Article:
Rovisco, M (2019) Staging citizenship: Artistic performance as a site of contestation of citizenship. International Journal of Cultural Studies, 22 (5). pp. 647-661. ISSN: 1367-8779

https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877919849962

Staging citizenship – artistic performance as a site of contestation of citizenship

Maria Rovisco
School of Sociology and Social Policy
University of Leeds, UK
M.Rovisco@leeds.ac.uk

Abstract

While there is already a solid body of work on the lived dimensions of citizenship, little is known about whether artistic performance in popular culture and the arts can constitute a site for staging and contesting citizenship. In this paper, I argue that the literatures on voice and citizenship need to pay more attention to what performance studies approaches can offer to the study and understanding of practices of citizenship, and suggest that an expanded notion of voice as an act of self-expression, which is not purely discursive, is needed for understanding citizenship as embodied and expressive practice. By combining interview data with textual analysis, I employ performance tools and concepts from performance studies to analyse how citizenship is staged and contested in the documentary film *Wait* and the performance *Welcome to Dreamland*.

Keywords: *voice *citizenship * arts * performance *communicative space *civic engagement *migration * asylum

Address for correspondence: School of Sociology and Social Policy, Social Sciences Building, University of Leeds, LS2 9JT Leeds, UK.

Maria Rovisco is Associate Professor in Sociology at the School at the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds, UK. She has research interests in cosmopolitanism, new activisms, citizenship, migrant and refugee arts, and visual culture. Among her recent publications are the co-edited books *Cosmopolitanism, Religion and the*

Public Sphere (Routledge, 2014) and *Taking the Square: Mediated Dissent and Occupations of Public Space* (2016).

Acknowledgements

This research received funding from College Development Fund for Research, College of Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities at the University of Leicester.

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Introduction

This paper considers citizenship as embodied and expressive practice through analysis of the work of artists with a migrant or refugee background. Although there is already a significant body of work on the lived and embodied dimensions of citizenship (e.g., Isin and Neilson, 2008; Isin, 2009), little is known about whether artistic performance can constitute an arena for struggles and contestations of meanings and practices of citizenship (exceptions include Marciniak and Tyler, 2014; Iannelli and Musaró, 2017). Theoretically, this paper aims to demonstrate the value of employing concepts from the field of performance studies as tools to examine how citizenship is staged and contested through artistic performance. The argument is supported by interview data from UK-based artists with a migrant or refugee background and the textual analysis of a performance and a film. Media and cultural studies approaches have shed light on the ludic and embodied dimensions of citizenship in a range everyday life contexts (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Stevenson, 2003; Dahlgren, 2009; Hartley, 2010). However, there have been few attempts to apply analytical tools and concepts developed in the field of performance studies to the study of cultural citizenship. The work of artists with a migrant or refugee background deserves empirical attention because they are particularly interested in producing work that is thematically concerned with debates on migration, asylum and belonging, and with the articulation of struggles for inclusion and recognition in the body politics (Marciniak and Tyler, 2014). This is not to say that the expression of citizenship in artistic performance needs to be confined to the practices of artists with a migrant or refugee background or minority artists.

This research draws on a sample of 16 interviews with UK-based artists with a migrant or refugee background whose work is thematically concerned with themes of migration, asylum and belonging. My main objective was to achieve a balance between established and emerging artists working in various performing arts (dance, film, theatre, performance art, digital media art) and to capture diversity of ethnic backgrounds, gender, trajectories of migration, and

professional experiences. Through the interviews I aimed to gain an understanding of the ways in which the artists use their artwork to express something that matters to them around issues of migration, asylum, and displacement and their views of citizenship. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts drew on conceptual work on civic agency, aesthetics and performance, while also allowing for the emergence of themes from the interviewee's own accounts. For the purposes of this paper, I offer textual analysis of a performance (*Welcome to Dreamland*) and a short documentary film (*Wait)* and focus on interviews with three artists, Zlata and Anna, respectively the performer and theatre director of *Welcome to Dreamland*, and Havi Ibrahim who directed the film *Wait*. I treat both the film and the performance as 'texts' to isolate and analyse some of their formal characteristics (e.g., mise-en-scene, acting, plot and subject-matter). Adopting the approach of 'analysis as reconstruction' (Pavis, 2003: 10-11), I combine textual analysis of *Welcome of Dreamland* and *Wait* with interview accounts of the artists' intentions and experiences of the 'making of' of the film and the performance. Here, I intend to illuminate both the aesthetic devices, performance strategies and subject-matter of each artwork within particular conditions of cultural production and reception. The paper starts by showing how approaches citizenship as communicative action in the field of media, communication and cultural studies offer a useful analytical lens to understand citizenship as embodied and expressive practice. It then goes on to argue that this scholarship needs to pay more attention to what performance studies approaches can offer to the study and understanding of citizenship, and that an expanded conception of voice as an act of self-expression, which is not wedded to the written word, is crucial for understanding practices of citizenship. By combining interview data with textual analysis, I support this argument by deploying concepts from performance studies in the analysis of how citizenship is staged and contested in the documentary film *Wait* and the performance *Welcome to Dreamland*.

