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Material Stories of Migration: Reframing Home through Poetry

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ABSTRACT

This article reflects on the power of poetry to reframe the concepts of home, arrival and belonging, each of which is important in understanding the relationship between migration and culture. It traces the journey of a collective poem – 'Grapes in My Father's Yard' – that was created during the Material Stories of Migration project in Sheffield in 2015; was performed at Migration Matters Festival and has since been shared in multiple digital and material formats between 2015 and 2022. The text's trajectory demonstrates poetry's capacity to transgress structural and grammatical norms and capture that which is absent, ambiguous, and elusive in the idea of 'home'. The poem intertwines different languages and flows between them, enacting the give and take of linguistic and cultural translation. This article draws on follow-up interviews and ongoing discussion with project participants and creative facilitators to explore how the 'storying' of migrant lives is an ongoing creative process that poetry can illuminate. 'Grapes in My Father's Yard' articulates how post-arrival life for migrants is not a linear, forward-moving process but a kind of re-dwelling in lost homes and landscapes; the beginning of a micro-bordering which continues for years. The poem calls on us to read between the lines and to seek out the silences, as much as it asks us to listen to the words.

KEYWORDS: Poetry, performance, stories, migration, multilingualism, home, arrival, belonging,

The Material Stories project began with an ethos of curiosity and a commitment to social inclusion, and unintentionally brought a poem into the world. This article traces the journey of that collective poem, from its emergence in pieces of paper spread on the floor in a creative workshop to its live performance as 'Grapes in My Father's Yard' at the Migration Matters Festival in Sheffield and beyond. Five years after it was written by a group of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, all of whom are migrants to Sheffield, we decided to take a retrospective look at the poem's development and its ongoing impact by weaving together the perspectives of participants, artists, and researchers both then and now. Our aim is to examine the transformative power of poetry and its performance, and to use this reflection to reframe concepts of home and belonging. The 'storying', as we have termed it, of migrant life experiences through poetry has the capacity to produce cross-cultural meanings that resonate in the 'hostile environment' (Liberty 2018: 4) that migrants continue to face in the UK, particularly considering the increased isolation created by the Covid-19 pandemic and the current government's initiative to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda (see Mayblin 2022; Nair 2022).

Stories shape how we see ourselves and others and how we make sense of our lives. However, stories can also be misused and turned into devices to control public opinion and policies. The insensitive and dehumanizing terminologies and tropes used to represent migrants in some media and political discourses can split communities and divide nations. The construction and circulation of us/ them binaries is one way in which reductionist and discriminatory narratives are created. In Carolyn Heilbrun's words, 'The problem […] is one not of language but of power. And power consists to a large extent in deciding what stories will be told (1988: 43). Acknowledging the power relations that produce invisible borders in

a society requires a democratic imagination and ethical collaborations that allow every voice to be heard and valued through (O'Neill et al. 2018). This context is crucial to the Material Stories of Migration project, which probes the possibilities and the limitations of participatory arts-based work, in this case the use of poetry and art to reshape not only individual situations and everyday scenarios but also the structural relations that hold them in place, imagining fresh forms of positive social interaction and avenues to social justice. We also aim to situate the poem in the emergent landscape of 'decolonizing' the knowledge produced by universities and the creative industries by examining how collaboration, a commitment to multilingualism and 'poetic activism' can work together in a way 'which affirms the granulations of the way peoples name their worlds' (Phipps 2019: 9).

We decided to write this article in 2020, partly because the loss of many creative opportunities due to Covid-19 restrictions and ongoing funding cuts highlighted the value of this project, and others like it, for everyone involved. We also feel that we are now far enough removed from this first iteration of the project for honest reflection without the pressure to prove the superficial function of arts-based research in instrumentalizing the 'value' of the humanities and the arts (Ladkin et al. 2016). Of course, the approach and methodology – if we can call it such – developed during the project continue to evolve and to inform our current work as researchers and creative practitioners in a deeper sense. By combining our consideration of arts-based activities with literary analysis and the thoughts of participants and creative facilitators collected through follow-up interviews, we hope to open pathways towards better understanding, honouring and connecting with the multiple, embodied ways of knowing and expressing migrant experiences. In doing so, we firstly pause to evaluate our own positions reflexively and to reflect on the wider situation of migrants in the UK by outlining the trajectory the poem has taken and the solace it continues to offer its creators and their readers. In subsequent sections we examine the key themes of the poem

(home, arrival, belonging), the collective creative process, the importance of mutlilingualism, and the poem's live performance.

