

Conclusion: Challenging times and hopeful futures

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There is much to take heart from in a volume such as this. Some chapters show people overcoming adversity and uncertainty to develop new spaces of comfort and safety. Often this is assisted by faith-based communities, local youth workers, activists and volunteers who fill in the gaps in the neoliberal austerity economics of deprivation. Despite loss, fatigue and emotional labour, we see new homes, new identities and new lives formed in intimate healing spaces. We see celebrations of lives that resisted death and remembrance of all that was left behind. In this we find shared values that transcend linguistic, cultural and socio-political divisions, supranational networks of people forced from home but also others dedicated to protecting and supporting their very humanity. Testaments, all, to the strength of the human spirit. Yet still, the voices speak of the vulnerability and exploitation of children, the systemic failures of purported protection mechanisms, frequent rights violations, abuse and discrimination. We witness suffering.

To an extent, the demarcation of the different parts of this book – ‘Critical research’, ‘Crucial voices’ and ‘Creative practice’ – is merely a fabrication to facilitate ease of access to a passing reader. All chapters are based on research and the research is of a kind where the voices of the participants are deemed essential. And creativity is always essential when particularly, in the face of overwhelming odds, we endeavour to make the world a safer place. As such, certain themes including intersectionality, power, positionality and participatory methods also run through the chapters. There is thus an emphasis on creative approaches to research and practice that recognise the complex and intersectional experiences of refugee and migrant communities which resist viewing these diverse peoples as a homogenous group or ‘problem’ to be dealt with. Central to these creative approaches is recognition of the agency, fortitude and creativity of refugees and migrants themselves who, through engagement in research and therapeutic interventions, empower themselves.

This conclusion will bring the different parts of the book together and draw out the key themes from across the chapters. As we have seen in this

volume, intersectional identities require holistic interventions, and we argue that the actions taken in attempting to build new lives free from oppression that we see here are inherently political acts of resistance that contribute to a global political movement. However, we also recognise that the work of this movement is increasingly operating within hostile environments in which national governments, particularly those of the Global North and their political supporters, actively seek to deny the rights of refugees and migrants. So, what lessons can we learn and what hope can we derive from the creative research and practice with refugees and migrants presented in this book?

People matter

Time and again, throughout this book, we see the intersection of past, present and future woven through the lives and identities of migrants, their communities and the places they move, they create and inhabit. Rabia Nasimi, who herself threads a complex path within London's Afghan migrant community, sharing language, ethnicity, gender and class with many of the women she works with, has shown the importance of 'home' for her participants. Home is a tapestry of packages from aunts, dried nuts and fruits, trips to Bedford. A spiritual state of mind. Home is a wider community of mosques and shops. Such connections are key to 'Being happy and comfortable. Not feeling different or not understanding the surroundings. The familiarity'. Thus, we see in the chapter by Naomi Thompson, Graham Bright and Peter Hart how faith-based youth and community workers are key to facilitating the familiar in the new. Eric Harper and Angela Rackshaw's work as therapists supports the co-construction of healing and political spaces enabling individuals within groups and communities to find their own voices. The social workers without borders in Finbar Cullinan's chapter act as political agents both supporting individuals and making change on a societal level, staying true to their profession's principles and values, an approach also reflected in Brian Callan's research in the perseverance of professional staff at the UNHCR who struggle against constraints imposed by global neo-liberalism. Throughout this book migrants, communities, volunteers, activists and professionals come together to find 'new ground' (as in Marina Rova et al's chapter) or create 'new town cultures' (as in Rachel Hughes et al's chapter) in defiance of illiberal politics and policies of exclusion.

