

# Goldsmiths Research Online

*Goldsmiths Research Online (GRO)  
is the institutional research repository for  
Goldsmiths, University of London*

## Citation

Gunaratnam, Yasmin. 2019. On researching climates of hostility and weathering. In: Kevin Smets; Koen Leurs; Myria Georgiou; Saskia Witteborn and Radhika Gajjala, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Media and Migration*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 129-141. ISBN 9781526447210 [Book Section]

## Persistent URL

<https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/26381/>

## Versions

The version presented here may differ from the published, performed or presented work. Please go to the persistent GRO record above for more information.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Goldsmiths, University of London via the following email address: [gro@gold.ac.uk](mailto:gro@gold.ac.uk).

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated. For more information, please contact the GRO team: [gro@gold.ac.uk](mailto:gro@gold.ac.uk)

## **On researching climates of hostility and weathering**

**Yasmin Gunaratnam**

### **Abstract**

The focus of the chapter is on researching the intersecting effects of the mobility of contemporary borders, 'hostile environment' government immigration campaigns and longer histories of racism and xenophobia in the UK. Together these disparate forces are theorised as constituting and mediating a pervasive climate. Engaging with three literatures on: (1) weathering; (2) debility; and (3) social suffering, the chapter draws from original research studies on dying migrants and UK immigration information campaigns to show how climates of hostility and structural injustice can wear down and debilitate racially marked migrants. A critical, methodological question that is tackled is how researchers might become empirically receptive to the complex intertwining of experiences of the debilitations of weathering and social suffering that are overlooked in the media interest in migration as a series of short-term events. The author describes her use of scalar analysis that includes bringing together different genres and forms such as social theory and poetry, images, art and fiction to trace the impact of hostile climates and the slow moving violations of weathering. The chapter suggests that scalar analysis and the use of performance methods in migration research can help researchers to discern and trace the effects of migration and racialised hostility over time and serves to highlight discussions of what constitutes 'proof' in research and activism.

**Keywords:** Death and Dying, Debility, Disability, Ethnicity, Racism, Performance Methods, Weathering.

A group of noisy women with megaphones is drawing attention from passers-by. The women were filmed in August 2013 disrupting an immigration raid in Southall, west London. ‘We stood outside and encouraged members of the public to shame the racist immigration policies. We shouted in English, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Amharic, a demonstration of Southall's rich history of multiculturalism and diversity’ (Southall Black Sisters, 2013).

The women shout ‘Here to stay. Here to fight’. The chants used in pro-migrant British campaigns in the 1970s and 80s, condense almost four decades of anti-racist feminist activism by the civil society group Southall Black Sisters. What mobilised the women was the UK government’s aggressive immigration controls and policing, animated in the Home Office’s ‘Operation Vaken’, which included the Southall raids. Vaken was a one-month pilot campaign in the summer of 2013 that included two vans being driven through six of London’s most ethnically diverse boroughs. The vans carried billboards with the message, ‘In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest’. The Go Home vans became iconic symbols of the government’s hostile environment immigration policies. The phrase ‘hostile environment’ was used by Theresa May, when as Home Secretary in 2012, she defended the government’s failure to reduce net migration, stating, ‘The aim is to create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants’ (Hill, 2017).

As Hannah Jones (2018) argues, a huge raft of institutional mandates in the UK have seen borders insinuate themselves further into daily life, along with the devolving of immigration policing to those such as health care professionals, teachers, bank workers and private landlords. For Jones, hostile environment policies constitute:

...an ‘environment’ of suspicion and threat that can encompass anyone at any time—even someone with settled status whose documents are unavailable even someone born in the UK with parents with legal status, even someone who has no immigration history in their family but works for a bank or rents out a home.

For eighteen months, between 2013-2015, I was part of a team of university researchers, working with civil society organisations, including Southall Black Sisters, to investigate the effects of government immigration campaigns. Our Mapping Immigration Controversy (MIC) study included qualitative interviews, observation and a national survey, conducted by Ipsos Mori of a nationally representative sample of 2,424 people (see Jones *et al.*, 2017). Five years after our study began, in the beginning of 2018, we have started to see a further, more clandestine leaching of hostile environment policies. What has come to light is the illegalising and deportability of Britain’s cohort of post-war Caribbean labour migrants, dubbed the ‘Windrush generation’ in the media (the name comes from the *Empire Windrush*, a ship that brought migrants from Jamaica to the UK in June 1948).

The Windrush events have revealed the diffuse slow violence of contemporary border regimes where strategies, tactics and devices are not simply anticipatory and proactive

(De Genova, 2017). Borders can unfurl backwards in time. To put it another way, you can stay in one place and through the incremental recalibration and whittling away of citizenship and residency rights over time, the border can move underneath you. Or you can imagine and fear that it might. In an interview with a community worker in Bradford about the impact of Vaken, Hannah Jones was told that third generation citizens of migrant heritage were asking ‘Are we going to be allowed to stay here?’ (Jones, 2018).

