Migrant Mothers Creative Interventions into Citizenship

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Theoretical Frame

• Migrant mothers contribute to citizenship through their cultural work: bringing up new citizens within a multiethnic framework of belonging

• Through this culture work they challenge racist identity ascriptions and exclusions
Enacting Citizenship

• foregrounds transformative and creative performativities of citizenship,

• ‘those acts that transform forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being political by bringing into being new actors (...) through creating new sites and scales of struggle.’ (Isin 2008a:39).
• Migrant mothers are enacting citizenship through their mothering practices,
• 1) as community mothers building new types of communities
• 2) creating new ideas and meanings of belonging
• 3) transmitting new cultural forms which also inform resistance to dominant projects around nation building
• 2 ‘play back’ sessions, where women share their stories which are then acted out by professional actors

• 6 sessions of ‘forum theatre’, where women themselves act out particular stories they themselves experienced. While one group enacts the story, others who watch are invited to ‘intervene’, i.e. take the role of one of the characters and change the course of events.
• The participatory theatre was an opportunity to try out claiming rights and share their experiences with other mothers to develop solutions. For example, the scenes of accessing services were found to be helpful as rehearsing how to assert their rights. It was an exercise of active citizenship.
because I feel myself ‘why is she doing this to her?’ I felt things and said ‘stop that’ she said ‘sorry’ because the way she was speaking- the receptionist- was completely wrong. Then myself, I said to myself ‘I have to do something- why I sit here?’ because I feel myself confident and then I have to say ‘do this one- this is not right’. And I have to do my right. If it’s not right, I have to do my right (MZ)
• It was wonderful. Like put yourself in the situation, what happened, because it's not everyone, you know, have the same experience and for example if I haven't got experience in their particular situation, it makes me think, you know, what would be, what I would do with that because people can get information through these workshops and spread it out for others and it would be easier to tackle these problems like you know, sometimes people go to the hospital or to council. And they just like playing football with them, kick them out and go to someone else and after someone else to somewhere else again and so on so on so on..(MI)
• theatre workshops allowed a diverse group of migrant mothers, from different ethnic, racial, educational and other backgrounds develop collective knowledges

• the reason ‘that performance is so important is that enables us to see things more clearly because it can encapsulate our lives as a whole in a manageable form’ Jennings (1992: 241&242)
• identity and power relations are constructed as performative acts in the liminal space of performance as everyday norms are suspended, multiple realities can emerge.
• This study provides ways for the research participants to re-appropriate their experiences through the performance.
• methods of inquiry transform and multiply the ‘what is’, might contribute to the emergence of new ways of seeing and doing things.
Anthropologists!
Interviews: What can be excluded.

Some of the Participants did not have the ‘cultural’ capital and their experiences were not yet assimilated enough to be able to articulate them through speech and in front of a professional. Furthermore, they have associated interviews with specific situations and social interactions such as interrogations, accessing services and assessment procedures. (Please see report findings in ESRC research, ‘Identity, Performance and Social Action’, 2005-2008).
Focus group: what can be excluded

• Participants with different or limited cultural and social resources.
• Participants that they are placed in disadvantaged position within power dynamics
• Emotions, bodies, ‘genes’.
• Action oriented solutions
• Time, reflection, rapport.
What is different epistemologically

• But the reflective process of making an image, taking time, as well as the act of making something that you can look at and think about and change, is different than being in a face-to-face session where somebody asks a question and you have to provide an answer straight away.
It’s not ‘just’ methodology

• The interest in methodologies is absolutely all about how we gather and develop knowledge about the social world: in other words, the very heart of social science. Without a good and varied set of tools for understanding how people think about and respond to their social worlds, social science is potentially limited. David Gauntlett, www.visualsociology.org.
Beyond words and text-include the absence

• Bring in bodies.
• Bring in emotions
• Bring in movement
• Ask to spot what can be changed
• Multiply the personal/individual experience
• Bring in impromptu reflection and analysis
• Attempt to brake ‘expert’ and ‘community’ witnessing! Who is the expert?
Obstacles to co-production.

