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Walking, sensing, belonging: ethno-mimesis as performative praxis

MAGGIE O'NEILL and PHIL HUBBARD

This article outlines a research project that used participatory action research (PAR) and arts practice (ethno-mimesis) to explore the senses of belonging negotiated by asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants in the English East Midlands. At the core of this project was a walking event in which refugees and new arrivals guided long-term residents through the city, tracing an imaginary and real journey that linked the here and now with the then and there. Reflecting on the ways that walking evokes and invokes, this article suggests that while walking should not be privileged as a way of knowing, it has certain sensate, embodied, relational and collective attributes which rendered it particularly useful as a means of exploring the importance of being-in-place among a group whose lives are often depicted as markedly transnational.

INTRODUCTION

Questions of migration (whether free or enforced) and belonging remain intrinsic to a wide variety of debates in the social sciences and humanities, not least in a world where there is widespread anxiety about the permeability of the boundaries of the nation-state. One manifestation of such anxiety in what has been labelled 'Fortress Europe' is the panoply of policies designed to either assimilate or exclude the ethnic Other. Foremost here have been those immigration policies that have fundamentally changed the right to refuge from persecution, seeking to repel those who are non-economically useful to host nations unless they can prove incontrovertibly that they are genuine refugees, and not 'bogus'.¹ For many of those seeking asylum, the experience of the new asylum model is hence one of being cast into the position of a non-citizen suspended outside international space and time, being assumed to be a potential threat to the nation.

The experience of seeking asylum in a new nation is often one that is bewildering, frustrating, alienating and ultimately damaging to both mental and physical health (Martin 2006; JRCT 2007). Moreover, in the UK, and many other nations besides, this process can be drawn out over a number of years; asylum seekers are unable to work whilst waiting for their cases to be heard. For those whose cases are refused and who do not sign up to voluntarily return, destitution can be a normal state of affairs. Yet even those granted Humanitarian Protection or Leave to Remain² continue to be suspended between the nations from which they originate and their new hosts, unable to safely return, yet facing varying degrees of public antipathy fuelled by harmful media images linking refugee status with terrorist atrocity, the corrosion of national values and inevitable discourses blaming immigrants for placing a burden on specific communities (Gabrielatos 2006; O'Neill and Harindranath 2006; Tyler 2006; Saeed 2007).

Research on the asylum-migration nexus has, for good reason, tended to focus on basic needs – issues of service need, housing, education and health. Questions of ontological security, emotional well-being, and senses of belonging and emplacement have been less seldom explored, with rare exceptions noting the importance of mobile telephony and Internet communications in allowing refugees to maintain relations with others both within their new homelands as well as in similar situations across a refugee diaspora (Williams 2008). Questions of how asylum seekers locate themselves in the here and now as well as the far away remain only fleetingly considered, despite the stress many have put on the need to develop a 'politics of dislocation' concerned with 'what it means to be situated in a particular place' and 'how people are attached and attach themselves affectively in the world' (Grossberg 1996, 185).

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Phil Hubbard is Professor of Urban Social Geography at Loughborough University. He is interested in urban theory and the geographies of everyday life, and has a particular focus on the geographies of sexuality. His books include *Key Ideas in Geography: The City* (2006), *The Sage Companion of the City* (2007), *Thinking Geographically* (2002) and *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (2008).

Working with this geographic and sociological imagination – one associated especially with Doreen Massey's (1995) call for a progressive and relational sense of place – in this article we accordingly reflect on the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in the English East Midlands. Specifically, we reflect on how a project based on walking methods (see Pink 2007) allowed us to discover – and *feel* – what it is like to live in Nottingham, Derby, Leicester and Loughborough for new arrivals who had often made perilous journeys to seek freedom and safety from nations including Zimbabwe, Congo, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Albania, Turkey and Afghanistan. In this article we suggest that walking as practice, combined with ethnographic, biographical forms of doing research (ethno-mimesis), can help articulate the sense of being 'home away from home' in a number of registers, simultaneously producing knowledge about the rich cultural contributions and skills migrants bring to the region's cities, towns, cultures and communities.

ETHNO-MIMESIS AS ARTS/RESEARCH PRACTICE

If one accepts that mobility, flux and change are normal conditions of our contemporary world, then issues of *becoming* rather than *being* appear more in tune with the manifold process by which differences are materialised, embodied and experienced. This does not mean that categories of class, gender, age and so on need to be jettisoned; rather, it is to insist that these are supplemented by notions of emotion, aura, and affect which register how identities become in the midst of relations between self and Other. In emerging non-representational accounts of the social world, affect is crucial as it passes among and between us, being a realm of connectivity rather than separation (Thrift 2004).