WHO WE ARE AND THE GENESIS OF THE PROJECT

The Material Stories Project began as engaged research with a small 'r'. In order to fund the project as academics, we had to promise to 'generate' new insights into the lives of migrants in Sheffield. In actuality, our vision was hazier – indeed it was suffused with uncertainty – but we believe this also made it more open and, ultimately, more generative. Convinced that 'vagueness and uncertainty are not necessarily shortcomings' (Weiner-Levy and Popper-Giveon 2011: 27), we wanted to allow meaning to emerge through creative interactions and the stumbling blocks they involve. Yasmin Gunaratnam characterizes this kind of open-ended approach in which 'the form and content of art works as encounters and events […] can "make way" for what is beyond immediate recognition and experience, both how things "might be" and the "not yet"' (2007: 271). The 'not yet' is particularly crucial given the uncertainty and drawn-out legal processes of migration to the UK. The challenges of adjusting from 'there' to 'here' that migrants are expected to face with resilience and resourcefulness are far from straightforward and, on an emotional level, are never complete. In 'Grapes in My Father's Yard' something of the intricacy of this incompleteness is brought into view and further enhanced in the accompanying artworks and a short film produced during the project (now available on the Material Stories website).

We – Shirin, Rachel and Veronica – came to the project with similar priorities but from different perspectives and positions. Shirin is a researcher, a poet, and a migrant to Sheffield from Iran whose experience enriches her creative work with groups from diverse backgrounds. Rachel is a Sheffield-based poet, writer and creative facilitator. Veronica is a lecturer in global literatures who established the Material Stories project after running pilot

workshops with asylum seekers in Sheffield in partnership with local organizations in 2014. In many ways, as is often true of creative projects, this pilot process was messy. In the pilot sessions participants and facilitators discovered the joyful unexpectedness of collaboration but also confronted challenges including: the live translation from Arabic, Farsi and other languages into English, the lack of cultural fluency amongst researchers and facilitators; the need to get to know new faces at each workshop; and the risk of opening up personal stories that had to put away again when a stand-alone session was over.

When it began in 2015, The Material Stories project aimed to address these limitations by combining the best aspects of the pilot workshops with Shirin's experience of working with migrant participants over longer timeframes, allowing stories and ideas to be unpacked and shared in a more sustained manner. We used a format that was flexible, exploratory, holistic, and responsive to participants' own priorities. As such, the activities were able to elicit 'the emotions and vulnerability inherent in the artistic process that connects people' (Nguyen 2018: n.pag.). Working with Rachel and other creative facilitators, participants used multiple methods (poetry, performance, printing, textiles) to re-imagine their relationship to Sheffield as a city and to the place or places they had previously called home. The emphasis fell naturally on moving between their 'mother tongues' and English. The space (of the workshops and the poem itself) became one where all languages were welcomed and valued. When the energy in the room worked well, participants, researchers and facilitators were absorbed in co-producing creative pieces in solidarity. The creative work destabilized – to some extent – the power relations that are ingrained in university engagement with marginalized communities. Partly because of the shifting between languages, everyone could suddenly become an outsider trying to follow conversations and decipher meaning, a position unfamiliar to non-migrant members of the group and one that can allow us to 'come close to people's situations' (Nguyen 2007: n.pag.) that are unfamiliar

to us. In the following sections we unpick the creative process further through what Megan Nguyen calls the 'deliberate contemplation' that characterizes arts-based practice and research (2007, n. pag.). Fostering 'critical self-awareness' (Broussine 2008: 36) is particularly crucial in migration research as the plurality of experiences and diversity of voices means that researchers must learn to be inexpert and prepare to encounter each experience of displacement on its own terms. Our starting point is expressed well by Gary Knowles and Ardra Cole's assertion that 'the arts can bring forth a type of knowing that caters to unspeakable human emotions' (2008: 19). Therefore we remain hesitant to put our own interpretation on the poem discussed here and prefer to let this collective piece speak for those who created it as far as possible. Participants and facilitators of the project have actively contributed to this article via interviews and discussion and we have intentionally made the language and style accessible and inclusive while, we hope, encouraging deeper thought about the themes and images of the poem itself.

