

# 1 Global Refugees: Forced Migration, Diaspora and Belonging

MAGGIE O'NEILL

## Introduction

The Splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass (Adorno, 1978:50)

The above statement encourages us to focus upon what is ordinarily overlooked, the small scale, the minutiae of lived experiences. In focusing upon the small scale we can often reach a better understanding of the broader picture. For Adorno, it is only by trying to say the unsayable, the 'outside of language', the mimetic, the sensual, the non-conceptual that we can approach a 'politics' which undercuts identity thinking and criss crosses binary thinking and resists appropriation.

The research on which this paper is based sought to develop alternative forms of re-presenting and analysing the lived experiences of refugees and asylum seekers living in Nottingham and London. The research was conducted between 1998 and 2002 with the participation of refugees and asylum seekers from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Afghanistan. The participants were the co-creators of the research. The research was contextualised within the Arts Council's concept of cultural diversity and was premised upon the vital role of the Arts in socio-cultural regeneration.

This paper explores renewed methodologies for writing/doing ethnography in the 21st century by developing hybrid texts, by drawing upon the inter-relation/inter-textuality between art (the 'outside of language') and ethnography - as ethno-mimesis (see O'Neill, 2001). The research discussed in this paper was conducted in participation with two community associations, the 'Bosnia- Herzegovina Association' in the East Midlands and 'The Afghan Youth Association' in London. Additionally we worked with two community based arts organisation, 'City Arts' and 'Exiled Writers Ink!' Our project draws upon processes of participatory action research (PAR) and participatory arts (PA) to produce critical theory in practice/ praxis. Praxis is understood as purposeful knowledge within the context of the need to raise awareness of the lived experiences of refugees and asylum seekers and to challenge myths and stereotypes. PAR/PA is intentionally action-oriented, performative and progressive (O'Neill et al., 2001). Our project is potentially regressive in that

it may facilitate the transformation of pain into enjoyment, where suffering can simply be consumed or enjoyed and something of its horror is removed. However, the research does not simply memorialise the testimonies of the participants but through re-telling, re-writing, re-constructing and re-imagining the loss, displacement and exile faced by the people involved; and in re-presenting their stories or testimonies through artforms, processes of regeneration and re-construction emerge and act as a spur to the processes of community development in the East Midlands (with the Bosnia-Herzegovina Association) and in London (with The Afghan Youth Association). Challenging and resisting dominant images and stereotypes of 'refugees' and 'asylum seekers' documented through the mass media can also serve to raise awareness, educate and empower individuals and groups.

The life history interviews with the participants in the research throw up a number of major themes: their lives before the war or sudden transformation in their status; through the war/upheaval and change in status; and finally living in the UK feeling safe and building communities.

The majority of the Bosnians were living their lives as Bosnian Muslims in or near to Banja Luka when war broke out in Bosnia. They arrived in Britain mostly as programme refugees from Red Cross camps in Croatia. The Afghan participants were representative of three successive waves of Afghan migration to the UK following: the Soviet take over, the Soviet retreat; and most recently those fleeing Taliban control.

The Bosnians illustrated their life story interviews with precious photographs and we agreed to re-present their life histories through photography. City Arts were commissioned to work with the participants to facilitate the transformation of lived experience into visual photographic form. The Afghan interviews were incredibly poetic and a creative writing workshop format was suggested and agreed by participants. Exiled Writers Ink were commissioned to work with the Afghan participants. The outcomes of the research included very powerful and moving re-presentations that have received great critical feedback and support from audiences in the East and West Midlands and in London. The participants were facilitated to speak for themselves through the medium of visual ethnography and poetics.

## **Methodology**

The research combined socio-cultural research (life history interviews) and the re-presentation of the life history narratives in artforms (photography, poetry, and creative-writing) as ethno-mimesis to produce alternative ways of re-presenting the lived experiences of refugees and asylum seekers. Re-presenting life-history research through artforms can serve to counter negative media

stereotypes and produce positive representations that speak of the rich cultural contributions refugees and asylum seekers bring to cities and communities.

There were four stages to the project:

1. Gathering socio-demographic information about the two communities. Developing a literature review.
2. Conducting in-depth interviews and focus group interviews with participants of both groups/sites (London and Nottingham) with co-researchers from each of the communities.
3. Developing arts workshops to re-present life experiences in artistic form with the help of City Arts and Exiled Writers Ink!
4. Develop a small scale touring exhibition and a report in collaboration with the participants.

The two community organisations received funds to enable their participation in the research. Indeed, funding from the AHRB went specifically to the two refugee associations, and the two arts organisations with a small University budget for research travel and subsistence.

Our collaborative work encouraged the inclusion of refugees and persons seeking asylum in participatory action research and moreover:

- supports and fosters democratic access to inclusion in participatory arts-based provision;
- supports the importance of arts in everyday life and the essential role of the arts in fostering community well being and community development;
- mobilises and reinforces skills, experience, self esteem and confidence.

Re-presenting social research through artforms can create multivocal, dialogical texts, and can make visible 'emotional structures and inner experiences' (Kuzmics, 1997:9) which may "move" audiences through what can be described as "sensuous knowing" or mimesis (Taussig, 1993). As a researcher, interpretive ethnography grounded in the stories of the co-creators of the research (participatory research) rooted in critical theory is my chosen method. This method privileges their voices and triangulates their voices with cultural texts re-presenting and imagining the "refugee experience" through 'feeling forms' (Witkin, 1978).