In focus groups, we showed participants images of the Go Home vans and asked them what came to mind. The photographs were read in complex ways. Several people did not at first feel that the vans were a part of a government campaign. ‘I do believe that was the BNP (a far-right party) that done that’; ‘I can’t believe that a Government would even think along those lines’ were two responses. Participants ruminated on the words ‘Go Home’. For refugees and asylum seekers, the phrase was a painful reminder that they had no safe home to return to. For some, this made their lives in Britain feel more insecure. Others picked up on the racist lineage of ‘Go Home’. ‘It’s reminiscent of back in the days when there used to be blatantly racist people... I had that slur used at me by racist thugs...going to work’, one Jamaican-born man told us in Birmingham, in the midlands of England. Operation Vaken also triggered fear and anxiety among those who had a relatively secure immigration status. A participant in a focus group, facilitated by Sukhwant Dhaliwal, spoke of how ‘scared’ and ‘terrified’ she was when seeing immigration officers with dogs, carrying out immigration checks at a train station. Despite being in the country legally, she said:

I got so panicked and scared that I went and sat in the wrong train...When I got on the train I started crying. I was thinking, how long will I live with this

fear?... I started to think to myself, if I can't move around at all, that people are blocking my way like this, and I'm so scared, then perhaps suicide is better. (Jones *et al.*, 2017, p. 37)

My focus in this chapter is on researching racialised economies of securitisation and hostility, not only as a result of the latter day mobility of borders but as an assemblage of discourses, affects and practices that stretch further back in time, constituting a climate. I offer evidence of this longer lineage through the meeting point of my different studies on transnational dying in English hospitals, hospices and homes. I think of this overlapping of projects, like the chants 'Here to Stay. Here to Fight' as a temporalisation of recursive cycles of racism and their melding with different modes of anti-migrant sentiment. My qualitative and ethnographic research on diasporic dying has involved care professionals and ageing migrants from 'new' Commonwealth nations who mainly settled in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s (see Gunaratnam, 2013), including Windrush-era residents. Because not all Windrush residents had the documentation to prove their residency status, some are now finding themselves caught between becoming undocumented—unable to work, travel abroad, access welfare benefits or health services—and at risk of detention and deportation.

In giving attention to the longer, more mundane temporalities of everyday racism that predate the hostile environment policies, it is important to recognise that the racism mobilised by the government in Vaken has been further intensified by a swelling of nationalist politics and nativism following the June 2016 UK referendum vote to leave the European Union ('Brexit'). In the month after Brexit, there was sharp rise in 'racially or religiously aggravated' hate crime (Forster, 2016). As events unfolded

there has been more public and scholarly conversations about xenophobia and racism, contextualised against longer histories of British and English nationalism.

It is significant that much of the hostility whipped up by Vaken and Brexit has been forged on the terrain of health and welfare, with migrantised people being seen as a drain on national resources and a particular threat to the livelihoods of white working class populations. Robbie Shilliam (2017) has named these discursive associations a ‘nationalisation of entitlement sentiment’, connected to ‘the historic dissolution, via the 1948 National Assistance Act, of the formal distinction between the deserving and underserving poor.’ He goes on to observe, ‘at the same time this distinction was informally racialized so as to place the homogenised deserving “white working class” in opposition to undeserving “immigrants” from the “new” (i.e. majority coloured) Commonwealth countries.’

Against this weight of history, it is relatively easy to be pessimistic about hostile environment policies. However, the recent Windrush immigration cases have illuminated the often imperceptible debilitating effects of British border regimes and their entanglement with, and supplementation of, racist and neo-colonial forces. Previously murky political and cultural distinctions have surfaced. ‘The Home Office has a default assumption that if your papers aren’t in order, it’s because you’re dodgy,’ Polly Mackenzie, director of the think tank Demos, has said (Serhan, 2018). ‘They thought undocumented migrants and illegal migrants were in fact the same thing, and it’s very clear that because of the legacy of Commonwealth migration, those two things are not the same’. At the same time public sympathy towards the Windrush residents and anger at the injustice—which led to the resignation of the

Home Secretary Amber Rudd—has demonstrated the contradictions of racialisation and ‘new hierarchies of belonging’ (Back *et al.*, 2018, p. 67). ‘The ‘Windrush generation’ do not summon images of ‘illegal border crossings’,...or uncontrolled migration, or terrorism, asylum or Islam.’, Luke De Noronha (2018) points out, continuing:

The ‘Windrush generation’ are elderly, they have worked hard and paid taxes, and they are defined by stasis, not by unruly mobility. ‘Illegal immigrants’, on the other hand, even those who have been here for twenty years, remind us that there are many more like them, who might flout immigration restrictions and move to the UK, and worse still, they might stay. ‘Illegal immigrants’ are mobile, and their mobility is dangerous, and this is central to their undeservingness.

For Les Back and his co-authors (2018), ‘hierarchies of belonging’ as they manifest in the lives of young migrantised people in London, are a form of ethnic and racial ranking, operating through distinctions drawn between older cohorts of migrants and ‘freshies’ (newer arrivals); freshies face greater hostility. Using mixed methods of conversations, photography and diaries, Back *et al.* show how a variety of psycho-social ‘checkpoints’ mark the sifting of belonging in daily life. The checkpoints are laden with feelings of ‘shame, displacement and status anxiety’ (p.67). And yet, as young people negotiate differential inclusions they are sometimes able to ‘embrace the opportunity of more convivial encounters with difference’ (p.67). We encountered similar dynamics in the MIC project. To our dismay, in focus groups with migrants from Eastern Europe, we were told how some individuals had faced xenophobic



aggression from British black and ethnically minoritised citizens, who told them to ‘go home’.