• When the ‘othering’ is reinforced through methods and research production. Researcher as expert, takes information and is doing the analysis on her own or academic team.

• Through professional (Academia and regulations) of perpetuating privilege. (Conference example).

• Researcher's lack of reflection on their own ‘reasons’ to work with the ‘Other’.
Recommendations for social researchers

- Work interdisciplinary, take risk to train yourself in different methods
- Think always what has been excluded.
- Inform yourself through Feminist, postcolonial and ANT epistemological theories their intersections and their critical analysis to each other.
- Make research/fieldwork ‘alive’ and engaging by the use of methods that include multi facets of the world and human experience. The physical, the visual and the visceral.
The ‘other’ and power relations

- There are also inherent issues associated with the fact that projects are focused on those marginalized from relations of power, rather than on those in positions of dominance and privilege and the creation of more receptive social environments for change (Campbell, Cornish, Gibbs, & Scott, 2010). It is not clear whether and to what extent the performance might have influenced the police officers perceptions of young people of African background. This is worth exploring in future projects. Moreover, even if individual police were moved by the performance, and their individual perceptions shifted, this does not necessarily mean that everyday institutional practices of policing will shift.

The Research methods and Video

- Playback Theatre
- Forum Theatre
- Images
- Body allegories/Movement
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What is different epistemologically

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Participants’ accounts

• ‘I think it made so much impact because they could see. They could really start to reflect on it for the first time, because it was inside, now that it is outside they could see it’ (SCI, P.23)

Another participant said: ‘It is much easier, yes you tell a story but, you know, you are not obliged to tell the sad story. You see how people play, you know, it really makes it real and reminds you things but that, you know, makes you laugh as well, having a fun time’
Embodied, Dialogical, Illustrative.

This methodology can offer a body of knowledge that is: Embodied, Dialogical and Illustrative rather than producing narratives of either linear biographies or attitude surveys and expressions of personal attitudes and perceptions like in interviews and focus groups (Kaptani & Yuval Davis, 2008). The dramatised illustrative moments produced by the participants highlight and encapsulate central ‘generative’ themes and reproduce the embodied, as well as the affective, dimensions of the participants’ experiences.
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Focus group: what can be excluded

• Participants with different or limited cultural and social resources.
• Participants that they are placed in disadvantaged position within power dynamics
• Emotions and bodies not always present or prevented them from being fully present.
• Expression though words than action.
• Time, reflection for change, rapport.
Co-production

• Beyond words and text-include the absence
• Bring in bodies.
• Bring in emotions
• Bring in movement
• Ask to spot what can be changed
• Multiply the personal/individual experience
• Encourage impromptu reflection and analysis
• Attempt to brake ‘expert’ and ‘community’ witnessing! Who is the expert?
Obstacles to co-production.

• When the ‘othering’ is reinforced through methods and research production criteria. Researcher as the expert, takes information and is doing the analysis on her own or within the academic team.
• Researcher's lack of reflection on their own ‘reasons’ to work with the ‘Other’.
• Issues of interest for the researcher as the starting point for the research.
• Lack of reciprocity. (Participant’s development)
Recommendations for social researchers

• Work interdisciplinary, take risk to train yourself in different methods
• Think always what has been excluded.
• Inform yourself through Feminist, postcolonial and ANT epistemological theories their intersections and their critical analysis to each other.
• Make research/fieldwork ‘alive’ and engaging by the use of methods that include different aspects of the world and human experience. The physical, the visual and the visceral.
Epistemological change

• “knowledge is no longer a good in as far as it faithfully represents some object as it is. Instead the objects cut up continuities and intersect. Good knowledge does not draw its worth from living up to reality. What we should seek, instead, are worthwhile ways of living with the real”. Mol