The point about such methodologies is that they deal with the contradictions of oppression and the utter complexity of our lived relations towards the close of the twentieth century - within the context of technologization, globalization - indeed within the context of what Paul

Piccone calls ‘the permanent crisis of the totally administered society’ (1993:3). Renewed methodologies such as ethno-mimesis can serve to:

- i) re-memorialise;
- ii) focus our attentions upon history and the unspeakable - genocide/refugee;
- iii) focus our attentions upon the transgressive acts, every day resistances and hope for the future;
- iv) focus our attentions upon the democratic processes and possibilities for citizenship, rights and freedom within the realm of relative unfreedom, marked by instrumental reason, and “postemotionalism” that exists in the West.

Theoretically, conceptually the project is situated in the tension between a modernist project of transformation through praxis and a postmodern project of hybridity, inter textuality and performative praxis. Hillis-Miller (1992) argues against binaries (as in the reversibility of the politicizing of art into the aestheticizing of politics) and argues for new forms of consolidation and solidarity which can develop into processes of inclusion and belonging. To illustrate, the work of Exiled Writers Ink! is one such example. Jennifer Langer, herself the daughter of Jewish asylum seekers to England, started a writers group through her work in FE colleges in London. The group were given funding for basic expenses by the Arts Council and the London Arts Board to take their Exiled Writers Roadshow around the country. The Roadshow is a powerful reminder of the cultural contribution asylum seekers make and has become a valuable and inspirational resource and contribution by and for refugee communities. The work of Exiled Writers Ink! also helps bring important messages to the wider community that contradict very powerfully the damaging and stereotypical messages we receive from the press and can ‘interpret’ from some of the ‘official’ responses.

The role of the arts in processes of inclusion and community development is vital and I argue that a PAR as ethno-mimesis is a useful response.

### **Citizenship and Community: Diasporic Identities**

My work over the past twelve years has been rooted in participatory action research (working with groups and communities for change) inspired by the works of Orlando Fals Borda on PAR and exiled social theorists Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin alongside feminist theorists. Three key elements of theory (critical theory in practice), experience (ethnographic work) and praxis (purposeful knowledge) combine to explore experiences of exile, displacement and belonging. I introduce the concept of ‘ethno-mimesis’ to describe the production of poetic work and art forms as producing knowledge,

as sensuous knowing. Ethno-mimesis is the inter-relation of art, and ethnography - a renewed methodology for social science research embedded in critical theory, in critical thinking - "thinking otherwise" or using Adorno's term - "non-identity thinking".

Renewed methodologies that incorporate the voices and images of refugees and asylum seekers through civic research as participatory action research can not only serve to enlighten and raise our awareness of certain issues, but could help to produce critical texts that may help to mobilise for change. Ethno-mimesis seeks to speak in empathic ways with people, represented here through literary and visual texts in ways which counter postemotionalism, valorizing discourses and the reduction of the other - the stranger to a cipher of the oppressed, marginalized, exploited. Ethno-mimesis is founded upon mutual recognition.

Norman Denzin tells us that the new ethnographies can help to transform the 21<sup>st</sup> century because a text must do more than awaken moral sensibilities, it must move others and the self to action. The opening quotation 'the splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass' encourages us to focus upon what is ordinarily overlooked, the small scale, the minutiae of lived experience. In focusing upon the small scale we can often reach a better understanding of the broader picture. The quotation also encourages us to maintain a critical stance to concepts as ordinarily used, lest we take them for granted and slip into 'identity thinking'. It is a good exercise to keep a watchful eye on the concepts we use heavily. Diaspora is one such concept.

What do we mean by diaspora? Strictly speaking it means collective dispersal; and examples are the Irish migrants seeking employment and survival in Britain and America, the Jews fleeing Nazism, Asians post world war two seeking work; the forced migration of Ugandan Asian exiles, and the Somali, Rwandan, Vietnamese, Turkish Kurds, Bosnian Muslims (in the East Midlands these groups welcome Bosnian Serbs and Croats) and Kosovan Albanian asylum seekers and refugees. Refugee groups have organised collectively to form community organisations and, in the process have revitalised our urban landscapes, service sector, and economic, political and cultural sphere.

Discourses of forced migration combine with economic migration in the use of 'diaspora'. Exiles as well as economic migrants and people seeking to re-unite with families are captured in diasporic discourses. Avtah Brah asks whether diaspora is a descriptive category or whether it can be used analytically, and advocates 'Diaspora' as an interpretive frame for analysing the political, economic and cultural modalities of historically specific forms of migrancy - to include migrant, immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, and exile. Brah is especially interested in forms of identity and subjectivity in social relations and the way that exile, and the politics of location form what she calls a diasporic space, tinged with discourses of 'return'.

*The Bosnian in the East Midlands and Afghans in London: Past, Present and Future*

Here, abroad, nothing of that is left, we have been catapulted out of history, which is always the history of a specific area on the map, and we have to cope with, to use an expression of an exiled writer, 'the unbearable lightness of being'.

Czeslaw Millosz, *Joseph Koudelka*, 1-3

The experiences of exile, displacement and belonging are re-presented in photographic form and poetic form. The creative writing and photographs represent three key themes that emerged from the life stories of those involved in the research:

- i) experiences before the war/change of leadership - for example, dislocation marked by post-communist citizenship in "Yugoslavia" that re-constituted "citizenship" on a kinship or community basis, ie. for the Serb leader only Serbs were allowed "citizenship" and the protection of law. Afghans like Zarah who held high status roles under Soviet leadership were forced to leave jobs, their homes were looted and lives and families put at risk when the Taliban took over leadership - ultimately those who could pay agents to help them leave (and so survive) did so;
- ii) experiences during the war/upheaval - displaced and abstracted from history, citizenship, and the law - separated from families and friends - for the Bosnians living in refugee camps, and for some, concentration camps;
- iii) experiences of living in the UK – re-locating and re-building communities.

