

## Editorial – Why Displaced Voices?

*Paul Vernon Dudman*

Welcome to the inaugural volume of our new journal – ***Displaced Voices: A Journal of Archives, Migration and Cultural Heritage***. *Displaced Voices* sits at the interdisciplinary nexus of archival science; refugee and forced migration studies and cultural heritage and is published by the Living Refugee Archive, an online portal managed and curated by colleagues at the Refugee Council Archive located within the University of East London. *Displaced Voices* is committed to the values of open access and all facets of the journal including articles, poetry, multimedia and related content will be made freely accessible to all.

Our aim is for *Displaced Voices* to be a multidisciplinary open access peer-reviewed online journal which aims to encourage cross-disciplinary engagement at the intersection of refugee and migration studies, archival science and cultural heritage incorporating submissions from a range of scholars and practitioners both nationally and internationally. *Displaced Voices* will be published twice yearly, in June and December each year, and will provide an online digital platform for activists, archivists, researcher, practitioners and academics to engage and contribute to issues pertaining to refugee and migration history, refugee and migrant rights, social justice, cultural heritage and archives. We are very keen to encourage submissions to the Journal from all writers as inclusivity of approach is vitally important in terms of what we hope to achieve with *Displaced Voices*. Whether you are a community activist, a volunteer, a practitioner, a student (any level) or an academic (from PhD students to Professor) we want to hear about your experiences and explore ways we can highlight your voice within the pages of *Displaced Voices*.

*Displaced Voices* is born out of our ongoing work experience working with archival and oral history collections documenting the experiences of refugee and forced migration issues combined with a growing awareness and impact of cultural heritage issues within this context and the realisation that there was not a publication space availability which adequately represented the intersection of these disciplines, engaging inclusive scholarship within the Journal, and we have chosen to publish *Displaced Voices* within our Living Refugee Archive online portal as a means of facilitating an independent publishing space encouraging a range of different publishing opportunities including traditional articles, multimedia pieces, poetry and creative writing. We can also utilise the exhibition and

presentation capabilities of the Living Refugee Archive to showcase content in the form of exhibitions, installations, audio and visual materials. Displaced Voices represents a collaboration between the Living Refugee Archive at the University of East London; the [Centre for Refugees, Migration and Belonging](#) (CMRB) at UEL; the Oral History [Society Migration Special Interest Group](#) and the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) [Working Group on the History of Forced Migration and Refugees](#). We also work in collaboration with the British Sociological Association (BSA) [Diaspora, Migration and Transnationalism Study Group](#) and the BSA [Activism in Sociology Forum](#).

*Displaced Voices* is looking to engage with issues relating to the intersection of refugee and migration studies with participatory archive and oral history methodologies and the role of cultural heritage in relation to the refugee experience. Broad themes for the Journal will include refugee and migration history; cultural and intangible history, community memory and notions of identity, and the role of archives and oral history in documenting the refugee and forced migration experience. But why start a new journal exploring issues relating to the narratives of displacement?

Our ongoing work with archives of displacement at the University of East London and the need to give agency and voice to the under-documented narratives of migration, has reinforced an understanding that displaced communities continue to be de-historicised in wider historical discourse, which is increasingly in danger from more nationalistic interpretations of our past. The impact of the Hostile Environment, Brexit and now Covid-19 threaten to heighten already negative discourses on displacement issues, engendering further potential barriers for under-documented communities to engage with their past and to reflect upon their own collective memory. It is important therefore that we continue to offer independent and participatory spaces for engagement on these issues. We want *Displaced Voices* to be an open accessible participatory space for multi-modal approaches to storytelling and for the documenting of experiences, in a way that is accessible for both the writer and the reader, whilst attempting to avoid the scenario of displaced voices being written and stylised for a particular audience.

We want to challenge the nations that the only displaced voice that is acceptable, is the one that focuses on a story of trauma and dispossession to engender a sense of sympathy from the reader. We want both our journal and our archival collections to represent a site of agency and empowerment, where communities feel comfortable engaging with the materials that we hold in an open and accessible fashion, where their story

will be listened too and where it can act as a source of inspiration and empowerment for others.