Such collective collaboration in the public realm is what Hannah Arendt (1958) called Action, which she understood as an inherently political human faculty. Action, she argued, is a denial of the political passivity of modern society in which nationalism, modes of production, capitalism, consumerism and individualism lead to the pursuit of 'life itself' as the highest goal, an unthinking existence solely concerned with the labour of self-satisfaction. Arendt understood that the realisation of a complete human life only occurs within the plurality of humanity's social condition, 'the reality that comes from

being seen and heard by others' (1958: 58). Thus, as we see in this volume, the interactions between refugees, migrants, practitioners and participatory researchers in making meaning of their lives offers another strand in the creation of something new 'affecting uniquely the life stories of all those with whom he comes into contact' (Arendt, 1958: 184). Action is therefore the realisation of freedom in which individuals disclose their identities, who they are as distinct from what they are. The critical research, crucial voices and creative practices brought together here are just a small part of a global political movement.

Intersectionality

The significance and utility of an intersectional approach stands out strongly. This applies not only to particular challenges for young female migrants navigating secular Western societies while still trying to satisfy more conservative and religious traditions of their families and the communities they came from in Rohina Sidiqi and Pearson Nkhoma's study. Intersectionality, as Eric Harper and Angela Rackstraw have pointed out here, 'speaks to crossing over of power play, positions of taken for granted privilege, the therapists as white, middle-class and the different modes, or "matrix of oppression" based on identity'. Intersectionality thus becomes an important part of reflective practice where we must examine our own assumptions in the intersubjective encounter where we try to understand an 'other'. In this we may also reflect on Hannah Arendt's concept of Judging not in the sense of criticising but in 'the ability to see things not only from one's own point of view but from the perspective of all those who happen to be present' (Arendt, 1968: 221). Arendt considered Judging to be the most political faculty of the mind in that it is an activity concerned with reflecting on different perspectives and achieving shared understandings that occupy their own intersubjective space. Judging thus produces understanding but this understanding resides neither in the self nor in the other but within a 'third position' of the intersubjective relationship.

In this sense, we have seen Naomi Thompson and Rabia Nasimi negotiating their own fluctuating 'outsider-insider' positionalities as a path to understanding the women they work with. For Eric Harper and Angela Rackshaw it is seen in the examinations of the positions of the therapist within the therapeutic frame, alongside the psychoanalytic concepts of transference, counter transference and projective identification. The creative interventions presented here also seek to access the totality of experiences, vulnerabilities and potentialities that intersect in individuals, using 'hopeful disruption' as artistic acts which challenge conventional ways of talking and acting, as shown by Rachel Hughes, Marijke Steedman and Brian Callan. Hughes and her colleagues deconstruct unexamined assumptions through the enquiring eyes of people from migrant cultures, while still providing 'radical hospitality' and

opening people's eyes to new possibilities – to new ways of thinking, doing and being – as new sources of belonging and self-worth. This is done through 'unlocking cultures' which is seen also through the psychosocially supportive and culturally sensitive case examples presented by Sarah Crawford-Browne and through Pearson Nkhoma's recognition of the role of *mavuto* – chronic deprivation or destitution – for young Malawian women in contributing to their decisions to leave home. As Nkhoma points out, a capability approach that emphasises enhancing individuals' freedoms and opportunities to lead dignified lives they value offers a valuable framework for understanding and tackling the root causes of forced migrations and supporting those displaced. Our message is that we must create social environments that are emotionally supportive, spiritually and culturally appropriate, and psychologically safe. We must all find new ground.

A global protection drought

Yet tensions remain in the testimonies in this book. Feelings of not being completely one identity or another in a world where nationality, culture, identity and self are so tightly entwined and valorised as the core of belonging. Rightward political trends in the Global North have been emboldened since the Great Recession of 2007–09 and subsequent austerity economics that denuded public services in many states. Anti-immigrant sentiments in state policy have foregrounded nativist movements in North America and Europe (Goldstein and Peters, 2014; Ybarra et al, 2016). Such movements, which often encompass racism and xenophobia (Guia, 2016), also constitute a global political movement that stands in direct opposition to the actions and lives outlined here. Both Pearson Nkhoma and Brian Callan directly highlight this antagonistic environment which is leading to a 'global protection drought'.