By re-telling, re-writing, re-constructing, re-imagining the loss, displacement and experiences of exile faced by the people involved, and by representing their stories or testimonies through artforms processes of regeneration and re-construction emerge, and act as a spur to community development.

### **Experiences of Manija ...**

*Memories (Re-Printed from Exhibition Booklet)*

Memories are all I have got left of my war torn country. Beautiful memories. Luckily my childhood was not spent running from valley to valley for survival.

On the contrary to what most may believe I had a very civilised, normal and happy 13 years in Afghanistan.

I never remember being bored, there was always something to do or something to look forward to.

Winter was our school holidays. My god we looked forward to the first snow. You could almost feel it the night before, that when you wake up it will be there. I would wake up really early in the morning trying to beat my brother and sister to it. To be able to be the first to report that the delicate flakes of snow has one more time changed the landscape.

A comparison between the two worlds ...

If I could take away one thing from those days it is the constant longing of coming to the West. Where there were bright lights.

Being here and seeing it all and living in the fast life, I miss and long for what I had. The simplicity. The innocence.

Ethno-mimetic texts seek to present the inter-relationship and the mediation between the “micrology” of lived experience and broader structures of power, domination and violence within the context of postmodern times, de-traditionalization, and what Stejpan Mestrovic (1997) calls “postemotionalism” and compassion fatigue. In postemotional society a ‘new hybrid of intellectualized, mechanical, mass produced emotions has appeared on the world scene.’(26) Following Hannah Arendt (1970) and Keith Tester (1992) the inter-relation between thinking, feeling and doing is crucial to counter post-emotionalism in the administered society. Moreover, the interplay between critical thought, artistic praxis, and social action is one source of resistance to and transformation of the disempowering and reductive social and psychic processes that Mestrovic (1997) speaks about so clearly in his work.

At the point of reception into the UK, asylum seekers abstract from history but then history returns as the history of the culturally repressed. Cultural repression comes out in the troubles they experience in the UK. The 1999 and 2002 Asylum Acts instantiate in law a rational individualist diaspora. They are instrumental thinking in operation. They serve to engender a “culture of disbelief” towards asylum seekers - it is very difficult to prove asylum status and one must claim asylum at the point of arrival since January 8<sup>th</sup> 2003 to avoid being made destitute and classified as illegal.

For example, the British Government may now prepare removal documents and deportation orders prior to the decision on an asylum claim. An extension

of carriers liability has been introduced to include fines of £2,000 per head imposed on any international carrier - airline or shipping company - for every passenger coming in without valid documents. This covers all road, rail, sea and air services; and includes a new civil penalty aimed at any carrier bringing “clandestine entrants” into the country; again £2000 per illegal immigrant is levied and the impounding of vehicles until fines are paid. The Act extends criminal offences which cover trying to enter or remain in the UK using “deception” to include asylum seekers and their representatives who “knowingly” make false statements on their behalf.

Asylum seekers can now be sent back to a third “safe” country if they travelled through it to reach the UK. Female asylum seekers face further problems as the UN conventions are based upon a masculinist state and legal system that provide no flexibility towards the particular experiences and needs of female asylum seekers (see Crowley, 2001).

The State wants individual tourists to enter Britain - not families dispersed and separated - not families, not communities, not “Others.” For those seeking asylum their post-kinship diaspora - archaic depths loss of kinship, loss of history, loss of politics - combines with the experience of cultural repression. Concepts of what constitutes “citizenship” and “community” can be explored through patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

The British government appears to see the “asylum issue” first and foremost in terms of firm and tough responses that will deter potential asylum seekers rather than as a human rights issue. Asylum seekers are objectified, faceless, and nameless and in most of the media coverage on the issue are represented as a scourge on the economy, and the health service. In a memo by Tony Blair leaked to the press he wrote ‘We are perceived to be soft ... We need to be highlighting removals,’ and a later memo read: ‘We do need to be seen to care; and to act.’ (Natasha Walter, *Independent Newspaper*, 31<sup>st</sup> July 2000).

In 1999 Kushner and Knox stated that Britain is ‘becoming a country committed to asylum without the possibility of entry’ and of being a ‘haven for the oppressed without the presence of refugees’ (1999:417). As “outsiders” asylum seekers have few rights. Denied citizenship, they have to cope with racism, poor living conditions, poverty, the problems of communicating in a new language (for some) as well as the sorrow and pain that is a part of the experience of seeking exile.

One aspect of this pain is the loss of kinship. A woman participant from the East Midlands said:

With every war you can only expect the worse. Every war is bringing only unhappiness, killing, destroying, dead innocent people ... All the families are separated, not one family is living together now. ... but now we are not longing for what we had in the past, possessions, houses and belongings. We are longing now for the families that are now in three or four different countries.



Renewed methodologies for social research drawing upon PAR as ethno-mimesis seek to understand, express and re-imagine the complexity of loss, longing, exile, and re-construction, renewal through a combination of: life history work; re-imagining through artistic forms; and community development. This is a dialectical/constellational project rather than one that deals in binaries. Hillis Miller (1992) describes this process well when he argues against binaries as in the reversibility of the politicizing of art into the aestheticizing of politics; and for a cultural studies that promotes the performative over the merely theoretical (1992:16). Arguing for new forms of consolidation and solidarity, Hillis Miller, like Drucilla Cornell, Juliet Flower Macannel, Shierry Nichol森, John Berger, Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin look to art and aesthetics as one means to re-imagine and renew our social worlds.