Registering the affective wash of everyday life, and the social relations of emotion within which we struggle to construct our singularity (Kuzmics 1994; Fortier 1999), non-representational theories encourage a loosening of traditional epistemologies. There is accordingly a preference for performative, visual and qualitative methods that capture ambiguity and complexity (Tolia-Kelly 2007). Given the focus on doing as well as being, the practice of walking thus takes its rightful place among a range of (largely non-cognitive) techniques designed to encourage us to be aware of phenomenological processes of coming-into-being (Solnit 2001). As Wylie (2005, 236) stresses, 'walking corporealities and sensibilities: moments, movements, events, allow for reflection on the more-than-rational – for example, the 'shifting mood, tenor, colour or

intensity of places and situations'. The difficulty here is then representing these phenomenologies of place without lapsing into the languages and practices of sedentary and rational social science, without drifting into a form of 'tourism' and without losing the balance between subjectivity and objectivity. This tension is expressed by Ingold and Lee Vergunst (2008, 2) when they insist that walking 'is itself a way of thinking and of feeling, through which, in the practice of pedestrian movement, these cultural forms are continually generated'.³

In a more general sense, the search for embodied tactics, spatial practices and modes of expression with which to explore textures of place is leading to an increasing turn to work traditionally associated with the performing arts (Pinder 2005; Jones 2006; Roberts 2008). It is here that ethno-mimesis – a practice existing in the interstices of ethnography and art – comes into its own. Ethno-mimesis – as a methodological and performative praxis – involves the combination or interweaving of ethnographic and participatory methods and the subsequent production of art forms to represent experience (O'Neill et al. 2002; O'Neill 2008).

Representing life history/biographical narratives through art forms can create multi-vocal, dialogic texts which make visible emotional structures and inner experiences as sensuous knowledge (Kuzmics 1994, 9). Ethno-mimesis is described by O'Neill et al. (2002) as a 'politics of feeling' given that the ethno-mimetic research process involves sensuousness and emotion in tension with reason, rationality and objectivity. Combining micrology (ethnography) and mimesis (not as imitation or mimicry but as sensuous knowing) requires creative methods such as collaborating with artists and participants, sometimes using participatory action research methods, and working together through narrative, talk, and art-making. At the core of the process is an exploration of the transformative role of art and the methodological approach of working with artists: ethno-mimesis foregrounds the transformative role and capacity of art and emphasises the importance of biography (life-story) as critical theory in practice/praxis (O'Neill 2008).

This methodological, performative approach involves working in collaboration with artists, performance artists, writers, poets, photographers and participants in the space between ethnography and art, creating a 'potential space' full of transformative possibilities. Tolia-Kelly's (2007, 336) research undertaken with the artist Graham Lowe designed to explore the multiple relationships and engagements of migrant communities (from Burnley, Lancashire) with the landscape of the

English Lakes provides such an example, using multiple methodologies to map the affective registers 'and responses to the landscape' of the participants 'usually marginal in the national iconography' through drawings and paintings. Tolia-Kelly talks about the paintings and drawings that emerge in the research process as involving 'an embodied feeling engagement' (2007, 340) that 'uncovers lost or hidden voices', especially with regard to the alternative sensibilities and different registers that 'landscape' engenders. This research is, for Tolia-Kelly (2000, 337), 'the beginning of a process of recording the values of this landscape and not the final product'. Indeed, the political intention was to 'record multiple cultures of engagement' and achieve a 'reversioning of the emotional values of the lakes and a reimagining of the landscape's sensory registers' (Tolia-Kelly 2007, 338).

Certainly, in re-presenting ethnographic data in artistic form or producing ethnography through walking art practice we can access a richer understanding of the complexities of lived experience, encompassing the 'immaterial', the 'Phenomenal' (Battersby 1998), and what Adorno alludes to as the 'unsayable': those aspects of lived experience that are hard to put into words. Mimesis is intended not to mimic or reflect reality, but to encourage a moment of cognition through which we can develop a critical perspective that includes 'empathy' as sensuous knowing. Knowledge is produced, forcing us to abandon instrumental rationality and reach towards a more sensuous understanding that incorporates feeling involvement as well as cognitive reflection. Mimesis is inherently involved in dialectical tension or mediation with reason as 'cognition, as construction, as technique, as spiritualization, as objectification and so on' (Nicholsen 1997, 148). Adorno expresses this in the dialectic of art and society, in that mimesis and rationality are irreconcilable. The mimetic faculty is always symbolic, and for Adorno (given his pessimistic view on the relationship between ideology and knowledge), art is a refuge for mimetic behaviour:

In short, mimetic faculty, according to Benjamin, has not disappeared in favour of an abstract and rational way of thinking, but it has taken refuge in language, writing, and in the form of art (music, painting, literature, dance). An image, a gesture, a sound, all contain traits of what they aim at expressing. This is why mimetic activity is always symbolic mediation: it never reduces itself to imitation. (Campaner and O'Neill 2009, 14)

Thus, ethno-mimesis involves the mimetic re-telling of life narratives in artistic form, capturing more sensuous

meanings and experiences, including memories, experiences, associations – indeed, all the senses involved in narration. Working with an ethnographer and an artist, the storyteller (e.g. a migrant, refugee, or asylum seeker) can find the ways and means of re-presenting their story facilitated by the collaborative process. Artistic representations of migrants' lived experiences can be transformative, providing recognition, voice, a means of sharing identities through inter-disciplinarity and hybridity. Moreover, such 'border crossings' can enrich our theoretical work (Cocker 2008; Doy 2008).