This first Volume of *Displaced Voices* contains an engaging mix of articles and perspectives. At the time of writing this Editorial, we are in the midst both of the unprecedented situation across the world in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of both the virus itself and the subsequent lockdowns have had upon our communities and wider society. Whilst at the same time, we are witnessing the response of the Black Lives Matter campaign to the desperately sad death of George Floyd in Minnesota, and what we can only hope is the heightening of some much needed social justice reform to ensure that the curse of racism can start to be eradicated from our societies. None of us are immune from the soul searching that is needed in response to the Black Lives Matter campaign and we all need to go back and re-assess our own practices to ensure that we are enabling the most inclusive version of our society and ourselves, and to ensure we are enabling and empowering the voices of everyone within our communities.

With the issues of the Coronavirus pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement very much at the forefront, this volume of *Displaced Voices* begins with Nithya Rajan contextualising her experiences of the Black Lives Matter campaign in her article, focusing on *Who is a Refugee*, linking her PhD research on Afghan refugee mothers in India to the solidarity movement in Minnesota. Whilst the contribution of Anonymous and Dr. Rumana Hashem's reflects on a conversation undertaken as part of a University of East London Refugee Archives civic engagement project focusing on documenting the experiences of refugees and East Seekers in East London. The conversation style of this article enables both interviewer and interviewee to reflect upon their own experiences and challenges of displacement in the United Kingdom, reflecting on issues of racism, access to healthcare, integration and considering how these reflect the upon responses to the Coronavirus pandemic and Black Lives Matter. Lastly in this section, in an article on *'Weaponizing Fear and Controlling Movement'*, Jasmine Lilian Diab explores the intersection of the Coronavirus with/on migration and border crossing, highlighting the complexities of border controls and visa restrictions. The article highlights how undocumented immigrants are the most vulnerable within the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis highlighting how "Migrants have long been scapegoated for the public health concerns of the day." (Diab, 2020).

We wanted *Displaced Voices* to incorporate multiple forms of representation and the multimedia pieces *'Drowning By Numbers'* by Nergis Canefe reflects upon the challenges of how public narratives of migration are shaped by the very audiences they are designed to reach, and how the use

of non-textual storytelling techniques can help situate these narratives in a more ethnic context. It explores the politics of representation and the use of narrative and story-telling approaches in non-textual formats, utilising an installation of 26 images, accompanied by a contextual textual essay. Canefe's work reflects on the role of aesthetics in mobilising narratives of survival and in what form these are constructed. The role of narratives and storytelling, and the dangers of focusing on the 'trauma' of the displaced is common to several articles in the first volume of *Displaced Voices*. In her artwork and accompanying essay, Canefe's methodology "is one of engaged story telling via alternative forms of representation." (2020). The Living Refugee Archive also contains an online visual representation of Nergis's work, available via this link at:

<http://www.livingrefugeearchive.org/exhibitions/drowning-by-numbers-online-exhibition-by-nergis-canefe/>

Four articles by Kiran Khan; Val Harding and Julie Begum; J. Madeline Bass; and Katherine Randall *et al* draw upon some key issues we hoped would be present within this first issue, namely the role of oral history and archival documents in enabling the documenting of community histories and the Voices of often under-represented communities within our Archives to be heard, combined with the ethical challenges of working with difficult narratives, especially in relation to experiences of migration and racism within host communities, and how we as archivists, historians and writers utilise these stories in the telling and retelling of history.

In her article '*Mirch Masala*', Kiran Khan reflects on whether the acceptance of South Asian cuisine within the UK setting has reflected the wider acceptance of South Asian culture in Britain. Khan utilised oral history recordings from the *Hidden Histories* oral history archive curated by Eastside Community Heritage, and held at the University of East London, to understand the prevalent discourses and experiences of South Asian migrants as an immigrant community, highlighting that whilst South Asian food in the form of the curry was readily accepted into British culture, the experiences of the South Asian community itself told a very different story. Racism towards the Bangladeshi community in East London, for example, was both frequent and normalised.