**Don't Ask Me Why?**

*Zahra Ashaq (re-printed from the exhibition booklet)*

Don't ask me why you are hungry  
When I have no food to give you  
Don't ask me why you are cold  
When I have no warmth to give you  
Don't ask me why you are ill  
When I have no medicine for you  
Don't ask me why they fight  
I am not fighting  
Don't ask me why they hate us  
I am beginning to hate them too  
Don't look at me in despair  
When I am as desperate as you  
Don't ask me why I no longer hope  
Soon you will have no hope too  
And when you died, don't ask me why  
I cannot save myself and I cannot save you  
Don't ask me why!  
I have not started this bloody war  
This war I have not won  
And this war I have always lost

Evoking Adorno's concept of the "new" in *Aesthetic Theory* and Benjamin's "*Jetztzeit*" Hillis Miller (1992) illustrates 'how works of art bring something new into the world rather than reflecting something already there.

This something new is constitutive rather than being merely representational or, on the other hand, a revelation of something already there but hidden. Works of art make culture. Each work makes different the culture it enters' (1992:151). In relation to this focus upon the "new", for Shierry Nicholse (1997, 1999) the importance of drawing upon Adorno today is his focus on the role of the subject and subjective experience, particularly the imaginary and imagination. As I have argued elsewhere (see O'Neill, 1999) the usefulness of Adorno's oeuvre is that his work gives voice to the critical, moral, creative potential of non-identity thinking, *Kulturkritik*, and the social role of art in dialectical tension with the role of subjective experience, within the context of a social world marked by identity thinking and instrumental reason. The exemplars of instrumental reason and identity thinking are none more obvious than in the psychic and social processes that led to war in Bosnia and the emergence of the Taliban. They are also present in the British government's response to asylum seekers enshrined in the 1999 and 2002 Asylum and Immigration Acts.

### **In the Name of Kabul**

*Berang Kohdamani*

*Translated by Suhaila Ismat and Jennifer Langer (Re-printed from exhibition booklet)*

My presence is here but  
My heart is in the alley-ways of Kabul  
My tongue utters its name  
My lips sing a song of Kabul  
The trees are shrouded in inky-blue,  
Years, months, weeks, days, mourning Kabul  
Oh traveller! Traverse my town silently  
For in mourning is Kabul  
He who is cognisant with its streets, its palaces  
Murmurs 'Where am I?' Kabul  
Oh God, you who are both benevolent and wrathful,  
Your munificence is disposed elsewhere  
Your anger is vented on Kabul  
Mother of Rostam undeserving of this cruelty  
Undeserving of this affliction, Kabul  
It complains, screams, shouts, this was not preordained.  
Dark days, dark times  
Sombre days, the destiny and misery of Kabul  
Only the plant of sadness grows in the deserts of its  
memories  
Mourning is the morning of Kabul, sadness is the night

of Kabul  
All adventures are with beginning and end  
An adventure without conclusion is Kabul  
The Hand of God must surely intervene  
The hand of Satan powerless to relieve the agony of  
Kabul  
The living are miserable and wretched  
The sorrowless are the deceased of Kabul  
Died before their time, without healer, without remedy  
The sick children and orphans of Kabul  
It should be released from destruction and annihilation  
My permanence, your permanence, is the permanence of  
Kabul  
At dawn, the water-seller carries his empty goat-skin  
He dreams of water, the water-seller of Kabul.  
From annihilation, liberate Kabul  
Let its citizens survive.  
If I live out all my days, so too surely will Kabul.  
The yellow leaves of the tall and gracious poplar  
Rise up - a hand praying for Kabul.  
Years, months, weeks of destruction How can you  
destroy it?  
From the dawn of time, God was omnipresent in Kabul.  
As tyrants Yazed and his followers spill the blood of  
innocents  
Oh Hassan, oh Hassan, is this the Karbala of Kabul?  
The Taliban surged forth, broke down the gateways of  
knowledge, the windows of learning  
They who are illiterate, now become the spiritual  
teachers of Kabul.  
We are plunged into the abyss of the Stone Age  
The painters of vanity now emerged as leaders of  
Kabul.  
Dah Afghanan transformed into the abode of strangers  
The age is sliding relentlessly backwards, these are  
dark days for Kabul.  
Dahsavaz now the grazing land of primitive beings  
The advantaged are the heathens of Kabul.  
In Zandabanan every second the keepers of life await  
death

The research that is documented here seeks to facilitate artforms which speak of the complexity of diversity and cultural heritage in our communities

as a key element in processes of social inclusion, and regeneration through cultural citizenship. The concept of citizenship used is that defined by Jan Pakulski (1977). Cultural citizenship is: the right or presence and visibility (as opposed to marginalisation), the right to dignifying representation (rather than stigmatisation), and the right to identity and maintenance of lifestyle (instead of assimilation to the dominant culture). Denied actual citizenship, asylum seekers deserve the respect, dignity and rights to identity and maintenance of lifestyle mediated by soci-cultural structures and processes through the major institutions and organisations that make up “society” - especially the law, education, health, welfare services, and the media.

Needless to say, the identity of “refugee” or “asylum seeker” is problematic within the context of dislocation and attempts at re-location in a climate of “disbelief”. It shifts as Kushner and Knox (1999) document from proud and self-sufficient - to shameful and a crime - it represents failure. “Catapulted out of history”, it is very difficult to feel “at home” in the new world. Finding new rhythms in time and space, quelling the anxiety of the unfamiliar and the loss of orientation takes time.