Using participatory action research methods, and led by the priorities of collaborator-participants, our ethno-mimetic project with asylum seekers and new arrivals involved an approach consisting of collaboration designed to loosen the knowledge/power axis involved in knowledge production and 'expertness'. As such, in this article we represent the walks undertaken in the 'Sense of Belonging' project using photographs as well as text. Walter Benjamin's ideas that images provide the basis for transformation of the collective as well as the individual are critical here. Indeed, Benjamin 'argues for the politically emancipatory significance of the image for the way that we develop the capacity to actively intervene in and shape the world around us' (Calderbank 2003, 6). For him, thinking in images can point the way out of ideological thinking and develop a critique, given that images 'are not the object but the matrix and medium of his theoretical work' (Weigel 1996, x). Accordingly, we suggest that the combination of images and text can counter 'the sanitized, demonized or hidden aspects of the lived cultures of exile and belonging and help to produce knowledge as a form of social justice' (O'Neill and Harindranath 2006, 42–3).

A SENSE OF BELONGING

Emerging from a network of asylum seekers, community arts organisations and activists in the East Midlands, the 'Sense of Belonging' project was intended to explore and represent the experiences of living in a new environment. Through community arts organisations, groups of asylum seekers and artists in exile – notably, young Iraqi Kurds and Afghans in Loughborough, Somali, Congolese and Zimbabwean refugees from Leicester, Congolese, Iraqis, Kurds and Iranians from Derby, and Zimbabwean, Eritrean, Iraqis and Congolese in Nottingham – were invited to take part in a series of coordinated walking events in the four towns and cities. These walks were based on a model developed by Misha Myers⁴ (Myers 2007, 2008; www.Homingplace.org) and involved participants following a series of instructions

Instructions for Sense of Belonging project**(a) home**

Make a mark on a blank page representing a place you consider home.

(b) special place

Think of a place nearby your home that is special to you, perhaps a place you have made many journeys to. Draw a map of the way from your home to this special place.

(c) landmarks

On your map draw the landmarks that are along the way from your home to this special place. These may be small details which are important to you personally.

(d) unfamiliar place

Go somewhere unfamiliar or different to the home you have mapped and take a walk there using your original map as a guide through this different place.

(e) the walk

Start walking and use a piece of tracing paper to mark the landmarks you see along the way over those on your original map until you arrive at your special place.

(f) next steps

As you walk follow the 'steps' below marking a response on your tracing paper:

step

Stop at a place where something reminds you of the home. What details in this place remind you of that place? What could you do here that would make you feel at home?

step

Stop at a place that is unfamiliar to you. How does this place make you feel? What object would you put in this landscape to make it more familiar?

step

Stop at a place that is familiar to you. How is it familiar?

step

Stop at a place you find fascinating or comforting along your walk. What interests you or draws your attention to this place.

(g) last step

When you find your special place and arrive at the end of your walk mark this place on the tracing paper.

FIGURE 1. 'Way from home': instructions for the 'Sense of Belonging' project (with kind permission of Misha Myers).

developed as a method for exploring how individuals find themselves 'away from home'. This consisted of drawing a sketch map (see Figure 4) leading from a place they called home to a special place and using the map to navigate the new environment in which they find themselves, following the directions in Figure 1. Starting from an agreed point in the city, the walkers thus navigated the city using a map that related to a remembered journey, allowing them and a fellow walker (a councillor, politician, member of the police or other 'long-term' resident) to experience a walk that was about questions of here and now, near and far, the real and the imaginary. Along the route, the instructions encouraged a reflection on the details of place that evoked feelings and resonances with past environments, and demanded

an active consideration of how strange environments can be made familiar.

The walks took place simultaneously in Derby, Leicester, Loughborough and Nottingham on Friday 16 May 2008 at 10 a.m., and lasted for around two hours.⁵ As well as being mapped, all were taped, photographed or transcribed,⁶ with the expectation that the material generated could be analysed and re-presented in some way. Post-walk discussions (held at a local youth centre immediately after the walks, and facilitated by Misha Myers)⁷ involved reflection from all participants on the walks, and began to identify shared experiences and themes for the development of the arts/research practice and workshops. Subsequently, workshops that put art at

the heart of social research took place and further explored the issues raised on the walks. The art/research workshops took place in each city/town between June and December 2008, led by local arts organisations and supported by Maggie O'Neill and Phil Hubbard.⁸ The artworks and some of the narratives produced in the workshops were exhibited at the Bonington gallery, Nottingham in January 2009.⁹

There are of course many precedents for using walking as a basis for reflecting on senses of place and belonging, from the spontaneous psychogeographical peregrinations associated with situationism through to the more planned guided walks and town trails designed to animate the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1991). Likewise, cognitive ('mental') maps of known spaces have been utilised as a way of exploring people's sense of place since the pioneering work of architect-planner Kevin Lynch in the present case the 1950s (see Holloway and Hubbard 2001). Yet in the present case the intention was that the walking exercise was not simply a way of exploring route-finding capabilities or prompting urban discovery; instead, it was designed to enable a series of relationalities and dialogues between walkers that would allow insights to be drawn about their relationship with one another and their surroundings.