MATERIAL FRAGMENTS AND 'HOME'

Stories migrate too. They cross borders, languages, alphabets, time, and cultures but remain invisible, unsettled, silent, stateless. The 'material stories' in this project do not refer to authentic autobiographical accounts, but narratives that are often reimagined and necessarily fragmentary. The project was designed to be an arts-based learning trajectory where participants were valued as co-educators and experts on their own unique experiences. The backgrounds of the group included Yazidi women from Kurdistan (Iraq) and people from Sudan, India, Iran, Romania, Poland and Germany. We avoid using reductionist banner terms such as BAME or 'ethnic minorities' to refer to the group as they do not address complexities and asymmetries of unique human identities. We have also intentionally avoided offering overtly theoretical definitions of the ideas at the heart of these stories: 'home' and 'belonging'. Exiled stories need to 'arrive' in their own time and find their own 'homes'. Our

intention is to honour these stories and the lived experience in which they are rooted by allowing the many meanings of 'arrival', 'home' and 'belonging' to emerge through multilingual articulations. Allison Phipps recognizes how expressions of 'home' can comprise both stillness and mobility; 'Language can be a refuge, a shelter house and a home, but only if it is itself given refuge, shelter and home, most especially when under attack, or forced, in the bodies of its speakers, into exile' (2019: 29). Our aim during the Material Stories project was not only to foster co-creation but to recognize a kind of co-presence between the stories of participants in which the elements that Phipps describes co-exist. This is also to say that our understanding of home still resists theorization because it is formed from the shifting presence of the poem itself (written, spoken, performed, and published). The poem has become a kind of linguistic home for the stories that flowed into it but, at the same time, it captures the immaterial and imaginary nature of 'home' in migrant lives. The participants in this project do not share a single idea of home or belonging; in actuality, their perspectives on home have always been very different and continually evolving, as the poem makes clear.

In order to allow for this complexity from the outset, the length of the project (a course of ten weeks) was decided carefully to allow the group enough time to know each other and feel comfortable to express themselves and build what can be called a creative solidarity. The diversity of the voices and stories in our multilingual group posed the question of what forms of 'language' and methodology could transcend the linguistic obstacles and could grapple more fully with the existential aspects of displacement from 'home'. The need to retell and re-own what is lost, including identity and human agency needs a kind of nuance which conventional forms of communication cannot offer. We commited to an art-based engagement with stories that, according to Sara Ahmed can offer 'the opportunity to review,

revise, and reconstitute the often-scattered shards of memory, culture and identity that [they] carry with them. The artistic act may then become one of discovery' (2011: 11).

To address the ambiguities and un-homeliness of the lived realities we used dynamic storytelling strategies including 'poetic inquiry'. At the same time, we did not limit our project to gaining knowledge and critical insights about migration but created 'art for art's sake' and cherished the merit of the works produced**.** Exploring imaginatively and with openness and shared vulnerability helps to reach an aesthetic depth and beauty which is otherwise unattainable (Gunaratnam 2007: 276). In each workshop facilitators used creative activities with the aim of helping participants experience the liberating joy and pleasure of creating.

STORYING AND RE-STORYING

The structure and the process of the course as well as the workshops can be divided into two parts: storying and re-storying. These terms refer to our desire to facilitate and nurture the need to tell stories, and eventually provide the possibilities for re-authoring and writing back. As Adriana Cavarero puts it, 'It's rather the necessary aspect of an identity which, from beginning to end, is intertwined with other lives – with reciprocal exposures and innumerable gazes – and needs the other's tale' (Cavarero 2000: 88). Each workshop entailed using creative storytelling techniques (storying) to allow stories emerge and then transforming them into a meaningful artefacts (re-storying). This journey, from telling a story, to re-telling it through art, also helped the group to transcend linguistic barriers. For example, we began the first session of the course using cards and photos to introduce broad themes such as 'map', 'journey', 'home', 'story', and 'memory'. This activity triggered powerful stories on themes including family, borders, crossings, dreams, hopes, the role of language (both mother tongue and English) and the question of belonging. We developed these emergent topics and used

them as threads that connected different workshops working in a range of media (fiction, poetry, print-making, theatre).

In one of the fiction writing workshops led by writer and lecturer Honor Gavin, we used actual maps of Sheffield and were asked to 'un-map' it by re-drawing it. This was a creative way to elicit more detailed and tangible narratives about everyday encounters with places in the city and a means of storying both autobiographical and fictional versions of everyday life. Anwar, a young man from Sudan who had made a long and dangerous journey to the UK, decided that Sheffield needs a 5-star holiday resort in the very centre of the city at Kelham Island. Anwar's reimagining of Sheffield city centre generated discussions about future dreams, replacing the marginal and often invisible sites that asylum seekers are often made to occupy with a hypervisible site of pleasure that collapsed the boundary between citizens and non-citizens. This topic continued in the following fiction workshop co-facilitated with the novelist Lucy Hamilton where the group were asked to develop fictional stories based on their hopes and dreams. Lucy asked the group to step into each other's 'worlds'. Dillo, one of the participants from Kurdistan Iraq, started by telling us that her teenage son was dreaming of becoming a pilot and flying his own plane. The rest of the group 'entered' that story by planning a group holiday to Spain, a fantasy of free movement that also solidified the ambitions of the group for their families and communities, centred in but also looking beyond Sheffield. While this activity created lots of fun, it also led to inter-connectedness and intercultural understanding. Five years later in an interview with Dillo, we found out that her son is actually studying to be a pilot.