Citizenship as communicative action

Within the social sciences and cultural studies, citizenship is increasingly conceived as an act or practice rather than a status. It is now acknowledged that there are many sites and scales through which actors can constitute themselves as claimants and subjects of rights (Isin and Nielson, 2008). The literature on 'inclusive citizenship' (see, e.g. Tambabaki, 2016; Mayblin, 2016), for example, emphasises how exclusions are articulated through the language of political rights and the political practices and lived everyday experiences that challenge citizen politics in a variety of sites and scenes. This is illustrated by the struggles of migrants as

noncitizens to access citizenship rights. In contrast with approaches that focus on struggles for formal membership or better inclusion in the body politic, cultural studies and media and communication scholars examine the relation between citizenship and culture. Citizenship is here understood primarily in terms of civic engagement within and beyond traditionally defined sites of formal politics. Stevenson (2003) and Dalghren (2009), for example, posit that citizenships as a social practice involves a dimension of learning in everyday life. . For Dahlgren (2009: 72), '(…) citizenship it is in part a question of learning by doing, acknowledging that such civic competence cannot derive exclusively from political society blurring the boundary between politics and nonpolitics'. An underlying assumption here is that people learn citizenship in everyday life and through civic interactions and participation in a political culture. Stevenson (2003: 22) sees cultural citizenship as being underpinned by 'genuinely communicative interests and passions' and argues that 'a communicative civil society would produce a cultural citizenship where the public were capable of learning from one another's viewpoints'. These conceptions of citizenship as a cultural practice draw attention to the horizontal dimensions of citizenship, which emphasise relations between citizens in the realm of everyday life experiences, rather than state-individual relations (Hartley, 2010; Dahlgren, 2009; Clarke Coll, Dagnino and Neveu, 2014). This scholarship has also shown that practices of citizenship are not always circumscribed to political spaces and that media and popular culture are important sites of citizenship because civic virtues can be learned, for example, through the consumption of Reality TV and commercial pop culture (Hartley, 2010: 239; Coleman, 2006). Such approaches emphasise the ludic, embodied and expressive dimensions of practices of citizenship. Hartley (2010), in particular, proposes the notion of 'silly citizenship' to conceptualise citizenship as purposeful play, as 'a body-to-body experience, comedic and competitive, entertaining and festive' (2010: 243). Hartley (2010: 234) is critical of abstract legal definitions of citizenship that disregard embodied forms of knowledge and argues that civic participation 'needs to be analysed by means of – play' (Hartley, 2010: 244), which encompasses the civic and cultural activities of people (e.g., migrants, children) who are often excluded from formal definitions of citizenship. In this paper, I aim to complement these approaches by bringing this perspective on expressive practices of citizenship into dialogue with theatre and performance studies scholarship.

Performance, voice and visibility

Performance studies offers significant insights, concepts and analytical tools to examine the relation between voice, artistic performance and citizenship. As Conquergood (2002) notes,