Given the cultural and language barriers that often exist between new arrivals and 'host communities', the conjoined practices of walking and talking were deemed appropriate as a basis for exploring such senses of belonging and 'habitant knowledge' (Ingold 2005). Moreover, as Myers (2008) argues, drawing on the work of Edward Casey, the act of walking and wandering is not simply about locating one's self in place: it is an act of place-making, for 'dwelling is accomplished not by residing but by wandering' (Casey 1993, 115). To trace a walk is therefore not just to follow a line: it is to become involved in the doings and becomings that produce space and make place.

BETWEEN HERE AND THERE

There were many ways in which the walks conducted as part of a 'Sense of Belonging' project communicated what belonging means to those participating in the research, allowing some grasp of their experiences and feelings about home, dislocation, and processes of making place. These insights related not just to the experiences of living in the East Midlands, but also the perilous journeys people had made to seek freedom and safety from nations including Zimbabwe, Congo, Iraq, Iran, Eritrea, Albania, Turkey and Afghanistan. The

emotional and physical impact of these journeys, and the experience of being 'home away from home', hence figured large in the exhibition that was a major legacy of the project – one that also celebrated the rich cultural contribution and skills the migrants brought to the region's cities, towns, and communities. In the remainder of this section, we highlight three related insights emerging from the walks, concerning their ability to elicit embodied, exploratory and relational experiences of space.

Walking as Embodied

As Lee and Ingold (2006) stress, walking does not in and of itself yield an experience of embodiment or facilitate participation. Yet what emerged in the course of the walking event, and subsequent reflection at the post-walk workshop, was that there had been a sharing of sensuous, kinaesthetic experiences. Put simply, the act of walking allowed participants to engage in the routes and mobilities of others. For those co-walkers from the 'host' community, this meant that they contrasted their pace and styles of walking in the city with the walks remembered by the refugee walkers. Given that the walks were anticipated to last around two hours, an important dimension of this was considering questions of scale. For example, one refugee drew a map of his journey from his village to his school, which was then transposed onto a map of Leicester centred on the first place he lived in the city, a now-defunct hotel which had been used by the city council for accommodating new arrivals. Yet the fact that his walk to school had been four miles meant that the route had to be truncated, leading to discussion of the relative distances that people are used to – or prepared to – journey.

As Irving states, 'memory is produced in the act of performance' as walkers 'make their way round the city and as events and episodes are drawn out of the city's streets, buildings, and market-places and turned into public narratives' (Irving 2008, 187). The performative nature of the walks facilitated talk, dialogue, biographical remembering and relational engagement. Through the shared walk (Lee and Ingold 2006; see also Myers' article in this issue) and replicating Myers' art practice the walkers share aspects of their biographies connected to the here and now – Nottingham, Derby, Leicester and Loughborough – linked also to memories of there and then (home), and these are literally performed in the practice of the walks. The dialogic, relational space between walker and co-walker becomes an embodied space where a 'shared viewpoint' can facilitate 'empathic witnessing' as well as 'collaborative knowledge



FIGURE 2. *Sharing a walk*, Leicester, 2008 (photo: Phil Hubbard).

production' (see Myers, this issue) that elicits the ethno-mimetic moment of cognition. In John Perivolaris' walk with the Kurdish artist, Thær Ali, he states: 'On 16 May 2008 I joined the Kurdish artist, Thær Ali, for a walk to the centre of Nottingham starting at his flat in Sneinton. When I arrived to meet him I looked up at buildings I have seen hundreds of times and photographed only a few months before. Glimpsing Nottingham through Thær's eyes and memories, my view of the city was changed.'

Thær shows John the view over the city from his flat: 'Because I live in high rise flat I see all these buildings, cars, and trees. That gives me a sense of space. It also gives me a sense of freedom. It reminds me of my country, because Kurdistan is very mountainous.' He leads John under trees that remind him of his grandfather's village, a canopy of pomegranate trees, and then past a wall which reminds Thær of a temporary wall, the same height and width of one used for the execution of a thirteen-year-old boy which he was forced to witness: 'The reason we were made to watch that execution was to force us always to carry an image of our future if we resisted Saddam Hussein's regime.' In reflecting on the walk at a later date, John talked about

the process of empathic witnessing when walking with Thær, suggesting that 'his story has become mine – revealing the fabric of the city as I walked with him' (cited at http://www.flickr.com/photos/dr_john2005/sets/72157605115882016/). Through experiencing the ethno-mimetic process, John's affective register of the city was changed, developed, and enhanced by the empathic witnessing as an embodied, seeing and feeling engagement.