In the UK, former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak (2023a, 2023b) listed immigration as one of the Conservative government's five priority pillars for 2023. This initiative represented the UK's first explicit stance against providing protection to victims of modern slavery. In turn, it framed vulnerable victims as needing additional scrutiny for 'spurious human rights claims' (Sunak, 2023b). Such an approach may leave vulnerable victims, particularly children and unaccompanied minors, struggling to qualify for support designed to prevent their involvement in modern slavery. In the face of such policies and rhetoric, violent attacks on immigrants have been reported in the UK and in October 2022, a terrorist attack on a migrant centre in Dover was attributed to extremist ideology (Reuters, 2022). The purported need for scrutiny of immigration and false claimants remains firmly in public discourse as the new government beds in. The Labour Party's successful election was due in large part to the numbers of former Conservative voters who swung further

right to Nigel Farage's Reform UK party, which leads opinion polls as the UK's most popular political party at the time of writing.

After the European elections in June 2024, far-right parties now make up approximately 24 per cent of elected members in the European Parliament, with about half of that number coming from France's *Rassemblement National* (RN), *Fratelli d'Italia*, the Polish PiS, the German AfD and Hungary's *Fidesz*. While the popularity of far-right populist movements is driven by multiple factors to which EU citizens have been exposed since 2008 – the Great Recession, the 2015 refugee crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine (Ivaldi, 2024) – a discontent with immigration is a common and central driver. The overall rise in the far-right membership is marginal on 2019 but this reflects, at least in part, the loss of 29 Brexit Party members from the UK who no longer have membership (Ivaldo, 2024). The 2024 results reflect a consolidation of the far-right electorate in almost all EU member states, while in both Hungary and Italy right-wing populist parties form the ruling parties. Regardless of the varying levels of electoral success, xenophobic and often racist discourses have affected the policies of mainstream, traditional parties (Krzyżanowski, 2020). In December 2023, Donald Trump, as part of his successful presidential campaign, made a speech in New Hampshire where he claimed that immigrants are 'destroying the blood of our country' (Lepore, 2023). Such trends are not limited to the Global North, with incidents of xenophobia and violence against foreigners in countries like South Africa, under initiatives like Operation Dudula, and disturbing discoveries such as a mass grave in Malawi (Malawi24, 2022; Nhemachena et al, 2022). The humanistic desire to afford protection to those in need, embodied in conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is under threat from concerted and widespread social and political movements.

Conclusion

We thus have two global political movements: one comprised of a transnational network of major international organisations, migrants and their communities, professionals, local charities and grassroots volunteers and activists dedicated to helping those fleeing deprivation or persecution. The other seeks to scapegoat or demonise those who they deem as 'not belonging' within a given national border due to the colour of their skin, their religion, their culture or lack of wealth. The intersectional approaches and collaborative practices outlined in this volume form part of the former and stand in stark contrast to the simplified and exclusionary political programmes that want to 'STOP THE BOATS' or 'BUILD THAT WALL'.

It would be naive to make predictions as to how the contestation between these two political movements will play out but it is perhaps worth turning again to the work of Hannah Arendt. Much of Arendt's career was concerned

with the forms and structures of political oppression that she had witnessed with the rise of Nazism and Stalinism in works such as *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and on the ‘banality of evil’ in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). In her later works *The Human Condition* (1958) and *The Life of the Mind* (1977), she developed the political faculties of Action and Judging used here, which must thus be understood as attempts to resist the rise of such evil in the world. Arendt also offered a third political human faculty, that of Thinking which may ‘make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually “condition” them against it’ (Arendt, 1977: 5). Here is not the place to delve fully into Arendt’s political philosophy, suffice to say that, as a German Jew and political activist, she was arrested by the Gestapo in 1933 and fled her home country soon after. She too was an émigrée, an exile, a stateless person without papers or protection. Just one more of the many crucial voices we need to hear.

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