In what follows, I move across different migration contexts and research sites. I use these empirical movements to connect seemingly distinct times of migration, research relationships, knowledge production and global bio-political relations. The aim is to show the extensiveness and varied textures of climates of racialised hostility. I use concepts of ‘weathering’ as an intersectional lens to understand how hostility and borders make incursions into bodies.

### **Weathering**

The ‘weathering hypothesis’ was put forward in the early 1990s by Arline Geronimus (1992) who suggested that the early deterioration of the health of African Americans is the result of social exclusion. ‘Weathering’ has more recently been used by Christina Sharpe (2016) to describe the toll on, and the endurance and inventiveness of, black bodies living in climates of racist violence. ‘In what I am calling the weather,’ Sharpe explains, ‘antiblackness is pervasive as climate. The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies.’ (p.106).

Astrida Neimanis and Jennifer Mae Hamilton (2017) have expanded on Sharpe’s ‘weathering’ to take in the intra-actions between meteorological and social climates. In doing so, they propose weathering as an intersectional feminist, antiracist and decolonial praxis, attentive to the situated ways in which ‘not all bodies weather the same’ (p.81). ‘Weathering enables us to talk about the ethics of exposure, necessarily

in relation to the political economies of place', Neimanis and Hamilton assert. 'It recognises the need for shelter while remaining critically attentive to the politics of shelter, always textured by gender, race, class, accessibility, species and other embodied markers.' (p.83).

Alertness to intersectional vulnerabilities has been a central tenet of feminist, postcolonial and critical race methodological writing. The concern recognises the intertwining of research and social contexts, marked by gendered racisms and other forms of oppression, in which the very categories that we think with and the research methods that we use, can never be neutral. Indeed, an unsettling irony for the migration researcher is that the Greek etymology of the word 'method' is anchored in colonialist ideas of a journeying across frontiers (see Gunaratnam & Hamilton, 2017). Combining both *meta* (higher, beyond) and *hodos* (route), Gregory Ulmer (1994, p. 24) tells us that in modern Western traditions, the word method was, 'associated with the metaphor of the voyager', encompassing Plato's moral geometry: 'everything in its *right* place, related to the doctrine of the *route* as a right way to proceed' (p.30, original emphasis). Rather than focusing on methods as directing the 'right' way to journey, I am interested in the liveliness of the route itself in my research settings, where 'everything is *not* in the right place'. By this I mean how the mobility and violating incursions of contemporary borders can decimate consciousness and sentience.

My interest in weathering recognises that crossing borders is much more than a journey across spatial frontiers. Bodies, minds and being can be affected, especially in situations of forced exile and displacement, trauma, debilitation and racism. A critical,

methodological challenge that comes with this recognition is how researchers can become empirically receptive to these aspects of migration, especially as they unfold over time. My pragmatic response has been to use what I call scalar analysis that includes bringing together different genres and forms such as social theory and poetry, images, art and literary fiction to discern and trace the impact of hostile climates. By scalar empirical practices I am also referring to the juxtapositioning of different material, temporal and affective strata.

A vivid example of scalar analysis comes from Tiffany Page's (2017) research on self-immolation among refugees. Engaging the ethics of cross-cultural research on exile through an in-depth case study of media accounts of the self-immolation of Syrian refugee Mariam al-Khawli, Page advocates holding in parallel narratives of the micro and the macro, the here and there, the now and then. In displacing the search for linear causality so often favoured by the mainstream media, Page's discordant, uncertain analysis disperses attention from the spectacular event of al-Khawli's self-immolation. The multivalent ambiguity of causes that emerges comes with a move in focus 'from an acute moment in time' to more banal 'everyday modes of self-maintenance and endurance required to sustain lives' (p. 16). The shift in Page's analytic schema entails a peeling back—that draws on the work of Sedgwick (2003), Wiegman (2014) and Mahmood (2012)—of the relation between knowing (epistemology) and doing (politics) in research. Advocating researching against dominant or chrononormative time frames by 'interrogating the organisation of activities, scenes and events into consequential sequences' (p. 18), Page turns her attention to seemingly ordinary, localised acts of self-persistence in al-Khawli's life-world as a refugee. Page's empirical practices include altering the affective intensities

and temporalities through which she had previously approached self-immolation as a singular event. ‘I began to realise’ Page writes, ‘that some deaths that we think occur quickly may instead be slow and eked out not over minutes but rather over months, years and generations’ (p. 21).

I will discuss my own work with spatio-temporal and affective scales later on, using examples from my research on diasporic dying. For the timebeing, let me make clearer the specific relevance of scalar analysis in uncovering the *longue durée* and utter embeddness of racialised and anti-migrant hostility in British history, elaborating on the orthogonal formation of border affects in the UK.

### **Mobile borders and heavy weather**

In contemporary Europe we are living at the intersection of different migration trajectories, including the increase in post—2004 immigration from Eastern Europe. Since 2015, the so-called ‘European refugee crisis’ has dominated media headlines, denoting catastrophic death and a governing of migrantised multiplicity through what Martina Tazzioli (2016) describes as, ‘sorting processes of categorization, partition and channelling’ (p.480). News coverage has tended to focus on the young, with potent images of ‘boats crowded to sinking point, faces trapped behind barbed wire fences or dead bodies of children tragically washed up on beaches’ (Back *et al*, 2018, p. 3).

