



Images of Incoming

What's not to learn?

*A critical evaluation of the potential
impact of Postdigital arts-based
research as Resistance*



I feel like I can do my daily activities as a Canadian. I'm not scared. I thought I would be stuck and cannot live in cold or ice. When I see that there is snow outside, I say, "how I can go outside"? [But now] I feel free when I go outside, and I can go anywhere.

A canopy of trees, near the city centre. Indian people are crazy about Bollywood movies - Romantic movies with trees and dried leaves. The funny part is that many people are doing TikTok, here, acting out a Bollywood movie song. The landscape changes over the months and I love nature so much and it tells me how nature changes. It also tells me that the bad times are not going to stay and they will change. I took a picture every month, it is a great way of seeing the changes in the seasons. I love nature so much; the cycle of nature. It sends a message, after a bad time, will come a good time.



Who is involved?

- ▶ The Images of Incoming exhibition is the result of a project which engaged with some 70 women from Northern Ireland and Canada. The Northern Ireland -Canadian project emerged from an initial partnership between Queen's University Belfast's Open Learning (Adult Education) Programme and the University of Fraser Valley, British Columbia's Adult Education Department. The University of Atypical, Northern Ireland's lead organisation on arts and disability, later joined the partnership to curate an exhibition of photographs from participants, facilitate the creation of an accessible website and make a documentary film - recognising the importance of accessible dissemination and impact.
- ▶ The project participants were women from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures, from Africa to China to India and Pakistan, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Kosovo, Kurdistan, East Timor and Mauritius.
- ▶ The women took photographs to express their sense of exclusion and belonging in their new country and came together through a series of online workshops to discuss their images. The Northern Irish participants were able to gain Open Learning credits for their participation.
- ▶ The rich insights of the project will help inform all those working with incomer people, including policy makers about what are the key issues and how they can be addressed.

Outcomes

- ▶ To date:
- ▶ Accredited workshop series in each country and joint international series
- ▶ Exhibition -to be launched 29 October
- ▶ Website - to be launched 29 October
- ▶ Documentary film - to be released end of December
- ▶ Research chapter

Queen's University Belfast Open Learning Programme:

The Open Learning Programme offers a wide range of adult education courses and research. The programme has three main strands: a large Humanities curriculum featuring daytime, evening, weekend and online courses meeting the needs of the community, a Continuing Professional Development Programme, delivered in partnership with voluntary and statutory organisations and an outreach projects programme focused on the Grand Challenges of our time, including migration and the wellbeing of older people, and developed in partnership with local, national and international partners.

University of Fraser Valley Adult Education Department:

The University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) Adult Education Department offers a wide array of programs including a Bachelor's Degree in Adult Education, a Workplace Education (WE) Associate certificate and an Integrated Learning Design Associate certificate. UFV Adult Education Department also offers a certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language. These programs prepare students to work in any setting where adult learning takes place. This includes formal classroom settings, non-formal and informal settings such as the workplace. A diverse group of students from all over Canada participate in UFV's Adult Education programs.

University of Atypical for Arts and Disability:

The University of Atypical for Arts and Disability (UofA) is the lead sectoral organisation for arts and disability in Northern Ireland and plays a key role in increasing opportunities for D/deaf, disabled and Neurodiverse artists and audiences. UofA delivers a sectoral development programme in equality, access and inclusion and showcases the work of d/Deaf, disabled and Neurodiverse artists through the Atypical Gallery, Bounce Arts festival, and the Ledger Studio for performing arts. Learning programmes include EU wide outreach partnerships, Digital Horizon an arts based digital innovation scheme and British Sign Language courses for art workers.

Aims and Research Questions

- ▶ In proposing this project, we embedded holistic outcomes for participants such as: improved digital literacy, language skills, increased self-confidence, stronger social relationships, intercultural awareness, self-awareness, self-efficacy, conflict-management skills, community organizing and increased knowledge of community-based supports in each respective geographic region.
- ▶ The overarching research question was, how can we create a postdigital arts-based co-research model which can offer migrant women a voice to articulate their resistance to negative stereotyping and exclusion and to reveal what belonging means?