### **Who am I?**

*Abdul Karim Atife (re-printed from exhibition booklet)*

Am I the one whose countries' history is celebrated for her knights.  
Or am I the one whose country has opened her arms to the darkest rulers.  
Am I Razia the Queen who conquered and ruled the continents.  
Or am I the one whose people have lost their courage and hope.  
Am I the one whose art and science bemused the East and West.  
Or am I the one who lacks a place to run to survive.  
Am I the one renowned for her hospitality and culture  
Or am I the one who is migrating for a handful of food.  
Am I the one whose influence stretched from Delhi to Baghdad.  
Or am I the one whom the students of civilisation have enchained  
Am I the one who two thousand years ago created the masterpieces of all time  
Or am I the one who destroyed them in the name of religion.  
Or am I the one who burnt them in the disgrace of idiocy.  
God please do not let this difference wound my identity.  
Give me the strength to honour my distinctiveness and individuality.

The Bosnians and Afghans achieve a sense of belonging in part in the context of a post-kinship diaspora by developing and building a community association in mutual recognition with the wider community(ies) they live alongside. The right to presence and visibility is marked by the sharing of the cultural traditions of food, music and dancing (we successfully bid for some funds to hold a cultural festival to celebrate Eid, inviting the wider

communities living locally to attend). The right to dignifying representation is evident in the newsletter that the association creates and the promoting of the traditional folk dancing and folk music. The groups perform in civic events and the folk group leader teaches dance and runs workshops in local schools. The right to identity and maintenance of lifestyle is important within the context of being included, recognised and respected by the wider multi-ethnic community. The community association provides an anchor, a place for regular fortnightly meetings on “club” afternoons. The Chair of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Association said:

We have our meetings ... we share conversation, thoughts and feelings ... it means a lot ... we can relax from everything ... we are still under pressure and always will be from what happened ... we can never forget what happened and when we talk amongst ourselves ... no one can understand what we went through ... and talking to others who understand ... it is good to have someone to share ... it is easier to cope.

The evidence from history, from experience, is that refugee groups re-vitalise our cities, arts, culture, economy and polity. In re-imagining and renewing the social order along democratic principles, the key themes of our collaboration include: the development of participatory action research and processes of community development, the vital role of the arts in social regeneration/social inclusion/building communities, the role of creative inclusion in facilitating spaces for the voices of marginalised peoples, and the importance of taking a “grass roots” approach to facilitating cultural citizenship.

Drucilla Cornell draws on Stuart Hall to describe cultural identity as a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being,” belonging to the future as much as to the past and subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power. And, she tells us ‘far from being grounded in mere recovery of the past, which is waiting to be found and will secure our sense of our selves in eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past’ (2000:55). These narratives of the past are situated within a broader historical story.

Genocide involves classifying or categorising a group, and is enacted through a ‘categorical killing’ (Bauman, 1995:203). The victims are killed not for what they have done, but for the group they belong to. They have no “selves,” their identity is equated with, as Bauman states, disease; they are guilty of being “identified”. One contributor illustrates this point as follows:

Where I used to live most of the people were Muslim ... even though it was multi-ethnic ... in the former Yugoslavia you didn’t really know who was who ... then they started ethnic cleansing ... and they started to bomb the village ... and after two days because the Serbs had bases all around the people couldn’t go anywhere ... they couldn’t run away ... women and children died ... they were just firing on

people and they didn't have anywhere to run ... the people who survived were taken to the concentration camps, Omarska, Trnopolje, and Kerater.

Listening to the voices of peoples seeking asylum encourages us to engage with ethics, with people as similar to our "selves", within a moral order and conscience based on thinking and feeling and compassion - on mutual recognition. Thus, precluding the possibility of objectifying, classifying and categorising as faceless, nameless, less than our "selves," and may inspire praxis instead of adopting a "bystander" role. The worry is that during the 21st century there will be an increase not decrease in war, crimes against human rights, breakdown of law, justice and protection of peoples.

The life history interviews with the participants in the research throw up a number of major themes: the pain and suffering of dislocation from identity, society and citizenship; abstracted from the law *unheimlich* living in concentration camps and/or then red cross camps/waiting to be re-located, and finally processes of re-location in the UK; and building communities.

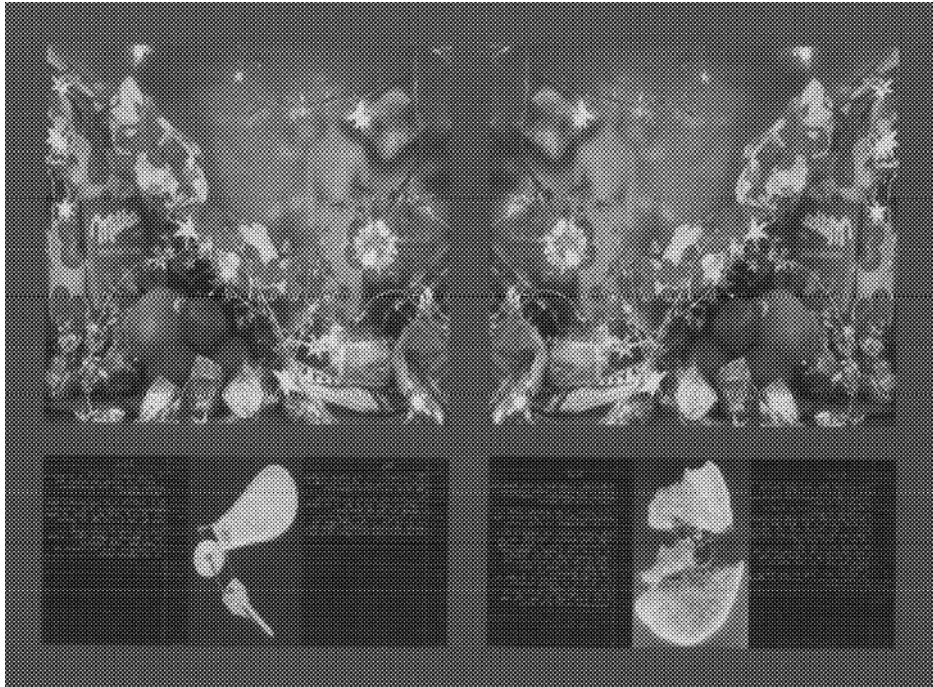
I think everyone suffered so much and it was so hard to watch, after all family by family were leaving slowly. Some people were leaving; some were disappearing. Every day we had an opportunity to see funerals. There were funerals in a day that we saw and a few that we didn't see. We as a Muslim people we couldn't even go outside much ... In the part where we lived it was very difficult to live because every day we were expecting only the worse and also whose turn it was that day ...