The fact the walks were completed on a grey, damp May morning (see Figure 2) also led to a shared set of feelings and sensations that encouraged certain styles of walking. It also emphasised that for many migrant groups coming to the UK, going out and walking may be discouraged for simple climatic reasons: transcripts of the walks are peppered with reference to the miserable, cold weather, and with suggestions that the walks should be truncated or curtailed because of the rain. Talking about differences in climate and bodily comfort provided a point of passage into debates about the need for the authorities to recognise the effects of weather on new arrivals and to provide suitable advice on clothing, heating and keeping warm. This emphasises that walking involves a fully engaged and multi-sensory connection between people and place.

Tracing a route taken from another time and place meant that there was both choice and improvisation involved in the attempt to follow this remembered and imagined route through the material city. In the process, obstacles were met and negotiated, and decisions made. Conversations were had about which way looked most promising, with the city exercising an intuitive pull over the body at various times that often contradicted the logic of the map. Sometimes, when it was not clear how to navigate, the refugees made reference to haptic sensations associated with the remembered walk – for example, in one instance a walker remembered that he used to go down a hill at a particular point, so the decision to take a street that gently inclined downwards was taken. In such ways, the walks re-enacted a set of embodied feelings that encouraged the new arrivals to recall past journeys, and allowed co-walkers some re-conception of their previous lives.

Walking as Exploratory and Revelatory

Lee and Ingold (2006) suggest that there is a resonance between walking and ethnography, in the sense that the locomotive (or 'getting around') aspect of walking allows for a detailed understanding of places. In the act of walking, talking and sensing the urban environment,



FIGURE 3. *Walking in Derby, 2008* (photo: Aria Ahmed).

unknown places were discovered and known places re-discovered. For co-walkers and refugees alike, this meant that the city was seen through fresh eyes. For example, passing an unassuming convenience and grocery store, one walker, an unaccompanied young asylum seeker, was encouraged to talk about the importance of particular stores for them:

Asylum seeker: Before I came here [to this store] there was no halal shop and so when this shop was here we are very happy. The staff are very polite and if our friends have no money they can lend them. I met a lot of Kurdish people but I never found people like this.

Co-walker: So very special?

Asylum seeker: Yes, and also you can get cheapest things here, fish, and meat, bread.

In the same walk, it became clear that convenience stores, fast-food takeaways and even a fitness centre were important not solely as spaces of consumption, but as 'diasporic' social spaces where the walkers liaised with others of similar background.

On a different walk, an imagined journey between a walker's home and school in Zimbabwe took him past a chip shop which he hadn't been in for years, but which used to be significant to him when he first arrived in Leicester and was staying at a hotel in the city:

This felt like my street 'cos we had like the chip shop there . . . and if me and some friends had a pound we could buy some. Chip cob! The food in the hotel, it was OK, but you can't just eat rice and grilled meat every day.

For one of the co-authors of this article, walking with a refugee made her see Derby anew, registering the significance of sites that for her had previously held little resonance. For example, encountering spaces of faith

encouraged reflection by her guide on the importance of religion in the lives of new arrivals:

I can understand the darkness between two hands. What is it that brings light – church, mountains, people. Faith is important to every human being. Religion is very modern, we are very old. Our thinking is very old.

But it was not simply registering the significance of landmarks or buildings for different communities that was crucial here, as walking encouraged a focus on detail, with normally mundane, ignored and relict features of the streetscape having considerable capacity to affect. For example, a flower trodden into the pavement, a broken water fountain, road signs, shop window displays, a CCTV camera or even the texture of the pavement could all provoke reaction.

Rises and falls in traffic noise across the route led to discussions about the differences between the pace of life in the English East Midlands and in the countries which refugees had left ('Too many people here, too many cars . . . so much pollution, like. Where I am from you get fresh air, you can taste the fresh air'). Likewise, a half-empty bottle of cider abandoned next to the road prompted one refugee to speak of his fears about walking the city at night, given his perception that alcohol made young people unpredictable and even violent. For the same walker, a railing reminded him of one around a city park that he avoided as it felt too dangerous to him because of a lack of people around.

The walking also encouraged participants to discover new spaces. Remarkably, one refugee woman, when walking along the banks of the River Trent in Nottingham, suggested: 'This is my first time since I came here to be near the water like this; I have never been near to it.' In this case, walkers subsequently decided to return to the embankment for further walks. In another town, it was the co-walker who was able to highlight facilities that have subsequently been useful to the asylum seekers, emphasising the reciprocity and sharing of knowledge inherent in practices of walking. Here, rivers and bridges were of symbolic importance as transitional objects connecting the then and there with the here and now, and featured strongly in several stories.