Theoretical frameworks

Postdigital democratic research

- ▶ Our research positioning was very much in line with Peters (2020) in challenging neoliberal concepts of ownership and privatization of knowledge with an ethos that research should not just be for the common good, but, should be empowering democratic, agentic. This is sometimes referred to as Responsible Research and Innovation (Tassone and Eppink, 2016). Hayes and Jandric (2020) argue that postdigital practices can constitute a form of resistance to political and economic ‘illusions’ of democratic forms of public culture found across the internet, and can address issues pertaining to power, exploitation and emancipation’. The research aimed to address one of the Grand Challenges of our time within the imperatives of *the Sustainable Development Goals*.

Critical Pedagogy

- ▶ Such an ethos lies behind and, arguably, emerges from a theoretical tradition known as critical pedagogy, which had its roots in Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and has been developed by scholars like Biren, Gurin and Lopez (2003). Of especial relevance to this project, is the work of Harman and Varga-Dobai, as it focuses specifically on critical pedagogy approaches with migrant learners on local immigration issues.

Arts-based approaches

- ▶ For the past several decades, scholars have maintained, and it has become increasingly accepted, that a shift in methodology towards infusing arts into research can bring tremendous insight, and create solutions that may not be possible through descriptive and linear language (Maginess, 2017; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Sinner et al, 200). Using art (photovoice) with migrant women who may have lower levels of English language and literacy provides an alternative mode of expression which centres the women's experience. Images can also stimulate dialogue with others.
- ▶ Qingchin et al (2017) have foregrounded the connection between arts-based methods and socially engaged research practice, thus echoing the goals of postdigital democratic research.
- ▶ 'The Photovoice project; breaking down the barriers between teaching, learning, pedagogy and research, and questioning traditional assumptions about who is expert, who has authority, was . . . able to do so because the same ethos of co-construction and active engagement characterised all the elements.' (Dr Elena Bergia, independent ethnographic evaluator)

Methodology

Research paradigm

- ▶ Aspers and Corte (2019) conclude that the qualitative paradigm oscillates between theory and practice, is concerned with getting closer to the actual experience of people and about improved understanding - of, we may add, hidden or erased realities.
- ▶ And we hope to fulfill the ideals adumbrated by Jackson et al (2007) in deploying a humanistic ethos, ethical diligence, objectivity and rigour.
- ▶ Qualitative research is a more effective methodology for challenging hegemonical and stereotypical characterisations of migrant people, so often represented in crude quantitative terms implying that thousands of migrants are 'swamping' developed countries and that, most of them are, in any case, not 'real' refugees and asylum seekers but 'economic migrants', as if the vast majority of migrants over the centuries have not, in fact, been economic migrants seeking a better life.
- ▶ The project embedded a co-research ethos.

- ▶ The project generated two kinds of analysis; the first kind was the commentaries of the participants about the photographs they took. These are all documented in the website gallery and in the project exhibition.
- ▶ The meta-analysis constituted another dimension to the co-research; enabling all those involved to comment critically on the process of the project. This panoptic view was very important in enabling all of us there to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Photovoice models we had created if there is to be impact and the potential for developing further projects which start to build sustainability and empowerment.

Findings

Thematic analysis of photos

- ▶ **Food.** Could symbolize difference and exclusion - the difficulty of finding foods which were important to their original culture, but also food as something to be shared, either with their own community or as a way of trying to connect with the wider community. Clothes, especially in terms of the lack of availability beyond Belfast of traditional clothes, important to cultural identity, was also a theme.
- ▶ **Double or fractured identities** - a sense of belonging in some ways and a sense of exclusion in others, a sense of wanting to be the to the cultural identity that they came from but also to embrace aspects of the new culture.

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- ▶ **Identity not fixed,** changes over time as migrant

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- ▶ **Discrimination and prejudice**
- ▶ **Language and cultural barriers**
- ▶ **New opportunities**
- ▶ **Importance of nature-** as a neutral meeting space, as a comforting or beautiful place.