'the constitutive liminality of performance studies lies in its capacity to bridge segregated and differently valued knowledges, drawing together legitimated as well as subjugated modes of inquiry'. Taylor (2003) argues that the repertoire - as performed and embodied practice (performances, gestures, orality, singing, dancing) - is concerned with the transmission of social knowledge, memory and identity, but cannot be captured through the archive, which is based on written modes of storing and transmitting Western modes of knowledge (texts, documents, buildings, bones). In methodological terms, Taylor's (2003) conceptualisation of expressive and embodied culture means shifting the analytical focus from the discursive to the 'performatic' to avoid reducing gestures and embodied practices to narrative and textual description. For Taylor (2003: 3) performance is both the object of analysis (dance, theatre, rituals, funerals, political rallies) and a methodological lens that enables the analysis of events as performance. Taylor's conceptualisation of the repertoire is significant for the argument proposed in this paper because it offers the possibility of treating performance as a collective experience while drawing the analytical lens to the non-representational and non-verbal dimensions of the repertoire. Similarly, Reinelt sees performance as a mode of knowing the world grounded in the imaginative capacity of the arts to transform the terms in which audiences understand the world and provides theatrical tools that offer new visions of the world (Reinelt, 2006: 83). Performance studies scholars are concerned with the "liveness" of texts, architecture, visual arts, rituals, dances even when dealing with media or archival materials. For Schechner (2103) performance studies regard whatever is studied as practices, events and behaviours. I argue here that performance studies offer useful concepts and analytical tools to study the role of voice in practices of citizenship. Voice is crucial for debates on citizenship because the understanding of citizenship as a form of civic engagement and communicative action is deeply connected to the issue of participation in social and cultural spheres, including the question of who gets to participate in the public sphere and who is excluded. Fraser reminds us that participation means 'being able to *speak in one's own voice*, and thereby simultaneously to construct and express one's cultural identity through *idiom and style'* (Fraser, 1992: 126) (italics added for emphasis). In the field of media, communication and cultural studies there is now a burgeoning literature on voice (e.g. Couldry, 2010; Dreher, 2010; Christensen and Thor, 2017; Cabanes, 2017) which explores how particular media forms amplify or ignore marginalized, diasporic and migrant voices in a range of communicative spaces. This scholarship emphasises both what Couldry (2010) calls the first order of voice as the process of giving an account of oneself and the second order of voice, that is, the conditions and forms of organizing human life in which the value of voice is enhanced or diminished.

This literature has not been necessarily been concerned with the performative dimensions of voice as an act of self-expression. Couldry's influential approach is underpinned by an understanding of voice in terms of the narrative resources that are available for individuals to give an account of one's life and its conditions. Couldry recognizes that voice is an embodied process that involves reflexive agency, however, his approach emphasises voice as a social process predicated on narrative, which 'involves, from the start, both *speaking and listening*, that is, an act of attention that registers the *uniqueness of the other's narrative*' (Couldry, 2010: 9) (italics added for emphasis). Missing from Couldry's approach and, more generally, in the literature on voice is a consideration of the performativity of voice, i.e., the expression of voice as an appearance that is sensed as much it is heard and seen. With some exceptions (e.g., Christensen and Thor, 2017), approaches to voice remain grounded on an understanding of voice as visual or verbal storytelling, and the idea of textuality as a mode of communicative practice that provides a model for all other forms of cognitive practice and social interaction (see Gilroy, 1994: 77). Less attention has been paid to articulations of voice as forms of embodied expression such as intonation, silence, body tension, arched eyebrows, or blank stares which signify, as Butler puts it (2015: 8), 'in excess of any particular written or vocalized account of what they are about'. In contrast, performance studies scholarship has shown is that the repertoire can offer a space of transgression for resisting the archive, which is often experienced as oppressive by marginalized groups (Boal, 2000; Conquergood, 2002; Taylor, 2003; Rovisco, 2010). Against this backdrop I argue that artistic performance, both as cultural form and embodied practice, is an important site for studying and understanding citizenship in relation to the exercise of voice as a political act of self-expression. One of the contributions of this paper is precisely to suggest that the literatures on voice and citizenship need to pay more attention to the performative dimensions of voice in popular culture and the arts. Contestations of citizenship in artistic performance are, as we shall see, concerned with the exercise of voice; i.e., who gets to be seen and heard in public life; who gets to appear and be visible in public life and who does not.

Articulations of voice as acts of self-expression are made visible through artistic performance in particular forms of visibility (Thompson, 2005: 35). These can be sensed and experienced in the ways in which people gain presence amongst others through 'gestures and conditions inherent to the performativity of appearance' (LaBelle, 2018: 30). If artistic performances are about making visible actions, practices, and behaviours that are relational and self-conscious (see Schechner, 2003), then we need to direct the analytical lens to the nexus between visibility and invisibility. We need to ask, for example, in which ways artistic performances succeed in

calling on public attention through what Dayan (2009) calls reflexive 'acts of showing' that oblige the audience to ask the question, "Why is this being shown at all? Why is this brought to my attention?" (Dayan, 2009: 26). We also need to ask in what ways practices and forms of visibility of art render 'visible what had not been' (Ranciere, 2009: 25).