Walking as Relational

For Lee and Ingold (2006), the sociability of walking can be seen to be analogous to the sociability of ethnographers and their subjects. In this sense walking is

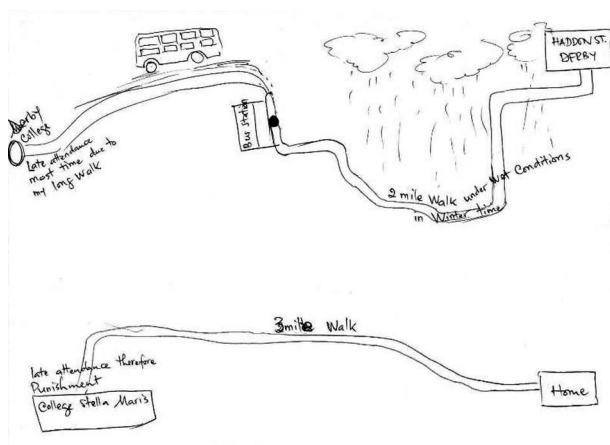


FIGURE 4. A sketch map of a walk between a place called home and a special place (*Sense of Belonging* project, 2008).

a 'profoundly social activity . . . [I]n their timings, rhythms and inflections, the feet respond as much as does the voice to the presence and activity of others. Social relations, we maintain, are not enacted *in situ* but are paced out along the ground' (Ingold and Lee Vergunst 2008, 2). This meant that through the processes of walking and talking, co-walkers came to know one another, with moments and sites along the walk prompting dialogue about the differences between here and there. This was something encouraged in the walking instructions, which asked participants to stop when something reminded them of their 'home'. For example, some of the Zimbabwean women who walked along the banks of the River Trent in Nottingham reflected in the course of their walk on the similarities – as well as the significant differences – between this location and those they had grown up knowing:

It actually reminds me of Victoria Falls, along the banks of the river it is very green like this, and the trees they are just like the bark of the trees we get in Victoria Falls oh, it's like I am walking home really.

Another added: ' . . . the trees and the greenery it is so like home it is lovely and very comforting'. Yet the same walker emphasised the difference between this river and the ones they recalled from Africa:

The river is nice but to me looks artificial, very artificial. Even the flow looks very artificial. [*laughs*] 'Cos our rivers have got rocks and stuff, some places noisy, some quiet, bubbles because water is going down then up. Activity in the river. But this one is quiet, looks artificial to me. Looks like tamed water. Our rivers would be more natural more life, might be a tree growing in the middle, growing fruit and

people would swim to get edible fruits and sometimes you find lots of roots in the river because of the trees by the banks and sometimes lots of rocks and sand. And sometimes people washing by the water when you approach.

Elsewhere on the same embankment, a war memorial prompted a Zimbabwean to speak of her country's colonial past:

Zimbabwean: We have one at home, in Harare, to the fallen war heroes who helped decolonise us, as well as one to the foreign world war, when we were still colony and there was fighting on behalf of Empire. So yes, it does remind me, not the shape, the concept. And every year we have heroes' day and people gather and put wreathes at graves . . . we have three, for two world wars and the liberation struggle.

Co-walker: When was that?

Zimbabwean: From 1960s to 1980 when we got our independence.

Likewise, for another walker, passing a church took them on a journey to their youth:

I was 8 years old, my dad was holding my hand, we were walking in the land with my little feet and very thin arm and my dad was holding me and I found a little small thing it was a golden statue of Jesus. I gave it to my dad and he kept it and showed it to others in the village, and some knew what it was. I always remember that when I see a church it is a beautiful memory, I wished I still was that small boy, my dad put a memory bangle on that little thin arm, and now I cannot wear it.

Moments of serendipity also occurred, so that in talking of a walk to school, the window display of a school uniform shop prompted discussion of the differences in how children would dress for school in Zimbabwe as opposed to Leicester. The tendency for the environment to routinely provoke such moments and encounters allowed co-walkers to explore biographical issues:

Walker: Some people are running now [*over there*].

Co-walker: On the field . . . is that something you did when you were younger, did you like running?

Walker: Oh yes, I liked running at school and competing with the boys, my husband was my teacher [*laughs*], we liked running and netball [*laughs*], I was good at sports and I thank god that little bit that I had at school but I was very



FIGURE 5. *Neither here nor there*, by Obediar Madziva, 2008 (photo: Aria Ahmed).

good at it. And all the festivities that we had [laughs] I had to make the best of them.

The fact that certain things reminded the walkers of home, making connections between 'home' and here, allowed for reflection on what both divides and unites people from different nations and backgrounds. Rivers, birds, trees, sky, monuments, places of worship, shops, the sound of traffic and so on all appeared capable of evoking memories and feelings associated with home. Tainted with nostalgia as they were, conversations about times with a loved grandfather in a garden, or about a childhood 'playing in the leaves . . . hiding ourselves . . . it was beautiful and that was every summer', were richly evocative and further helped cement the sense of empathy between walker and co-walker. Being asked to walk, look and think simultaneously across a spatial distance thus allowed people of different backgrounds, ethnicities and origins to connect in meaningful ways, learning reciprocally across cultural divides, leading to 'connection' and 'understanding' that took place in the space of the walks and afterwards when we met together



FIGURE 6. *A journey to safety*, by Emmanuel Chagunda, 2008 (photo: Aria Ahmed).