My neighbours next door, they left their hot lunch on the table and Serbs came and sat down to eat their lunch. My neighbours had to leave without anything, they were even laughing at them and teasing them that lunch was delicious. This family was, the man was 81 years old and his wife was 70 something. That was terrible. They got out of their home and they just sat on the street. They didn't have anywhere to go to. In the end they ended up together with everyone else in the field where camp was made with nylon tent. Some people didn't even make it to the camp, we don't even know where they are. I just hope that no one would have to go through that any more

### **Diasporic Voices: Finding Rhythms of Space and Time and Building Communities**

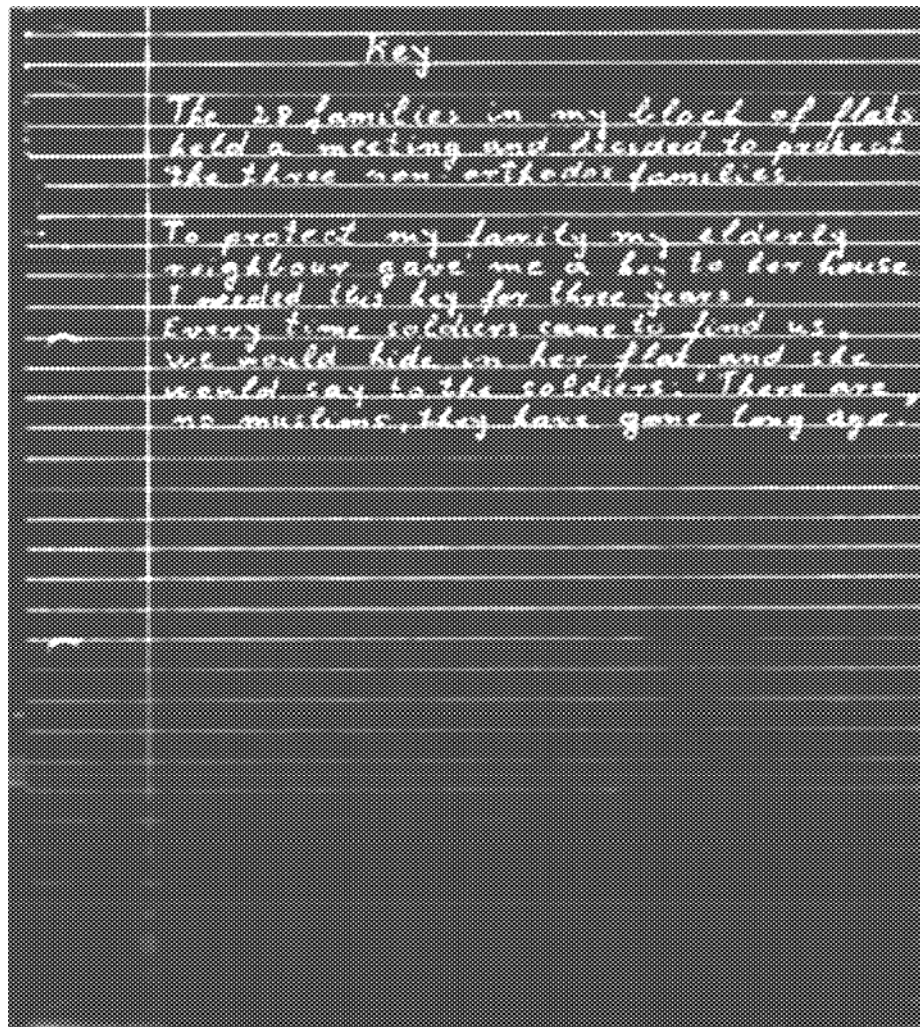
We just want to show to English people that we have our traditions, education and culture and give them a chance to see us in a different way and they can get to know us better. I think that they can learn that we are friendly people and nice nation and that war is not the only way to remember us. (Fahira East Midlands)

The image below was developed by Fahira over a period of seven weeks<sup>1</sup>. The image was developed as an “installation” a box of “goodies” on the theme of “good neighbour” and digitally photographed. The “bread” was made by the artist and photographed along with the “keys”. Both are symbolic of a life saved and a humanity greater than the experiences of pain, suffering and the outcomes of war. This re-presentation also challenges the binaries of Serb and Muslim; self and Other thus transgressing the process of labeling, objectification and de-humanization that emerges as a process and product of instrumental reason, war, and genocide in particular.