I will say my family is the strongest...they are a symbol to represent belonging. Before, I couldn't have my mom's cooking every day, but only after they permanently landed, I had my routine resumed. When my parents came to Canada, it helped for sure. Before, [in her home country] they guided me more but now that they've landed, I'm kind of like a teacher telling [them] about this and that...so it's a little bit of a role reversal



I need somebody to translate or interpret for me so that I can make connections I cannot get what I want or what I need by reading the labels. I buy the stuff which is familiar... I don't have to read it. That's why I still keep eating my traditional food.



*I feel very much at home, the sea
blinking always.*



‘Stone is sometimes in your way. That day I took the picture, it was warm, and I stood on the cool stones. When I came here, I had to learn the hard way, it took me quite a few years to get back on my feet’.



This is a scarf or sari...this is a traditional cloth. When I wear it and I'm in the Somali community, I feel belonging, I'm proud of it. But [sometimes] when I'm outside the house in Canada, I feel exclusion because I feel different, or I wear different [clothes] when I see other people wearing pants.



In Poland we have net curtains, so I put them up here.

This is a picture of two murals on the Newtownards Road in Belfast, the one in the background was painted a long time ago and depicts 1973, during the Troubles. The new mural shows a very different picture of a young woman who is maybe not from Northern Ireland. The older mural shows a history I am not part of, but it is slowly becoming part of my history.'





This picture shows a work helmet or hard hat and a jacket used by construction workers. I work in construction and here, it makes me feel good, 'at home'. There are no jokes about me as a woman. In Italy a boss might say 'a woman can only bend to 90 degrees'.



I want to show the flag of Albania. Because this is love...always has been for Albanians. It's very dear to me, many generations of people give their life to protect this...very dear for others who die for this flag. To me the Canadian flag is a symbol of hope, a peace symbol. In our hardest days [Canada] took us in and gave us a chance for new life. So, to me, more to my heart, when I see the Canadian flag, it feels like I belong. It's my flag.



I was a doctor back home but based on my immigration status and lack of language skills, I am not able to be a doctor in Canada. The lack of credential education recognition is a huge barrier to be certified as doctor.

Meta evaluation

- ▶ Reflecting on important aspects of the historical context for migrant women, particularly in relation to exclusion wrought through racism and stereotyping, a key theme which emerged in the workshop exchanges.
- ▶ Willingness to share, listen to and respect different opinions, and an open mindedness in wanting to understand other people's perspectives.
- ▶ Creating a space where the voices of participants were heard - leading to a sense of connection and belonging with others.

Postdigital delivery platform

Disadvantages

- ▶ Technical issues was a common theme Hannah noted that the online format did make the formation of friendships difficult.

Advantages

- ▶ Gemma believed that the project developed connections. Hannah felt that the online delivery did enable the project to reach a wider audience. ‘Virtually seeing people and hearing their stories made it very real’, said Gemma. Rose confessed, ‘I was in my pyjamas without anybody knowing. And after [the workshops] you just start whatever you have to do in the house’. The convenience was also a great advantage for participants - there was no need for transportation or parking as Lisa pointed out, while Amy said that she ‘ would not have been able to participate so often face-to-face’.

Benefits of the project

- ▶ ‘The project revealed how women could be included or excluded based on their migration status, social profiling, isolated because of their lack of language, or lack of opportunities to study, on their connections or lack of connections. One facilitator saw the project as a way to offer flexible support especially to women who had temporary status.’ (Canadian facilitator, Marcela Mancilla-Fuller)
- ▶ ‘There was some very effective and pleasant communication between universities - our Canadian partners were responsive but also very proactive, they had experience of running similar projects in the past and could guide us, anticipate potential problems and mitigate risks.. A true opportunity to share best practice and learn from each other.’ (Project co-ordinator, Federica Ferrieri)
- ▶ ‘The participants seem to have benefited from the interaction with the others: listening to other people’s stories seems to have helped the participants to understand the experiences of others as well as their own experiences better. There is some suggestion that discovering that others had has similar experiences was positive and created a bond; however, others noticed that there were great differences in people’s experiences: the fact that some had not experienced blatant racism, for example, seemed to create some distance from those who did.’ (Dr Elena Bergia)

Future directions

Acting on suggestions from participants, we have applied for funding to do a follow-on project, examining belonging and exclusion with migrant people, through literature.