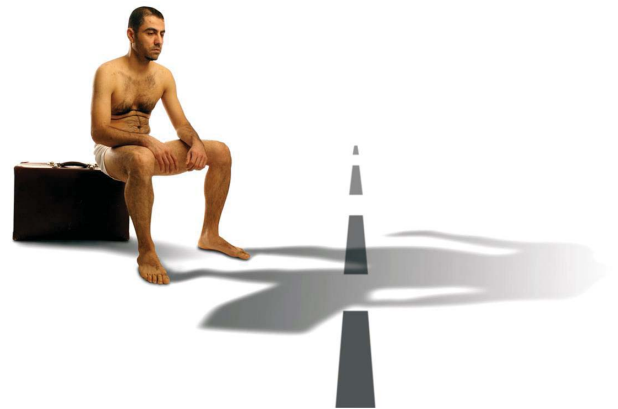


FIGURE 7. *Untitled*, by Aria Ahmed, 2008 (photo: Aria Ahmed).

as a group. Meaning is produced through the connections made.

The 'double consciousness' involved in being 'home away from home' was a key theme across all the groups. A walker in Derby reflected on this sense of his own being in the world:

Walking towards Normanton, my home is now two, it was one, after long time I went back to see my family to Iraq, I was missing them, when I got there I was missing here, and sometimes was making me cry, and I have been divided into two pieces, like two souls in one body. 'Home away from Home'.

Similarly in Nottingham the artists' group discussed this phenomenon. One person said, 'I am from here, I am from there, we are exactly nowhere, we are from nowhere'. Another person agreed:

I can only talk about how I feel about being a refugee in a different land to where you are born. In my case today I feel I completely

belong here, this is my home. The day after I feel differently, I feel absolutely I do not belong and there is no connection between me and everything around me including people, this stuff, my house and everything. It is a mixture of feelings, in my opinion, that will last for the rest of my life. It is not something that will blow over, that is how it is, one day you feel everything is yours here, it doesn't matter, and another day you don't and that is my personal experience and when it comes to art you can't avoid this double consciousness that one day this belongs to me and another day it does not.

Similar sentiments were expressed across all four groups and cities:

I belong there and I also belong here, my belonging to here is not as deep as my emotional belonging to there . . . bi-cultural, bi-national, we are something in between. On the other hand we belong to one globe. We are part of that and so borders are meaningless – in one way, we are part of the world, but you create your own life in a physical place that may be called Nottingham or whatever so I think everything is there, how you interpret the physical place, Kabul, Kurdistan.

Through *Erlebnis* (inner lived experience or 'lived moments' [Lopez 1999, 70]) and *Erfahrung* (historical experience grounded in cumulative wisdom – for example, in storytelling; see Benjamin 1992, 83–107), the processes involved in coming into a sense of belonging are deeply relational. Friends, networks and other sources of social associations are crucial. But the physical landscapes anchor these relational ties and can serve as transitional objects. As one walker exclaimed, 'This rain in Africa we would have rejoiced – it's very lucky to have this amount of rain'. In negotiating the real and the imagined space of the landscape of the cities, the relational aspects of the walks were foregrounded both at the time and in the subsequent art/research workshops and the work produced for the exhibition. Art/research workshops were facilitated by community arts organisations Charnwood Arts, City Arts, Soft Touch and the Long Journey Home with asylum seekers/refugees. A group of professional artists worked together and supported the art workshops in Nottingham, Derby and Loughborough. The workshops were spaces where the ethno-mimetic process unfolded. Being inspired by the walks, post-walk discussions and focus groups (some of the latter undertaken in the creative space of the art making) led to the themes and particular experiences



FIGURE 8. *Land of dreams*, by Paul Gent and Dreamers Youth Group, 2008 (photo: Aria Ahmed).

that resonated in the art works produced by the groups and individuals.

RE-PRESENTING THE WALKS

The three images in Figures 5, 6 and 7 – produced by artists in exile – contrast with Figure 8, produced by a community artist working with a group of unaccompanied young asylum-seeking men. The relational dimension of their journeys and the associations, friends, people and organisations they have encountered are documented in a piece that tells the stories of coming to an East Midlands town. The storyboards also tell of a sense of loss for those who left families and loved ones in war zones, as well as the stories of coming to 'be' and even 'belong' in Loughborough (partly through the support networks provided by the Dreamers Youth Group, Charnwood Arts and a supported housing association).

This focus on people making places reinforces the awareness for the researchers that the processes involved in belonging are deeply relational, with friends, networks and support being crucial. The physical, embodied process of walking remembering/feeling/sensing/being is inherently performative. It is relational/collaborative and opens up a discursive space. For one walker, what makes him feel at home is:

The freedom, the opportunities I have, the friends around me, the rights, you know, the basic rights, yes, these things made me fall in love with the land and makes me to feel I am belong to this place and this place is needing me you know.

The process of walking and talking in a subject-subject relationship (and so avoiding or minimising the power relationship that can be present in orthodox in-depth

interviews) facilitates a process that involves layers of meaning and interpretation. A co-walker said the following in a post-walk discussion in Derby:

What I have in my mind from the walk are the mountains, your memories of being a child, your family, the amazing journey to and from your home, the music we heard, there was a guy, a busker playing outside of BHS, but also the kind of connections between your memories of home and here and something that really stands out for me is, and it kind of links back to conversations we've had with Long Journey Home, is how you describe having two souls in one body and talking about being at home but away from home . . . that kind of 'double consciousness' and sense of home and I thought that was really powerful you know because it really helped me understand and connect with you.