Staging citizenship – ghosts, whispers and voice

The artists I interviewed are concerned with the aesthetic means available to represent lived experiences of migration and displacement including questions of voice and visibility. Who has the right to speak for migrants and refugees? Who has access to cultural dialogue and who has not? What aesthetic devices are appropriate to represent experiences of migration and displacement? Verbatim productions, which are an important genre in refugee performance, seek, for example, to make visible the 'back stories' behind the perilous journeys of migrants or the inhumanity of the asylum system, to bring to the fore the truth of personal testimony (Gilbert and Lo, 2007: 191-192). In contrast, my interviews suggest that the artists are more concerned with the representation of personal histories of migration and asylum to uncover, to make visible what is *already there* (italics added for emphasis) - i.e., those lived experiences of migration or displacement that remain invisible and unheard in public life. This act of making visible 'what is already there' but remains unseen can be understood through the performance tool of 'ghosting'. This notion suggests that features of previous performances and components from social and political life (gender conventions, racial histories, political and cultural pressures) are consciously or unconsciously acknowledged and displayed in every performance (Diamond, 1997). For Taylor (2003), performance rests on 'the notion of ghosting, that visualization that acts politically (…). Performance makes visible (for an instant, live, now) that which is already there: the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life'.

Artistic performances concerned with practices of citizenship can be understood in terms of a visualisation of citizenship that acts politically – i.e., performances that make visible real life struggles for inclusion in the body politics. A consistent thread in the interviews is the recognition that migrants and displaced people gain presence in public life through narratives that construct them as abject subjects (Tyler, 2013) and security threats (Rovisco, 2014). In this context, the arts are seen not only as a site of contestation of these stories and exclusionary narratives of citizenship, but also as a communicative space where marginalized voices can be heard and valued. Ghosting, as a performance tool, aims to make visible voices that are hidden or distorted by mainstream media representations of migration and displacement. While most

of the people I interviewed self-identify as artists with a migrant background, it is noteworthy that they do not always aim to create spaces where the voices of 'others' (e.g. refugees, asylum-seekers) can be heard in their own right. The possible othering of the subjects of representation under the categories 'victims' or 'oppressed' is a predicament faced by artists (migrant and otherwise) who use performance tools to tell personal stories of asylum and migration. The work of these artists is often impelled by moral outrage at a punitive asylum system and can be seen as a form of ethical practice and taking responsibility for the 'other' (Burvill, 2008). However, these artists risk being caught in what Salverson (2009) has called a 'aesthetic of injury'. Articulated primarily within performances in popular theatre, the 'aesthetic of injury' re-tells the stories of others by playing out a discourse of victimhood, which codifies the very powerlessness and violence they seek to address. Stories and images of injury can be problematic because when the subjects of representation (migrants, refugees) are constructed as victims or oppressed there is a risk that audiences perceive them purely as subjects deserving pity and lacking agency. While the artists I interviewed might not be always reflexive about the dangers of the aesthetic of injury and of enactments of victimhood (Jeffers, 2008), they are crucially concerned with using performance tools to create a communicative space where migrant and refugee voices can be valued. In artistic performance efforts to communicate meaning stem not only from the power of scripts (Alexander, 2008: 22-23), but also from the arrangement of elements of the scenario, which demand that we pay attention to 'the milieux and corporeal behaviours, such as gestures, attitudes and tones not reducible to language' (Taylor, 2003: 29). The scenario works as a meaning-making paradigm that refers to specific repertoires of cultural imaginings and uses conscious strategies of display to conjure a physical location, actors, setup and action, which allow for reversal, parody and change (Taylor,2003: 28-31). In order to illuminate how performance tools, such as ghosting and the scenario, consciously display particular struggles for inclusion in the community of citizens, I focus on the example of *Welcome to Dreamland* - a theatre play devised by Anna Ehnold-Danailov, a German-Bulgarian theatre director and writer based in London, and Bosnian-born Zlata Camdzic and their own personal accounts of devising and performing (in the case of Zlata) the piece.

Welcome to Dreamland is a wordless one-woman show about the dehumanising experiences of a female asylum-seeker in the British asylum system. This is not 'one story of one woman that we read', Anna tells me. It is not a story that is personalised, vocalised or contextualised; we don't know this woman's name or the personal circumstances that led her to seek asylum in the UK. The intentional lack of detail in terms of character construction and plot is poignant

because it is intended to force audiences to become more reflexive about what it means to be a displaced woman in the context of the British asylum system. Anna refuses to provide audiences with a secure sense of knowing or an ultimate truth (see Burvill, 2008: 241). As Anna puts it:

> 'I would like to encourage them [the audience] to think for themselves, to draw their own conclusions, to basically build up their own stories. (…) Because we decided … to tell a story that has been taken from so many different accounts, from different women from different cultural backgrounds. That although they have this sort of through line, obviously varying tiny details, we found it was covering much more than just telling one very specific story'.