In January 2018 this media imagery began to change. Another more longstanding migration trajectory gained public attention in the UK, through *Guardian* journalist Amelia Gentleman’s exposure of the effects of the government’s hostile environment

policies on Britain's ageing post-WWII labour migrants and their relatives. These individuals had mainly migrated to Britain from the Caribbean between 1948 and 1970. The Windrush events have involved disentanglement and the unmaking of residency and citizenship rights. Changes in immigration legislation, particularly the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts, have seen these settled British residents deported, made unemployed and homeless, incarcerated in immigration detention centres and denied lifesaving health care in what Will Davies (2018) describes as an assault through 'weaponising paperwork'. While Operation Vaken's hostile environment was supposedly aimed at managing the external threat of 'illegal' migrants, the Windrush events have played out through a domesticated securitisation and often on the terrain of healthcare and death.

Albert Thompson, for example, had lived and worked in the UK for 44 years. He was unable to begin radiotherapy treatment for prostate cancer because he did not have the necessary documents to prove his immigration status. Following media reporting of the case and a public petition, Thompson began his treatment after a six-month delay. The Home Office would not allow Junior Green to return to England for his mother's funeral after he had returned to Jamaica to be with her when she was dying (her body had been repatriated to the UK for burial). Green had come to the UK when he was 15 months old in 1957. At least three individuals, among 83 people believed to have been wrongly deported to Jamaica or refused the right to return, have since died (Gentleman, 2018a). Jennifer Housen, an immigration lawyer in Kingston, who represented some of these cases, has described how one of her clients 'died heartbroken' at not being able to return to the UK where she had lived for 50 years. 'Retirement here wasn't what she expected' Housen said. 'She wanted to go back

home. We fought for three years for her to go back, and they said no. We sent letter after letter. She became so exhausted and depressed' (Gentleman, 2018a).

Dexter Bristol came to the UK aged eight in 1968 to join his mother. He collapsed and died in the street from heart failure in March 2018. His mother, Sentina Bristol believed his death was caused by the extreme stress he had been under for more than a year in trying to secure his immigration status. Dexter Bristol was sacked from his cleaning job in 2017 because he did not have a passport. He was not able to claim the benefits he was entitled to because officials did not believe he was in the UK legally. When his health started to deteriorate he did not go to the doctor, believing he had no right to do so.

The coroner's inquest into Bristol's death in August 2018 refused to make the Home Office an 'interested party' in the hearing, recording a verdict of death by natural causes (Quinn, 2018). 'He was prepared to fight but as the months went on and he was required to find more evidence it became very difficult' immigration lawyer Jacqueline McKenzie said, 'and we saw him just decline into a shadow of himself' (Quinn, 2018). 'This is racism. He was the victim of their policies, and it is a tragedy. I'm hoping no one will go through what I'm going through now' Sentina Bristol said. 'There was a lot of racism when I came here, but I was young, I could handle it. People would call you 'black'; I just ignored it. This is worse, this is the government. They are intelligent people, they are people of power. We expect better from them.' (Gentleman, 2018b).

The evocative imagery of Dexter Bristol being reduced to a shadow, has resonances with the slow wearing down of vulnerable populations that has been the focus of

Jasbir Puar's (2017) theorising of economies of debility. I see Puar's various examinations of debility as scalar analyses. The relevance of her work to this discussion comes, in part, in its highlighting of the slow and increasing weight of biopolitical climates of racialisation on racially marked bodies. As I will go on to discuss, Puar's attention to bodily and affective experience can help migration researchers to better think about and trace the complex constitutive effects of migration experiences, xenophobia and racism on bodies and minds.

### **Debility and social suffering**

Puar's most recent work on debility has investigated the connections and alliances forged between pro-Palestinian and Black Lives Matter activists, as countering a racialised biopolitical logic of maiming as distinct from disablement. For Puar, 'disability is already overdetermined by "white fragility" on one side and the racialization of bodies that are expected to endure pain, suffering and injury on the other.' (2017, p. xiv). In explaining the distinction between the biopolitics of debility and disability, Puar clarifies, "Disability is not a fixed state or attribute but exists in relation to assemblages of capacity and debility, modulated across historical time, geopolitical space, institutional mandates, and discursive regimes" (p. xiv).

A crucial point of Puar's is that certain poor, queer and racialised populations are not recognised within liberal rights-based discursive regimes of disability. Their pain, injury and bodily losses are normalised. As such, debilitation is not considered a disability. We can see these patterns of normalisation at play in a range of migration experiences, especially with regard to what is called 'social suffering' in the human and social sciences (see Gunaratnam, 2012 & 2014a). Social suffering is a personal

and a collective experience, characterised by relative powerlessness. Arthur Kleinman and colleagues describe it as the ‘problems that result from what political, economic and institutional power does to people’. It’s a perverse, unnerving kind of hurt; so ordinary and dispersed that we scarcely register the damage of its ‘soft knife’ (Klienman, Das, & Lockwood, 1997, p. ix-x). The insidiousness of social suffering, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu concluded from a large international, collaborative study (Bourdieu *et al.*, 1999), is that we accept it as ordinary. We learn to live with it. Furthermore, a key proposition of the social suffering literature is that alongside acclimatisation to social suffering, we lack words and concepts to represent the experience. Because of these cultural and representational characteristics of social suffering, Bourdieu believed that researchers should use methods that close the social, cultural and language distances between researchers and participants. In conditions of trust and intimacy in research, experiences of suffering could be delivered into consciousness, symbolisation and language.