These participatory, sensuous approaches to social research – combining walks, arts/research workshops (ethno-mimesis) and art forms evolved praxis as purposeful knowledge. They tell us something about what it is to feel 'at home' and develop 'a sense of belonging' in a relational and phenomenological sense.

CONCLUSION

According to Blunt and Dowling (2006, 199), the lived experiences and spatial imaginaries of people living in diaspora often revolve around ideas about 'the relationships between home and homeland, the existence of multiple homes, diverse home-making practices, and the inter-sections of home, memory, identity and belonging'. In this article we have argued that exploring such complex issues through ethno-mimetic practices centred on walking seems a particularly apposite way of approaching such questions, not least where barriers of language, culture and nationality can impede dialogue. After all, walking is itself never simply about traversing a route from one place to another: the journey itself is performative, an act of place-making and an active engagement with the environment. Joining with asylum seekers and refugees as they imaginatively journeyed a route in their homeland, and experiencing the difference between here and there, allowed participants to relate to these processes of becoming, and appreciate what it is like to make home in a place that is not home.

The process of mapping, walking and making art to express experiences of migration and belonging described in this article was also about claiming a space and representing complex stories and experiences of

belonging in artistic, visual and poetic form. This is about asylum seekers and refugees claiming a creative space, a voice, and a personal and political space, in a social context where they are principally represented by others as unwelcome and threatening strangers. The process and practices the 'Sense of Belonging' project engaged in resisted what Alex Rotas (2004, 52) defined as the way that the label *asylum seeker/refugee* smoothes 'over difference within the group it designates at the same time as reifying the boundary that defines its otherness and the notions that constitute that boundary'. The art/research workshops stimulated by the walking exercise evoked a 'potential space' (Winnicott 1982), a third space between ethnography and arts practice where those participating explored and represented the exploratory, embodied and relational processes involved in walking that related to issues of transnational belonging, identity, and place-making, or emplacement. O'Neill (O'Neill et al. 2002; O'Neill 2008) suggests that in exploring the in-betweenness, the hyphenated, hybrid space between ethnography and art, we occupy a third space, a potential space/dialogic space where transformative possibilities and performative, visual and textual outcomes can emerge through 'subject-reflexive feeling' (Witkin 1974) that may feed into cultural politics and praxis. It may help processes of social justice via a politics of recognition, thereby countering the misrecognition of the asylum seeker, refugee, migrant as merely the Other. This 'potential' space also provides a nurturing and relational space, which, like walking itself, can be therapeutic for all involved.

NOTES

- [1] Research undertaken by the Information Centre about Asylum Seekers and Refugees (ICAR), Refugee Action, the Refugee Council and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRCT 2007) has documented the impact of the changes to immigration policy over the last decade.
- [2] Humanitarian Protection is usually granted for a period of up to five years; after this time the person can either be returned (if there is no longer a threat to life or persecution) or apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain. Leave to Remain is permission to stay in the UK either temporarily or permanently.
- [3] As Cocker (2008) puts it, 'there is a risk that wandering research practice may lapse into a form of tourism, where ideas are only cited and never fully inhabited; where the sound of a disciplinary dialect is mimicked but its meaning is never fully understood'.
- [4] We launched the project by replicating Myers' methodology of participatory performance and research that she instigated with refugees and asylum seekers in Plymouth between 2002 and 2006.

- [5] See http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/global_refugees/image_makers.html for an example of one of the walks.
- [6] Two of the Long Journey Home artists documented the walks led by community arts organisations using film and also photographs; and two further Long Journey Home artists in Nottingham and three artists in Derby led walks, walking with co-walkers from Housing, Health and the city council. Photographer John Perivolaris was a co-walker in Nottingham and has documented the walk at http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/global_refugees/image_makers.html. Maggie O'Neill and Phil Hubbard also documented the walks they took part in, in Loughborough, Derby and Nottingham.
- [7] Misha Myers summarised the walking event as follows: 'The project was successfully led by participants' own interests and desires and well structured to facilitate their contributions of knowledge and creative endeavour. For me personally, it was a wonderful opportunity to extend my approach to a different context and to develop and test new strategies.' See also Myers' article in this issue.
- [8] These organisations were City Arts (Nottingham/Derby), Charnwood Arts (Loughborough), Long Journey Home (Nottingham), and Soft Touch (Leicester). The participation of each was facilitated through an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Knowledge Transfer Award.
- [9] The 'Sense of Belonging' exhibition was launched to the press on 9 January 2009, followed by a private view on 12 January. The exhibition was reported on in the local press in Derby, Nottingham and Loughborough, as well as online and nationally via the *Guardian* Society web pages. Over 300 people attended the private view and 1005 people visited the exhibition between 9 and 29 January, averaging 60 visitors per day (not including the numbers attending the private view). See the exhibition online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/gallery/2009/jan/13/sense-of-belonging-exhibition?picture=341562670>.

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