In *Welcome to Dreamland* the affective value of embodiment in communicating experiences of asylum is enhanced not by a vocalised account of refugee testimonies, as is the case in verbatim dramas, but through the particular arrangements of the scenario where props and gestures acquire symbolic significance. In this regard, Anna refers to 'the glass ramekins, for instance, the use of offset pieces and props as symbols for a journey that so many people unfortunately have to do. Or for the torture, yeah, for the problems that so many people have encountered in their lives'. Silence and gestures are, therefore, part of the telling and should not be seen as signifying invisibility, injustice or lack of agency (see Horsti, 2017: 12). In artistic performance, as in other political performances (e.g., lip-sewing performances), silence can be seen as deliberate communicative action that is performed to convey a subject-position or emotion (Horsti, 2017; Tyler, 2013: 101).

Zlata tells me that this is a piece about 'who has the right to speak [for refugees and asylum seekers], and who doesn't'. It is clear that, at the level of the material performed, being voiceless is not the same as not having the ability to speak or to have voice. The image of the asylum seeker woman who we see running and stumbling over the glass ramekins is visually arresting and powerful because it signifies her agency in her struggles for inclusion in the body politic. These struggles are not wedded into the written word. The nameless asylum-seeker in the play fights for dignity - we see her applying lipstick and composing her clothes to look presentable - as much as she fights for her life as she braves walking over the glass ramekins. Yet, this woman does not speak, ultimately, because she cannot speak the English language. This is a strong subtext conveyed in this artistic performance. At the heart of the play is a determination to examine from a feminist standpoint the struggles of women asylum seekers whose experiences of rape, detainment and torture are neither heard nor seen. 'We just want

to tell a story of what women are going through', because 'you can't see them, you don't even see them begging on the street'. 'The lack of women, the visibility of women is astounding', Zlata tells me. She is keen to emphasise that many women asylum-seekers originating from countries in the Middle East or South East Asia have few opportunities to escape from abusive regimes because they have little access to education and public life, and don't speak English; 'why women don't even have a chance to escape? And when one does it's extraordinary. It's extraordinary bravery'. The play humanizes female asylum seekers by illuminating their bravery and agency against the backdrop of the inhumane British asylum seeker system and repressive home regimes.

Drawing on Mhurchú (2016: 157) who argues that citizenship is 'an act foregrounds *social struggle* (what people do rather than who they are)', I argue that *Welcome to Dreamland* performs citizenship in two ways: firstly, at the level of the material presented, through the representation of a female asylum seeker's struggle through the British asylum system, and secondly, at the level of the conditions of cultural production, as the artists, Zlata and Anna, carve out a communicative space to articulate their own struggles for inclusion and visibility. The process of researching, devising and, finally, performing the play becomes also a communicative context where Zlata and Anna gain a better understanding of the perils of female asylum seekers and become more reflexive about their own struggles for belonging and inclusion as migrant artists. The aesthetic option of devising a wordless one-woman show reflects the artists own struggles as migrant artists to develop work as non-native speakers. As Anna points out: 'Zlata and I are not writers. We are also not, you know, British. As you know the English language isn't our forte ... we are not writers but we are people who can tell stories. And telling stories doesn't have to be through words'. She is keen to emphasise that

> 'words are very restrictive with accessibility. To start with it would be something that is only to people who speak in English. But you know, I'd like to reach out to people who don't speak English or who've got very limited grasp of the English language as well. Images are, or have the power, that I think, well maybe, words can have, but I don't, because I'm not a writer'.

The process of researching and devising a play that dramatizes the perils of a nameless female asylum seeker in the UK is also significant to the extent in which it created opportunities for Anna and Zlata to become more reflexive about their identity as migrants and to develop new social interactions with others (refugees and asylum seekers). Zlata, like some of the artists I interviewed, admits she speaks from a privileged position – 'I've got British citizenship, this