A problem with this rationale is that it makes ableist assumptions about subjectivity and a metaphysics of presence. In my research with dying racially marked migrants, I have found interanimations between debility and disability, which can further meld with the normalisation of living with racist hostility. For instance, although several individuals talked candidly about the racism they had faced, and how they had countered it, the impact was also expressed more obliquely, or was sometimes denied. But the symptoms of disease could sometimes bring past hurt to the surface, suggesting how the weight of social suffering had been carried/weathered in a life and also how it could be reconstituted by biochemical changes resulting from disease or the drugs used to manage pain and symptoms (see Gunaratnam, 2014a).



I have described some of these complicated relationships in a thick case-story of ‘Violet’, a Jamaican born retired health care assistant with a large and painful fungating breast cancer tumour (a cancer that breaks through the skin or surfaces of an organ) (see Gunaratnam, 2013). Violet had also suffered a stroke and her biography included stories of domestic and racist violence. Her accounts of the racism she faced during the early 1960s were similar to those of her peers, who experienced racist abuse and who were turned away from jobs and housing. Here is an extract from a verbatim transcribed interview with Violet:

Violet: I mean you go for a job and ting and dey see you coming, then say ‘We don’t want any blackies . . . We haven’t no job for no blackie. Go back to where you come from’, and ting like dat...But we learned dat you know, we just pay dem no mind really, and we didn’t pass back no word at dem, nor nothing...

Yasmin: So how did you actually feel when you went for a job and they would say things like that?

Violet: Jus don’t pay it no mind, Dear. I just ignore everyting. We ignore everyting. (Gunaratnam, 2013, p. 62-63)

Violet’s stance at times of racist abuse was dissimulation and disengagement. A comportment distilled in her often-used cultural idiom of ‘paying no mind’ to what was happening. The extract also supports the criticisms of the speech act ‘Go home’ used in the Home Office’s Operation Vaken of 2013 that was felt to mimic and legitimise the crude racism of earlier British histories.

Towards the last months of her life, Violet would increasingly disappear from the present, staring into the middle distance and becoming less communicative. Such was the extent of her dissociation from her disintegrating body and the world around her that she died from a catastrophic hemorrhage from a large undiagnosed pelvic mass, the symptoms of which she seemed unable to convey to her carers. In trying to better understand Violet's life and death, I brought together ethnographic observations of her care and interviews with her and with her hospice home care nurse that suggested the many ways in which she silently endured different forms of pain and suffering. 'Violet wasn't always able to say what her problem was', Janice, her home care nurse told me. 'She really didn't make a fuss about the things that were causing her the most discomfort and that strangely as it seems, the cause of her death.' (Gunaratnam, 2013, p. 66). I held these different accounts of Violet in parallel with empirical materials from other research participants who had migrated at the same time to gain some insight into the social climate of 1960s racism and its possible on-going and varied effects. Yet, even with a scalar analysis it was impossible to disentangle the interlacing of bodily trauma and depletion caused by Violet's advancing breast cancer and the more mundane bracketing/acceptance of oppression and injury highlighted in the social suffering literature.

The ways in which disability and debilitation can conjoin with different types of exile and displacement adds to the methodological challenges that face scalar practices that are concerned with weathering. Self-negation and temporal displacement, for instance, have been underlying themes in examinations of how exile and its governance bear down on the mind and body. In a compelling essay, the anthropologist Michael Jackson (2002) draws from the radical empiricism of William James, to recognise flight as a subjective and objective reality for refugees. Flight, as

Jackson understands it, is characterised by ‘a panicked mode of consciousness in which a person is at the mercy of wild polar extremes – here and there, past and present, present and future, living and dead, immediate and imagined’ (p.101). In this existential churn, refugee subjectivity appears in Jackson’s work in stories of being socially dead, caught-up, detached, lost, disconnected from the present, dazed and stunned.

When a migration researcher begins to attend to the dynamic flows of disability, debility, weathering and social suffering, the inadequacy of language and narrative to experience is only a part of the problem of mediated representation. To recognise this multiplicity of forces requires working across, and bringing into lateral proximity, different biographical, social and historical coordinates, as Tiffany Page has suggested. Yet, because the debilitation of social suffering can lack symbolisation, and because disability can rearrange subjectivity, scalar analysis also entails reiterative speculation: an on-going too-ing and fro-ing between what is observed, what is known about the histories framing a life and an imagining of how a hurt self has been brought to live life in this way or that. Luciana Parisi (2012) describes a feature of the speculative method as one that ‘demands of thought to become felt, fact to become potential, imagination to supersede observation, object to affect method, method to become transformative of the object’ (p.242).

One way that I have incorporated speculative approaches into my research has been to turn to art and literature (we also used theatre and film in the MIC research). As Lata Mani (2018) observes, the distinctions between the form and genre of ‘expressive’ (fiction, poetry) and ‘didactic’ (argumentation, assertion, analysis) arts, hold different

relationships to experience. 'Through the expressive arts we *sense the making of* experience, its coming into being. The didactic arts help us *make sense of* experience, render it intelligible. The processes are distinct but not firmly separable'. (2018, emphasis in original).

I have found that the expressive arts are more receptive and hospitable to the ambiguities and ambivalences of the weathering of social suffering: how exilic bodies can bear and express the weight of living in climates of racialised hostility and debilitation. I will finish with an example of how I have used case stories that meld empirical and imaginative materials to frame and surface some of these complex experiences and alternative constellations of 'Go Home'.