This is also reflected in the article by Val Harding and Julie Begum focusing on the Bengali music in East London. The Bengali Music and Musicians Oral History project was established by the Swadhinata Trust to help document Bengali cultural history and heritage through music. The project looks to document Bengali culture in the diaspora through music as a means of documenting community life set against the challenges of racism and multiculturalism. The history of Bengali music in the UK has not been well-

documented, reflecting perhaps of the challenges of acceptability and the cultural appropriation of new musical styles in Britain. Perhaps in a similar fashion to Khan's notes in the adaptation of curry to fit Western tastes, Julie Begum reflects on how new bands like the *Asian Dub Foundation* and *State of Bengal* in the 1970's were able to mix traditional South Asian musical styles with modern dance music as a means of facilitating a new form of cultural engagement with South Asian culture.

In '*Resisting the Trauma Story*', Katharine Randall *et al* focus on the ethics of undertaking an oral history project with refugees in Southwest Virginia. The article reflects on the importance of 'refugees as curators of a personal archives of stories.' (Randall, 2020). The article reflects important methodological issues for archivists and oral historians, challenging us to resist the 'reductive trauma narratives refugees are often expected to tell' (Randall, 2020) whilst also challenging the traditional archival framework itself. It explores the ethics of oral history work with refugees and how we can amplify these stories whilst enabling a sense of agency to the storytellers.

M. Jaye Bass, in her article '*Resistance is our Culture*' explores the creation of liberatory spaces and counter alternative narratives through the creation of an archive of Oromo life and transnational solidarity of the Oromo diaspora in Germany. "It demonstrates the power of the archive itself as an active participant in documenting, remembering and supporting the Oromo struggle." (Bass, 2020) Bass reflects on her work with the Oromo Horn von Afrika Centrum ([link](#)) founded in 1985 in Wedding, Berlin, as means to document and preserve the Oromo struggle in the face of Ethiopian imperialism.

In '*Identity Artefacts as a Methodological and Pedagogical Tool*', Mary-Rose Puttick discusses the notion of storytelling through the use of "identity artefacts" as a methodological and pedagogical tool, and the storytelling born out of the responses to these objects. Focusing on Somali mothers who attended a Family Literacy class in the West Midlands, Puttick reflects on multi-modal practices "theorising artefacts as embodying diverse aspect: people, stories, experiences, identities, spaces and places feelings and thoughts.

We are also including two poetic contributions: the first a collection of poems and artwork by Sonia Quintero, a poet and activist currently running Newham Poetry Group; and a selection of poem and artwork published by the Hopetowns poetry and creative writing group based London. Both of these provide alternative forms of representation and different creative approaches to self-expression, and we are privileged to also have permission to showcase Hopetowns completed poetry publication and

artwork via the Living Refugee Archive too at:  
<http://www.livingrefugeearchive.org/archives/hopetowns-poetry-archive/>

Lastly we have two in-depth research articles focusing on the ongoing issues in Kashmir. Tajamul Maqbool documents the complex narratives in relation to the exodus of the Pandit community from Indian Administrate Kashmir, reflecting upon the challenges of determining a narrative chronology of events relating to the enforced exodus of the Pandit community from Kashmir. Whilst Inamul Huq focuses on the legacies of Partition and violence in the State of Kashmir and its impact on the communities located there.

We very much hope you will enjoy reading the articles located within this our first edition of the *Displaced Voices* Journal. We are very pleased to have the opportunity to launch this volume during Refugee Week 2020 and we thank our colleagues at Refugee Week UK for their commitment in organising a range of online events this year in what are difficult circumstances. We would be very interested in receiving any comments or feedback that you may have in response to this Volume. If you have any questions or comments, please contact the Editor, Paul V. Dudman, on [p.v.dudman@uel.ac.uk](mailto:p.v.dudman@uel.ac.uk)

If you are interested in submitting an article to the journal, please contact the Editor in the first instance. Please refer to our website for details at: [www.livingrefugeearchive.org/researchpublications/displaced\\_voices/](http://www.livingrefugeearchive.org/researchpublications/displaced_voices/) and follow us on Twitter at: [@DisplacedVoice](https://twitter.com/DisplacedVoice)

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