is my home, it's easy for me, I've got a job, I've got friends, everything, I've got my own flat, I've done a masters. I'm in a good place '. Yet, at another level, she also identifies with asylum seekers and refugees' experiences of displacement and of being an immigrant. Zlata tells me how at a Platforma conference she met 'people from all walks of life, lots of immigrants, refugees, people seeking asylum, lots of artists, and British people' and of how she felt an immediate connection with some of them. She was particularly struck by her encounter with a female refugee playwright with whom she ended up discussing the issue of who has the right to write, perform and, ultimately, stand in for refugees and asylum seekers. When this woman tells Zlata that "Everybody has the right. Give us a word even if it's just a whisper", Zlata thought 'imagine if everybody I know just whispered on behalf of these people. How amazing that would be. And so, for me, I knew I'm gonna be doing the piece [*Welcome to Dreamland*]'. This anecdote is also illuminating because it signals Zlata's recognition of her subject-position. She realises that as an artist she must speak on behalf of others who are denied access to public representation. She feels morally compelled to listen to their stories so as to counter their exclusion and invisibility in public life, which is an ethical orientation found in many theatrical productions about the treatment of refuges and asylum seekers (see Gilbert and Lo, 2007: 192; Gilbert and Nield, 2008).

In *Welcome to Dreamland*, speaking up means, literally and metaphorically, both dramatizing through the scenario rather than discursively an anonymous woman's fight through the British asylum system, and creating an alternative communicative space where abuses of the human dignity of female asylum seekers can become visible in public life. By mobilising certain performance strategies (e.g., the absence of dialogue, the walking on top of ramekins), the play becomes a vehicle for a myriad of women's stories that would otherwise remain unheard or distorted in mainstream public narratives. The emphasis on performance strategies that play out non-discursive registers needs to be understood against a backdrop of political and artistic performances in which injured asylum-seeker bodies speak by becoming visible in public space (Gilbert and Lo, 2007: 197-198). Lip-suturing protests and hunger strikes are a powerful form of political performance where asylum-seekers act out their abjection and find their own voice through silent protest. As insightfully noted by Tyler (2013: 101), such protests should not be seen as minor disturbances in the public sphere because they are often appropriated, restaged and repeated in performance pieces and plays as acts that 'form part of a critical practice of counter-mapping which creates an unravelled fabric of political resistance with the state and beyond its borders'. Thus it is important for researchers and artists to ask: who gets to exercise voice and whose voices get to be heard through performance? These questions are important

not only because 'speaking up does not guarantee being heard' (Dreher, 2010), but also because one of the problems of representing or researching the so-called 'refugee voice' is the assumption that artists and researchers, who often speak from a subject-position of relative privilege, must give 'voice to the voiceless' or vulnerable others. This is a problematic normative standpoint that blights scholarship and artists alike. One must not lose sight of the asymmetrical and unequal relationship between artists and performers (migrant or otherwise) who act as vehicles for 'other' refugee and migrant bodies and voices, and those subjects they claim to represent and embody by stepping into their shoes. While artistic performance can be an important site of political resistance, one must not assume that all performances concerned with marginalized voices or struggles for inclusion and recognition within the community of citizens are necessarily progressive or emancipatory. Whereas performance is, as we have seen, a collective exercise that can invite critical thinking and challenge the cultural positioning of the artists themselves and their audiences (Taylor, 2003), it is also important to consider voice as value and ask – as Musarò (2017: 95) does - in what ways can refugee and migrants speak up in order to challenge narratives of security and pity? What "architectures of listening" can be established by the performance so that the voices of refugees can come to matter?

Contesting citizenship

In this section, I argue that artistic performances of migration and asylum are not only concerned with issues of visibility and exclusions from public representation, but also aim to contest 'from below' formal rules for inclusion and exclusion in the body politic, both at the level of the material presented and the conditions of cultural production. These contestations of citizenship should not be seen purely as an exercise of deconstruction of the contradictions of the inclusive/exclusive logic of citizenship (Tyler, 2013: 146). Neither are the artists wanting to make public specific grievances and concerns (see Marciniak and Tyler, 2014: 7) to influence the government. Rather, contestations of citizenship are about creating an alternative space of expression where the social relationships between 'us' and 'them', 'citizens' and 'non-citizens', can be interrogated and re-imagined. The artists I interviewed are particularly concerned with using artistic performance as a forum to communicate, affectively and intellectually, the harm and injustice that contemporary modalities of citizenship inflict on particular social groups and populations (i.e., asylum seekers, refugees, minority communities). My argument is that contestations of contemporary regimes of citizenship articulated in these artistic performances are, ultimately, about enacting more dialogic forms of engagement and

encounter with these groups and populations in specifically artistic spaces as well as other fora in public life. What came to light in the interviews is the power of artistic performance and the creative imagination to generate humane forms of engagement and dialogue with those who are excluded from the community of citizens and labelled as outsiders and undesirable 'others' in mainstream media and political narratives. As collective experiences, artistic performances have the potential to bring together a range of interlocutors (artists, subjects of representation, audiences) to start new conversations, and to nurture imaginative engagement with experiences and images of displacement, migration and citizenship.