---

<sup>1</sup> First printed in ‘Global Refugees: (Human) Rights, Citizenship and Imagining Communities’, in Cheng, S. *Law Justice and Power: between reason and will*, California, Stanford University Press



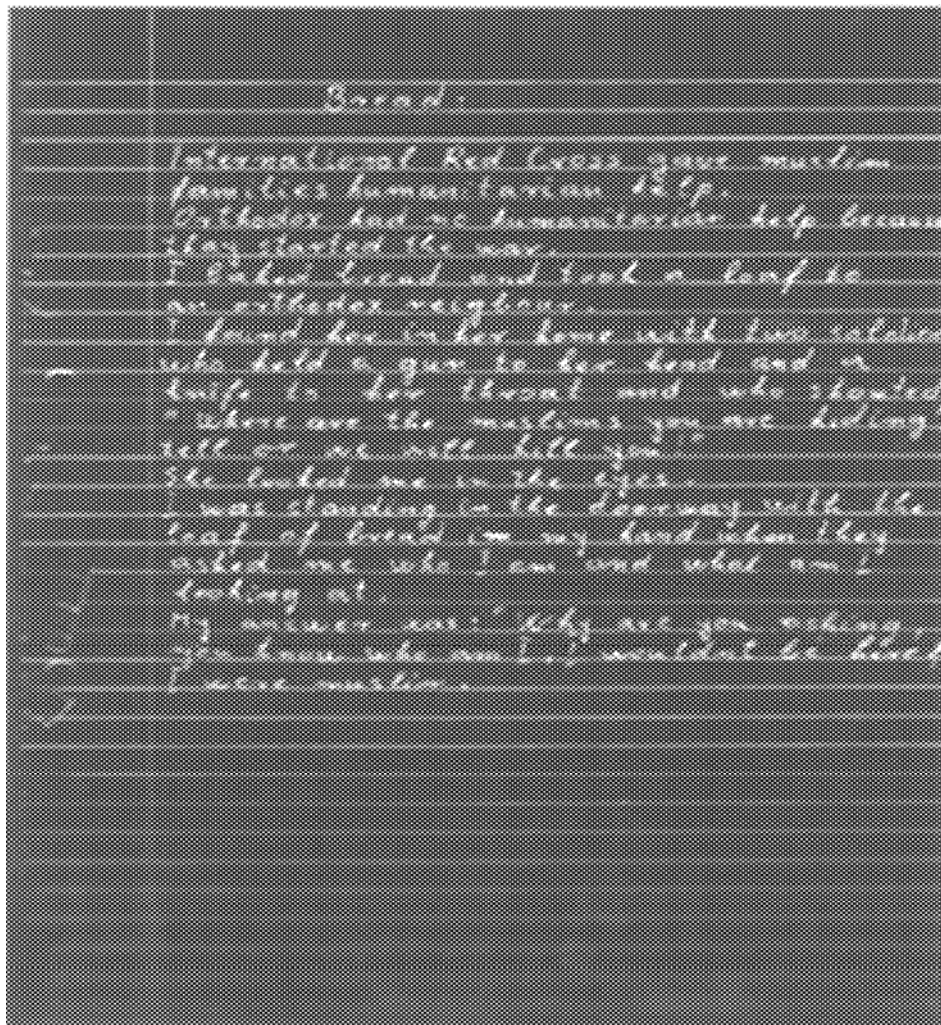
**Key**

The 28 families in my block of flats held a meeting and decided to protect the three non-orthodox families.

To protect my family my elderly neighbour gave me a key to her house I needed this for three year.

Every time soldiers came to find us, we would hide in her flat and she would say to the soldiers: "There are no muslims, they have gone long ago."





### **Bread**

International red cross gave muslim families humanitarian help.  
orthodox had no humanitarian help because they started the war.  
I baked bread and took a loaf to an orthodox neighbour.  
I found her in her home with two soldiers who held a gun to her head and a knife to her throat and who shouted "where are the muslims you are hiding,  
"where are the muslims you are hiding,

tell or we will kill you!"  
She looked me in the eyes.  
I was standing in the doorway with the  
loaf of bread in my hand when they  
asked me who I am and what am I  
looking at.  
My answer was: "Why are you asking,  
you know who am I. I wouldn't be here if  
I were muslim"

### **Conclusion**

The university has a central role in challenging and changing instrumental reason, and I am in full agreement with both Hillis Miller and Zygmunt Bauman on the subject. Hillis Miller (1992) sees the university as an instrument of power - 'it is political through and through' (see 18-19) and furthermore, the 'elaboration of questions of responsibility and justice is a major task of cultural studies today'(54). Bauman has argued for the emancipatory role of Sociology and the sociologist as an active agent in societal transformation through working with; not legislating on or for. PAR as ethno-mimesis, is, I would argue, a suitable response to both Hillis Miller and Bauman. PAR provides a renewed focus upon the role and purpose of academic involvement in the public sphere, especially in relation to facilitating processes of social inclusion and re-generation with and for the communities involved in the research. The impact of this research upon social policy (via the inclusion of the stereotypical "subjects" of research usually seen as "outsiders" or "outlaws") may appear to be small scale but has much wider repercussions in terms of the impact upon the groups and wider communities involved. For example PAR promotes: individuals/groups self esteem; facilitates the development of skills, empowerment, and the ownership of a stake in creating change, in creating praxis (see Fals Borda, 1988).

Bruno Bettelheim's experiences in the camps (1981) taught him that he 'had gone much too far in believing that only changes in man could create changes in society. I had to accept that the environment could, as it were, turn personality upside down, and not just the small child, but in the mature adult too (1981:15). He began to see that 'soon how a man acts can alter what he is. Those who stood up well in the camps became better men, those who acted badly soon became bad men' (1981:16). Bettelheim made a very important point in his account and analysis of the consequences of living under extreme fear and terror. The external symptoms of neurosis and psychotic breakdown (rooted in the inner difficulties of man) reflect back the nature of society, showing up 'what ails all of us in some measure at present, and warn us of

things to come ... they can also inform us about which forces an age looks to for solving the difficulties it is failing to master' (1981:52).

