggles of belonging, remembering and sharing their heritage. Saradha's poems in this issue focus on children, flavours and crafts. The coconut – the practice of cracking it open and the delicacies made from its milk – grounds an exploration of heritage in 'Learning about the Hidden Strength and Weakness of the Coconut' and 'Roti Dile Koko'. These two poems recount the process by which elders bequeathed their intangible heritage knowledge to their descendants. Saradha's contribution interpellates ancestral ties and, through collective memories, seeks to join the dots of severed histories. The restitutive role of this poetry is even more overt in 'The knowledge and durability of the coconut tree', a text constituted of eight couplets arranged on the page with decreasing length to visually conjure up the image of a cone-shaped vessel. The scattered histories of displaced Chagossians are reassembled and ordered on the page. Once again, the coconut functions as a catalyst to narrate. In its foliage the 'lives of the islanders were carried in a lattice of green and yellow fronds laced upwards and downwards'; this recollection of the coconut frond baskets (visually on the page and in the lyrics) evokes a sense of the intertwined threads of kinship

and cultural continuity that bind the community. The last poem, 'Language is my home, I say; not one particular language' brings full circle the disrupted connection between language and home: 'I'm stranded, with a feeling of being left in the waiting room of language'. This line lyricizes exile both as a spatial condition and a more existential one as the metaphor of the 'waiting room' draws on spatiality to exemplify displacement beyond place.

Shari Sabeti's article explores contrasting forms of representation in an arts education project involving the dispersed Marshall islander community, which has experienced internal displacement from Bikini Atoll due to the US Government's nuclear testing programme in the 1940s and 1950s, and more recent migration to the US mainland (mainly Hawaii). Sabeti explores the creative process of mural-making through two case studies. The first is a mural on a public wall at a Honolulu school with a large population of migrant Marshallese. Designed by the Hawaiian artist Solomon Enos and collectively painted by school children and the project team, the mural, argues Sabeti, is a 'consensual' (Schacter 2014a) ornamentation which brought people together: 'it contains a beautiful idea about Pacific empathy; it is the outcome of an empathetic process, and it is strategic – it will attract others (from outside the original process) into that empathetic understanding of collective humanity'. In the second case study, the children of displaced Bikini islanders now living on Ejit Island took a more active role in designing a mural within the (less public) grounds of their school. They selected existing imagery with symbolic importance to the community: the mushroom cloud of the Bravo shot, which left Bikini Atoll too contaminated for the islanders ever to return. This mural emphasized the children's link to the past – their origins, the cause of their exile and their shared identity – and possibilities for the future, which is increasingly uncertain for environmental and economic reasons. It replicated relations between the mural makers, communicating 'the ugly truth' (Schacter 2014b) of what happened to them rather than a harmonious vision for outsiders. By insisting on existing imagery with local educative aims, the community limited the agency of the artist and project team in the creative process. The two cases thus highlight contrasting levels of participation and agency available to different parties, but also the capacity of murals to generate and reinforce participants' sense of belonging.

Robert Hampson's contribution to this special issue engages with issues of language and representation through a reflection on six poems. He considers the formation of migrant subjectivity through the discursive environment of air travel after the US Patriot Act (2001) in documents such as a Homeland Security leaflet left in his suitcase, revealing how certain individuals are rendered powerless. Hampson's poetry explores different practices of bordering: in content, form and the writing process itself (since the poems were actually written on flights). Drawing on the language of in-flight safety practices, his work navigates the political and ethical issues behind the discourses of security: 'pull the mask towards you / already you begin to lose / the borders of your identity / pull it over your head / how do you locate yourself' (poem 'BD0717'). This routine safety check for air travel reinserts bordering practices where in fact they seem to have been obliterated and functions as a reminder of the kind of ontological losses inherent in border crossings. The poem 'BA2602' engages more overtly with border politics: 'elegantly cross-cut / itineraries / clearly marked / by skin colour / & accents / adjusted and / unfastened'. The language of in-flight safety practices is mobilized here to draw attention – subtly, yet powerfully – to the racial and ethnic profiling practiced

at the borders. The lines ‘elegantly cross-cut / itineraries’ conjure up images of retractable belt barriers to manage queues in border zones like airports, but they also function as metaphorical transpositions of less visible *itineraries* which segregate and administer lives, mobility and, ultimately, rights.

James Sheard’s poem ‘Paper Man’ also centres on the power of language and its inadequacy in the face of extreme human experiences. His self-referential poem is an engaging reflection on multiple stages and sites of writing about human displacement, the impossibility of translating the migratory experience into lyrics, and the limits of representation; as he puts it, the poem’s ending ‘is both written and unreadable’. The water metaphor shapes ‘Paper Man’ as an unspoken reminder of deadly sea crossings, and of the power and fragility of the written word until water ‘bleeds out the words, stained like the letters / in stories, letters that we never received’. What is today known as the ‘refugee crisis’ calls into question again the limits of representation, not only pointing the finger at dominant (inadequate and misleading) media rhetoric about mass displacement, but also calling for the arts to respond to, engage with, and make sense of migration. Morrison’s ‘unspeakable things unspeakable’ (1989) – a reference to the impossibility of telling the extremities of African American histories – laid bare the limits of representation of certain human experiences. There is an urgency to forge a new language, new forms of critical and artistic responses, as well as new approaches to research and knowledge production.

Conclusion

The contributors to this special issue are all committed to experimenting with arts-based methods, variously motivated by ethical, political and empirical aims such as: conducting more inclusive, non-hierarchical and collaborative research; challenging traditional forms of text, authorship/knowledge production and representation; and exploring avenues for social action and change. As the articles, reflections, poems, images and other forms of creative expression featured in this issue attest, the performative, symbolic and affective qualities of creative outputs make them powerful, evocative mediums for expression, with the potential to cross boundaries and reach broad audiences. Nevertheless, the contributors to this issue do not deploy arts-based methods uncritically or as an end in itself: rather, they reflect critically both on their own methodological practices and on the (limits to the) transformative potentials of using arts-based methods to engage creatively with migration. To begin with, there are limits to the capacity of participatory methods to overcome unequal power dynamics, and there are limits to the capacity of artistic expression to capture and convey diverse experiences of migration. Moreover, our shared commitments to pursuing participatory methods and exploring new forms of representation are repeatedly confronted by the enormity of the challenge for academics, activists and artists seeking to effect long-term change in a context in which discourse on migration is dominated by short-term political decision-making and punitive policies and dehumanizing bureaucratic practices force migrants into ever-more temporary, isolated, precarious forms of existence. Arts activists and researchers alike must consider ‘what types of creative practices can work in meaningful ways in these highly unstable environments’ (McAllister 2011: 14). Yet the contributions display a shared commitment to and belief in the power of the arts. While the prospect of influencing the political sphere

might seem remote, we acknowledge the role and power of the arts in instigating, shaping and leading change by inspiring people's conscience and civic responsibility. As Arendt points out, civil disobedience 'can be tuned to necessary and desirable change' (1972: 75). Roy reminds us to 'reclaim the space of civil disobedience, [...] to liberate ourselves from the tyranny of crisis reportage' through 'our experience, our imagination, and our art' ([1998] 2016: 333). The urgency to forge new languages and new narratives – explored by the contributions in this special issue – is a crucial step to ignite civil disobedience 'with our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness – and our ability to tell our own stories' (Roy [1998] 2016: 282).

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