### **Case Stories**

Case Stories is the name of my British Academy funded study on diasporic dying that ran between 2013-14 (see Case Stories, 2013). The resources that I developed included a short film 'Two Sighs', produced by the theatre of colour company, Tamasha. The film dramatises two stories and a poem that I scripted from my research (Gunaratnam, 2014b). In writing the stories and poem, I was mindful of the scalar approach of Saidiya Hartman's (1997) exploration of transatlantic slavery: '...rather than try to convey the routinized violence of slavery and its aftermath through invocations of the shocking and terrible,' Hartman writes, 'I have chosen to look elsewhere and consider those scenes in which terror can hardly be discerned.' The rationale of this turning towards the banal is to illuminate 'the terror of the mundane and quotidian rather than exploit the shocking spectacle' (p.4).

Some skepticism is required to accept the lines that Hartman draws between the quotidian and the spectacular, Fred Moten (2017) believes, pointing to how violence can also produce 'regulatory modes of response' (p. xi). What concerns Moten is how the invoking of the traumatic event/s can serve 'to preserve the appeal to the very idea of redress even after it is shown to be impossible' (p. xii). What Moten is alert to is, 'an irredeemable and incalculable suffering from which there is no decoupling since it has no boundary and can be individuated and possessed neither in time nor in space, whose commonplace formulations it therefore obliterates' (p. xiii).

The problem of the quest to discern and locate suffering as a means of recourse to some sort of justice is a real one. It is something that I tussled with in scripting *Two Sighs*. Rather than storying recognisably racist events, I choose to elicit what Moten terms the 'durational field' (p. xii) of the flows between disability, debility and social suffering that I have suggested is an integral part of how weathering can be experienced in diasporic illness. The poem 'Dust to Dust' in *Two Sighs* was inspired by an interview with Jamaican-born Morris, a Windrush-era migrant who came to London in 1969 with the intention of going back to Jamaica. He told me:

...A lot of people comes and ting like that. A lot of people just come an' work an' say that they will go back 'ome, spend five years. But after five years tings get difficult an' tings don't work the way you wish. So you spend more time and then disappointment come an' ting like that, so you stay behind, but you definite want to go 'ome.

I interviewed Morris in his small apartment in a high-rise council-owned tower block in southeast London, where he lived with his wife and two daughters. What was unusual about Morris was that compared to the other Caribbean-born people I had talked to, he said that he had never experienced racism. The hostility he faced, he told me, came from his Caribbean peers. And so he had kept his distance from them, believing they were jealous of him and took comfort in his religious beliefs. He tended to keep himself to himself and he wouldn't allow his two young daughters to play with other children on the multicultural housing estate where they lived. It was a sort of social quarantining and a preemptive response to the perceived threat of myriad hostilities of race, class and gender.

Morris was dying from lung cancer. He suspected that the cancer was caused by exposure to asbestos dust in his work as a builder. The construction industry is the sector with the highest incidence of lung cancer. 'In the UK alone it has been estimated that over 40% of the occupational cancer deaths and cancer registrations...are attributed to past exposure to asbestos and silica in this sector, mostly causing lung cancer and mesothelioma' (De Matteis *et al.*, 2017, pp. 3-4). Knowing that he was in the last stages of life, Morris said that he wanted to 'go 'ome' to be buried in Jamaica. There, his spirit would be 'free to fly above the mango and apple trees, the rivers and the sea'. Below are extracts from the poem *Dust to Dust*, performed in *Two Sighs* in Morris's Jamaican dialect:

...

I made mi living plastering. All week long.  
Always dress in suit an tie  
To go to di building site.  
Winter an summer.

Dat's how I come to catch dis sickness.  
Ole buildings.  
Plasterboard an' asbestos.  
I encounter it plenty,  
Tearing down ceilings.  
Inhaling, choking,  
Coughing up dust  
Spit, thick. Black like coal.

...

Not planning die over 'ere. Not me. Not ever.  
I want to go 'ome, bury in our land  
Where I 'appy. My spirit free  
to fly like bird, over di mango tree,  
Di happple tree.  
Di rivers, di sea.  
When di moon shine at night,  
Certain times of year,  
Can stan an look  
For miles.  
An miles.

To speculate about debilitation and social suffering in such circumstances—about what it might mean to live a confined life, to feel not able to breathe as you approach death, to yearn to be somewhere else—is to begin to try to piece together a referent for weathering out of the real, the barely there, and what is imagined. In other words, a researcher attuned to the weather must 'make believe'. I have taken this idea from Mariam Motamedi Fraser's (2012) richly textured reflection on sociology as an informed provocation of experience. Motamedi Fraser was writing about her archival research: on how a story called *Irradiant* came to be 'written by a tribesman from Lorestan in World War II occupied Iran' (p. 86). This was an era marked by violence, fear, rumours and paranoia, 'a period when many of the scales and perspectives by which realities are commonly constituted were purposely or inadvertently rendered inoperative' (pp. 93-4). So why make believe? Because sometimes people and

materials do not want to, or cannot be told *of* Motamedi Fraser believes, because ‘*of* is a place, a position, or a relation’, and ‘What if there were no ‘*of*’ through which to lure a tale?’ (p. 94).