We must therefore, address psychic processes and social processes in trying to understand the global refugee crisis. Moreover, in trying to find ways of caring for, respecting and supporting the needs of internally and externally displaced peoples, we must actively seek ways of preventing civil unrest, conflict, and war. Hence the vital importance placed in this text upon the inter-relationship between what Bauman (1995) calls autonomous individuality and collective responsibility.

The sharing of collective responsibilities is a moral imperative in current times. Clearly there is an urgent need to develop interventionary strategies based upon collective responsibility and what Benhabib (1992) has called a 'civic culture of public participation and the moral quality of enlarged thought' (1992:140) in response to what has been called the global refugee crisis.

How can interpretive research and ethno-mimesis address this?

The experiences of the people concerned must be acknowledged, listened to and advocacy networks developed to operationalize their voices through participatory action research. Recovering and re-telling people's subjectivities, lives and experiences is central to attempts to better understand our social worlds with a view to transforming these worlds. Such work reveals the resistances, strengths, humour of people seeking asylum as well as knowledge and better understanding of the legitimation and rationalisation of Power, Domination and Oppression Re-presenting lived experience through PAR Drawing upon as ethno-mimesis, can help to illuminate the necessary mediation of autonomous individuality and collective responsibility involved in performative praxis. Shierry NicholSEN's work the photographs presented here have the capacity to arouse our compassion whilst not letting us forget that what we are seeing is socially constructed meaning. Through re-presenting the "unsayable" the images help to "pierce us", bringing us into contact with reality in ways that we cannot forget. Ways that counter the "postemotionalism" of contemporary "me" dominated society that Mestrovic details so carefully in his work.

The civic role of the university is a key factor as is the role of academics and social researchers as interpreters and facilitators within the context of an institutional organization (Universities both old and new) that has a degree of status and power in society as well as access to channels of communication and audiences able to influence social policy through the combination of the theoretical and the performative. The work on which this paper is based envisions/imagines a renewed social sphere for asylum seekers and refugees as citizens of Europe with our eyes firmly fixed upon the "becoming" of equality, freedom and democracy, through processes of cultural citizenship and mutual recognition in the spheres of polity, economy and culture.

## Notes

1. This chapter draws upon work published in O'Neill (2004) and O'Neill and Tobolewska (2002) funded by the AHRB.
2. The poetic and photographic work were developed by the participants in workshops run by Exiled Writers Ink and the City Arts Nottingham working in partnership with Maggie on 'Global Refugees: exile, displacement and belonging' a research project funded by the AHRB. Thanks to the Watermans Multi-Media Centre, Maggy Milner, Karen Fraser, Jennifer Langer, Fahira Hasedic, Suhaila Ismat, Anna Musgrave and the two arts organisations - City Arts and Exiled Writers Ink for their involvement in the development and support of this work.

## References

- Adorno, T.W. (1978) *Minima Moralia: reflections from a damaged life*, translated by E.F.N Jephcott, London and New York, Verso.
- Arendt, H. (1970) *On Violence*, New York, Harcourt Brace and Co.
- Bauman, Z. (1995) *Life in Fragments: essays on postmodern morality*, London, Sage.
- Benhabib, S. (1992) *Situating the Self*, Cambridge, Polity.
- Bettleheim, B. (1981) *The Informed Heart: a study of the psychological consequences of living under extreme fear and terror*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.
- Brah, A. (1999) *Cartographies of the Diaspora: contesting identities*, London and New York, Routledge.
- Fals Borda, O. (1988) *Knowledge and People's Power*, New York, New Horizons press.
- Hillis-Miller, J. (1992) *Illustration*, London, Reaktion Books.
- Kushner, T. and Knox, K. (1999) *Refugees In An Age Of Genocide*, Frank Cass, London.
- Kusmics, H. (1997) 'State Formation, economic development and civilisation in north western and central Europe' *Geschichte und Gegenwart* 16 (2), 80-91.
- Langer, J. (ed) (1997) *The Bend in the Road: Refugees Writing*, Nottingham, Five Leaves Press.
- Mestrovic, S. (1997) *Postemotional Society*, London, Sage.
- Milosz, C. (1988), in Koudelka, J. *Exiles*, London, Thams and Hudson.
- Nicholsen, S. (1997) *Exact Imagination. Late Work On Adorno's Aesthetics*, Cambridge Mass. and London, MIT press.

- Nicholsen, S. (1999) Adorno, Benjamin and the Aura: an aesthetics for photography in O'Neill, M., *Adorno, Culture and feminism*, London, Sage.
- O'Neill, M. (2001) *Prostitution and Feminism: towards a politics of feeling*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- O'Neill M. et al. (2001) 'Renewed Methodologies for Social Research: ethno-mimesis as performative praxis', in *Sociological Review*, February 2002.
- O'Neill, M. and Tobolewska, B. (2002) 'Renewing Methodologies for Socio-Cultural Research: Global Refugees, ethno-Mimesis and the Transformative Role of Art' in Rugg, J. and Hinchcliffe, D. (eds) *Advances in art and Urban Futures Volume 2: Recoveries and Reclamations*, Bristol, UK and Portland, Or, USA, Intellect Books.
- Pakulski, J. (1977) 'Cultural Citizenship', *Citizenship Studies*, 1, pp.73-86.
- Piccone, P. (1993) 'Beyond Pseudo-Culture? Reconstitution Fundamental Political Concepts', in *Telos*, No.95, Spring 1993.
- Taussig, M. (1993) *Mimesis and Alterity*, London, Routledge.
- Tester, K. (1992) *The Inhuman Condition*, London, Routledge.
- Witkin, R. (1978) *The Intelligence of Feeling*, London, Heineman.
- Witkin, R. (1995) *The Social Structure of Art*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