To illustrate how artistic performance can be a site of contestation of regimes of citizenship I focus here on how Kurdish-Iranian filmmaker Havi Ibrahim crafts the documentary film *Wait* out of the raw materials of the real-life perils of Hayder, a Kurdish asylum-seeker who waited fourteen years for the Home Office to grant him leave to remain. *Wait* addresses directly in its subject-matter the figure of the bogus asylum seeker that is deeply entrenched in the British public imaginary (Tyler, 2013). Havi explains that his motivation to film and direct *Wait* was to challenge the public perception 'that asylum seekers have an easy life here in Britain— they don't have to work, they don't have to pay taxes, they get money, accommodation'. He wants to 'explore this frustration of Hayder's life: to tell the British people and the world that it is not true what you see in the newspapers and magazines because this is one of the victims'. Havi tells me about the many dehumanising predicaments of Hayder's life – for example, 'he wasn't allowed to study, he wasn't allowed to be educated, he wasn't allowed to learn, he wasn't allowed to be free'. In contrasts to *Welcome to Dreamland*, the film uses a vocalised account, a barely scripted narrative and the power of individual testimony as performatic tools to contextualise and meaningfully convey the real-life perils of an asylum-seeker. It is clear that Havi wants to do justice to the experiences of Hayder with the truth of personal testimony by focusing on a true-life story. An important subtext here is how the limbo condition in which Hayder is caught is depicted as a direct cause of punitive and dehumanising British asylum laws and policies. Not surprisingly, the film accords Hayder a strong subject position; Hayder's first-hand account of his experience of the hostile British asylum system is poignant to the extent that it accords the subject of representation an opportunity to exercise voice, i.e., the possibility to speak by publicly telling his own story and to turn the audience into media witnesses. The vocalised account of Hayder's everyday experiences of asylum goes in tandem with a plot that is very loose and cyclical, and a narrative that relies strongly on visual devices; for example, the recurrent image of the chimney of Hayder's British house, which punctuates the film, alludes well to Hayder's feelings of entrapment and lack of freedom. In one scene,

against the backdrop of this image, we hear Hayder saying 'without a decision my life is a living death'. Havi emphasises the importance of the visual vis-à-vis the script:

> '(…) with the visual, they [the audience] get a better idea behind the real subject, because one of the things that I forgot to tell you, when I was directing *Wait*, I didn't want to over-direct Hayder for a single second in that film. I've told him, "I'm just gonna be there observing you, *you do whatever you want to do, you say whatever you would like to say*. I don't want to get involved in that process". So that means that, during this 45 minutes, everything that you see is true. It's not like me, manipulating this character to say things or to do things'. (italics added for emphasis)

By playing up the power of the truth of individual testimony and minimal narrative, *Wait* does more than elicit sympathy from the audience through its imagery of victimhood and entrapment. Hayder's personal narrative of asylum in the cinematic frame sits uneasily with Hayder's performance and actions beyond the film text. Hayder, the actor and the human being, is not someone who is being reduced to the condition of helpless victim within the British asylum system, but someone who is empowered and humanized by the opportunity to act and exercise his voice beyond the film text.

For Havi, it was important to let Hayder do and say whatever he wanted so that Hayder could be heard not only as a fictional character in the film text, but also in particular contexts of reception. The circulation of the film in various contexts of reception such as the television channel Arte and several film festivals and public engagement events where the film was screened point towards the value of listening in a range of fora. Havi tells me that he took Hayder to an event organized by Amnesty International in Leeds where there was 'a debate on migration rights and we had a panel discussion'. He remembers Hayder saying that this was "the first time that I feel that I'm a human" because 'he had received his passport and it was very well-received'. What is interesting here is not only that Hayder felt listened to in a context of reception where he had the possibility to enter in cultural dialogue with the audience to discuss the film, but also that Havi felt it was important for Hayder to be listened to beyond the text. This resonates with Horsti's argument (2017) that watching the documentary films with those who had themselves eye-witnessed similar practices of bordering asks researchers interested in mediated witnessing to pay more attention to the context of reception: to the where

and with whom seeing and knowing happens, because this practice can create more sensitivity to listening to and seeing others.

Contestations of exclusionary practices of citizenship are enacted, as we have seen in this example, both at the level of the 'text' and in the context of reception (e.g., in post film screening discussions Q & A discussions and political advocacy events) where different interlocutors meet and engage in public debate about, for example, what does it mean to be excluded from the privileges of citizenship.