The capacity to speculate about social suffering that is encoded, naturalised, scattered or withdrawn, luring what is alluded to in metaphors, imagery or gestures to the fore, is not a capacity that can rely on rationalism and science alone. Although speculation, as Parisi (2012) contends, must be empirically engaged. It is a form of scalar analysis that is altogether more risky: even while historicising and contextualising empirical materials, a researcher must try to remain open to manifold ambiguities, to *terra incognita* and the ‘incalculable suffering’ that I see as an integral part of weathering (Moten, 2017, p. xiii).

In *Dust to Dust*, you may have also noticed that there is a very different evocation of a ‘Go home’ narrative and of a ‘hostile environment’. Morris’s wish to ‘go ‘ome’, to be buried in Jamaica and the imagery of open spaces, trees and seas is a type of geopoetics and politics when we think of his living and working in different toxic environments. End of life plans and wishes for the dying migrants and refugees in my research could often be ambivalent like this. Some can be read as cultural prescriptions or new hybrid diasporic practices (see Gunaratnam, 2013). Others can be read as expressing the hurt of hostile environments and the ambivalence of belonging. Such ambiguities of meaning are not only an empirical problem.

Several care practitioners that I have interviewed have also picked up on layers of meaning in the end of life plans and wishes of migrants. Melanie, a white British



hospital nurse said that she was often unsure about what is being conveyed. Melanie had an inkling that social differences and her professional authority as a nurse affect what some of her patients tell her. She recounted the following story of a Jamaican patient who wanted to be buried in Jamaica:

...she [the patient] said 'when I'm buried in the ground and my spirit comes up I want to see the sunshine and I want to see familiar people, people who know and love me'. She was wanting to not offend me, I think. She said 'there's nothing wrong with this country, but it's not the same *warmth*' and it wasn't just the physical warmth of the sunshine she was talking about.

The themes in this extract have an uncanny resonance with the creole ballad 'Tropical death' by Grace Nichols, a Guyanese-born British poet. The poem, from the collection 'The Fat Black Woman's Poems' (1984) is written as a dialogue between the narrator/poet and the protagonist - the 'Fat Black Woman' - a figure whose bulk and substance does not allow an uninvolved and disembodied reading:

In the heart

of her mother's sweetbreast

In the shade

of the sun leaf's cool bless

In the bloom

of her people's bloodrest

the fat black woman want

a brilliant tropical death yes (p. 19)

Tropical Death begins with the lines, ‘The fat black woman want/a brilliant tropical death/not a cold sojourn/in some North Europe far/forlorn’ (p. 19). In the seemingly mundane talk about the weather, ambivalence emerges with the renewed ‘brilliance’ of a tropical death shining exuberant against the present North European ‘cold sojourn’. In the last lines of Tropical Death, a deeper past opens up that elsewhere in the collection recalls the catastrophes of slavery, the Middle Passage and the plantation. These coincident trails of suffering, loss and enforced silences are haunting, ruffling the surfaces of the present.

Long histories of weathering the debilitating affects of racialised hostility and violence are an under-investigated topic in migration studies. In showing how scalar analytic practices in my research can be receptive to the impact of weathering, it is important to make clear that the folding together of the expressive and didactic arts produces a different constellation of proof. In his discussion of Berger and Mohr’s genre-crossing book ‘A Seventh Man’ (1975/2010) on the Turkish *gastarbeiter* (‘guest workers’) in 1970s Germany, Howard Becker (2002) sees the diverse materials of the book as offering ‘existence proof’: ‘a showing that the thing we are talking about is possible.’ (p. 5). This is another aspect of scalar analysis that requires further exploration in its contributions to intersectional methodologies and praxes. Might the bringing together of different forms and genre as ‘existence proof’ be a part of alliance building? And not despite, but because of the very ambiguities between the racial, class, gender and disability related forces at play in weathering?

## References

- Back, L., Sinha, S. with Bryan, C., Baraku, V. & Yemba. M. (2017). *Migrant city*, London, UK and New York: Routledge.
- Becker, H. (2002). Visual evidence: A seventh man, the specified generalization, and the work of the reader, *Visual Studies*, 17, 3-11.
- Berger, J., & Mohr, J. (1975/2010). *A seventh man*. London, UK and New York: Verso.
- Bourdieu, P., Accardo, A., Balazs, G., Beaud, S., Bonvin, F., Bourdieu, E., Bourgois, P., Broccolichi, S., Champagne, P., Christin, R., Faguer, J.P., Garcia, S., Lenoir, R., Oeuvarard, F., Pialoux, M., Pinto, L., Podalydes, D., Sayad, A., Soulie, C., & Wacquant, L. (1999). *The weight of the world: Social suffering in contemporary society*, trans Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson 1st ed. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Case Stories. (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.case-stories.org/>
- Davies, W. (2018). Weaponising Paperwork. *London Review of Books*, 40, 13-14.
- De Genova, N. (2017). Introduction: The Borders of Europe and the European Question. In N. DeGenova (Ed.) *The Borders of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering* pp.1-36. Durham and London, UK: Duke University Press.
- De Matteis, A., Heederik, D., Burdorf, A., Colosio, C., Cullinan, P., Henneberger, P., Olsson, A., Raynal, A., Rooijackers, J., Santonen, T., Sastre, J., Schlünssen, V., van Tongeren, M., & Sigsgaard, T. (2017). Current and new challenges in occupational lung diseases, *European Respiratory Review*, 26, 1-15.
- De Noronha, L. (2018). The mobility of deservingness: Race, class and citizenship in the wake of the 'Windrush scandal', *The Disorder of Things*, 3 July 2018. Retrieved from <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2018/07/03/the-mobility-of->

[deservingness-race-class-and-citizenship-in-the-wake-of-the-windrush-scandal/](#)

Forster, K. (2016). Hate crimes soared by 41% after Brexit vote, official figures reveal, *The Independent*, 13 October 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/brexit-hate-crimes-racism-eu-referendum-vote-attacks-increase-police-figures-official-a7358866.html>

Gentleman, A. (2018a). Mother of Windrush citizen blames passport problems for his death, *The Guardian*, 18 April 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/apr/18/mother-of-windrush-citizen-blames-passport-problems-for-his-death>

Gentleman, A. (2018b). Windrush: Three people wrongly deported from UK have died, says official, *The Guardian*, 30 August 2018. Retrieved from [https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/aug/30/windrush-people-deported-from-uk-died-jamaica-foreign-minister?CMP=share\\_btn\\_fb](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/aug/30/windrush-people-deported-from-uk-died-jamaica-foreign-minister?CMP=share_btn_fb)

Geronimus, A. (1992). The weathering hypothesis and the health of African-American women and infants: evidence and speculations, *Ethnicity and Disease*, 2, 207–221.

Gunaratnam, Y. (2012). Learning to be affected: Social suffering and total pain at life's borders. *The Sociological Review*, 60, 108-123.

Gunaratnam, Y. (2013). *Death and the migrant: Bodies, borders, care*. London, UK: Bloomsbury

Gunaratnam, Y. (2014a). Morbid mixtures: Hybridity, pain and transnational dying, *Subjectivity*, 7, 74-91.

Gunaratnam, Y. (2014b). Two Sighs, *YouTube*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5CAPtOi4r8>

- Gunaratnam, Y. & Hamilton, C. (2017). Introduction: *The wherewithal of feminist methods*. *Feminist Review*, 115, 1-12.
- Hartman, S. (1997). *Scenes of subjection: Terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth century America*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Hill, A. (2017). Hostile environment the hardline home office policy tearing families apart, *The Guardian*, 28 November 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/28/hostile-environment-the-hardline-home-office-policy-tearing-families-apart>
- Jackson, M. (2002). *The politics of storytelling: Violence, transgression and intersubjectivity*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Jones, H. (2018). Windrush and go home: The whittling away of both rights and responsibility. *Mapping Immigration Controversy*, 20 April 2018. Retrieved from <https://mappingimmigrationcontroversy.com/2018/04/20/windrush-and-go-home-the-whittling-away-of-both-rights-and-responsibility/>
- Jones, H., Gunaratnam, Y., Bhattacharyya, G., Davies, W., Dhaliwal, S., Forkert, K., Jackson, E., & Saltus, R. (2017). *Go home? The politics of immigration controversies*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Kleinman, A., Das, V., & Lock, M. (Eds.). (1997). *Social suffering*. Berkeley and London, UK: University of California Press.
- Mahmood, S. (2012). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mani, L. (2018). We inter are: Identity politics & #MeToo. *Feminist Review Blog*. Retrieved from <https://femrev.wordpress.com/2018/09/10/we-inter-are-identity-politics-me-too/>

- Motamedi Fraser, M. (2012). *Once upon a problem*. *The Sociological Review*, 60, 84-107.
- Moten, F. (2017). *Black and blur*. Durham and London, UK: Duke University Press.
- Neimanis, A., & Hamilton, J. (2017). Weathering. *Feminist Review*, 118, 80-84.
- Nichols, G. (1984). *The fat black woman's poems*. London, UK: Virago.
- Page, T. (2017) Vulnerable writing as a feminist methodological practice. *Feminist Review*, 115, 13-29.
- Parisi, L. (2012). Speculation: A method of the unattainable. In C. Lury and N. Wakeford (Eds.) *Inventive methods*, pp.232-244. London: Routledge.
- Puar, J. (2017). *The right to maim: Debility, capacity, disability*. Durham and London, UK: Duke University Press.
- Quinn, B. (2018). Family of Windrush citizen walk out of inquest into his death. *The Guardian*, 28 August 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/aug/28/family-windrush-citizen-dexter-bristol-walk-out-inquest-death>
- Sedgwick, E. K. (2003). *Touching feeling affect, pedagogy, performativity*. Durham and London, UK: Duke University Press.
- Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Durham and London, UK: Duke University Press.
- Serhan, Y. (2018). When even legal residents face deportation. *The Atlantic*, 19 April 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/windrush-generation-uk-facing-deportation/558317/>
- Shilliam, R. (2017). Beware of those who use 'the people' to drive through Brexit. *The Policy Space*, 11 April 2017. Retrieved from

<https://www.thepolicyspace.com.au/2017/11/182-beware-of-those-who-use-the-people-to-drive-through-brexit>

- Southall Black Sisters. (2013). SBS opposes UKBA immigration raid in Southall, *Youtube*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxhNYT4jDL8>
- Tazzioli, M. (2016). The government of migrant mobs: Temporary divisible multiplicities in border zones. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 20, 473-490.
- Ulmer, G. (1994). *Heuretics: The logic of invention*. Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Wiegman, R. (2014). The times we're in: Queer feminist criticism and the reparative 'turn'. *Feminist Theory*, 15, 4-25.