Reinelt (2015: 42) has argued compellingly that theatre is 'a possible worksite for democracy and citizenship in Balibar's sense'. While I agree with this proposition, I would argue that artistic practices and contestations of citizenship, such as those I have discussed in this section, cannot be reduced to agonistic struggles understood as a battleground where critical artistic practices can play an important role in subverting the dominant hegemony (Mouffe, 2007). Contestations of modalities of citizenship in artistic performance take place in sensitive contexts of listening that are akin to Habermas' (1989) conceptualisation of the public sphere as conversation between of intimate equals in the lifeworld. For example, the liveliness and intimacy of the spaces in which the film *Wait* is received and publicly discussed encourage, as we have seen, dialogic forms of engagement that effectively attend to the voice of the 'other' (Stevenson, 2003: 50); Hayder felt valued and listened to when offered the opportunity to attend a public film screening and engage in an alternative debate about his experiences as an asylum-seeker in Britain. What I am arguing here is that artistic contestations about citizenship are as much about questioning the dominant hegemony (Mouffe, 2007) as they are about having alternative and intimate conversations about what does it mean to be excluded from the community of citizens and the rights to which they have access. These conversations are very different in nature to the type of conversations that take place in digital spaces (e.g., blogs; online forums) and the mainstream media because they require co-presence in public space. Such forms of imaginative engagement with art take place in what Charles Taylor (2002: 113) calls a 'topical common space'; the act of coming together for a common purpose is crucial for nurturing participation in cultural dialogue within and beyond the ephemeral artistic event (e.g., attending a film screening or a performance).

Thus, rather than lamenting the disappearance of civic spaces where citizens can interact with each other, as Dahlgren (2009: 114-115) does, I suggest that more attention is paid to the arts as a site of citizenship; that is, to what the arts have to offer to the understanding of forms of citizen engagement and participation in democracy. The performing arts, in particular, can

contribute a unique form of embodied and imaged knowledge to express and sustain the social imagination (Reinelt, 2001: 366) that deserves more empirical attention. As we have seen, it is not necessarily that the artists I interviewed seek to directly influence migration policy, or make explicit demands on the state for the rights of migrants and asylum seekers in the state-centred arena of politics. Rather, they seek to contest and disrupt established cultural understandings of 'us' (citizens) and 'them' (non-citizens) by creating spaces for the exercise of the creative imagination where it is possible to have new types of democratic conversations and challenge the terms of public debate on migration and asylum. Thus more attention needs to be paid to how artistic performances can be constitutive of practices of citizenship that are linked to less immediately perceptibly political acts (Mhurchu, 2016: 157), and to the ways in which artists and audiences can become deeply involved in the larger political practice of identifying, thematising and imagining anew the issues that the wider public will need to take up and deliberate on (see MacAffee, 2015: 277; see Habermas, 1989).

Conclusion

This paper suggests that citizenship can be understood as embodied and expressive practice by illuminating some of the ways in which citizenship is staged and contested in artistic performance. It highlights the role of voice in practices of citizenship by suggesting that to be able to participate in social and cultural spheres people need to be able to speak in one's voice to tell stories about themselves and others, and that people – marginalized social groups, in particular - need more than narrative resources to speak up and be heard. The paper advances our understanding of the relation between voice and citizenship by arguing that an expanded notion of voice as a political act of self-expression, which is not purely discursive, is useful to the understanding of citizenship as embodied and communicative practice. It is suggested that media, communication and cultural studies scholars interested in debates on citizenship have not paid sufficient attention to the performative dimensions of voice and the significance of artistic performance as a communicative practice for understandings of citizenship, and that this scholarship would benefit from entering into a more serious dialogue with scholarship in performance studies. In the empirical sections of the paper, I argue that the artistic performances of UK-based artists with a migrant or refugee background are an important site where the voices of marginalised subjects and groups (e.g., migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees) can be articulated, heard and valued. By applying tools and concepts from performance studies – e.g., ghosting, scenario – I examine not only the conditions of production and reception of

the documentary film *Wait* and the play *Welcome to Dreamland*, but also the artists' subjective experiences of devising the film and the play, respectively. In so doing, I have shown that artistic performance can be a site of citizenship when artists use the resources the creative imagination and particular performance devices to make visible particular struggles for recognition and inclusion in the body politic. We have also seen that artistic performances can create communicative spaces for contesting and disrupting established cultural imaginings of 'us' and 'them', and that it is in such alternative communicative spaces that more dialogic forms of engagement with 'others' and democratic conversations can take place.

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