The feedback we received from the group demonstrates the positive effects that art-based storytelling techniques can have. One participant said that the course has made her 'more confidant and certainly helped to address issues very much in a way I hadn't been addressing it before' (Interview 8th April 2021). Mihaella, a former history teacher from

Romania, said, ‘I struggle to talk to English people, and am scared of mispronunciations. Because my English wasn’t good and it made me angry and anger comes from shame.’ (Interview 8th April 2021) These sentences reveal the silences, suppression, and even self-censorship people like Mihaella experience daily. The ‘shame’ of not being a fluent speaker in the host country leads to loss of voice and, in a way, the loss of agency. Mihaella says the course helped her to express herself and ‘I don’t feel alone now because I know there are many people like me’ (Interview 8th April 2021).

THE BIRTH OF THE POEM

Poetry can be a liberating and democratic mode of expression that makes it possible to transgress structural and grammatical norms and capture something which is absent, ambiguous, and elusive. At its best, it is an invitation to inhabit the unknown realms of the ‘other’, encounter new experiences, and see the world from unfamiliar angles. Patricia Leavy writes that, ‘poetry is a form that itself brings attention to silence (or as a poet might say, to space) and also relies on emotional evocation as part of meaning making while simultaneously exposing the fluidity and multiplicity of meaning’ (2015: 66). During the two poetry workshops, key topics such as home, roots, mother tongue, and micro-bordering were developed and became the foundational materials for the group poem, ‘Grapes in My Father’s Yard’. Carefully crafted activities which included the use of ordinary objects, including string and buttons, helped the participants to write mini-poems about everyday life and their subjectivities. Rachel used small mirrors and asked participants to take a moment to look at their own eyes with compassion: to become mindful of places, of our ‘presence’, and of what we ‘see’. For one of the participants the reflection of her eyes became these lines in the poem:

‘daydreaming in a café,

thinking of my hopeful eyes

like specks of caramel

in a dark chocolate brownie.'

The powerful combination of 'hopeful eyes', 'specks of caramel', 'dark chocolate brownie', and the liberating act of 'daydreaming' in a café is a poetic re-storying of 'presence' in a public place. Perhaps no one really pays attention to the specks of caramel in a chocolate brownie but the defamiliarization of an ordinary thing in an ordinary setting is an aesthetic invitation to observe the world from different perspectives. At the same time, claiming a public place for 'daydreaming' evokes a sense of belonging or the desire to belong: to participate in the daydreaming rhythm of the city. In contrast, another participant looked at herself more critically, seeing only a 'slab of blood red marble', an image that also found a place in the poem. Participants were encouraged to look softly on themselves with acceptance and kindness: to accept what came up.

In the second poetry workshop, Sai Murray drew on this previous work in helping the group to put together the first draft of the group poem, which was later co-edited and finally dramatized as a performance in two different venues. Sai encouraged the participants to use their mother tongues in the poem (Kurdish, Polish, Farsi, Gujarati, and Romanian). Being inclusive simply by inviting people to use their own languages is, in Sai's words, 'giving people a license to express themselves' and prioritizing their 'comfort' (interview 10th May 2021). Multilingualism is also a tool to 'talk back' to the cultural supremacy and the dominance of English language. In the follow-up interview, Sai emphasized how he aims to approach workshops with people from refugee backgrounds with humility, conscious of his 'positionally' as a black British man and aware of the privileges and advantages of being someone born in the UK as well as his 'lack' of language skills and lived experience of displacement. Sai's stepping back from his own expertise in order to centre that of the

participants allowed the force of their presence to dominate the workshop; asserting ‘I want to say’ from their own unique standpoints simultaneously allowed for mutual recognition and a sense of empowerment.

It was a group decision to choose the title of the poem from Mihaella’s writing. In an interview, Mihaella said, ‘I still see me under the grapes in my father’s yard, and I always think the smell of the grapes in spring was connected to the idea of that poem. The memory we tried to keep with us and find and recreate it somewhere around us. Grapes makes me feel romantic and good things. Father’s yard is the opposite of city living and cars and — you find serenity in a grape yard. I think it is exactly the same idea we put in the poem— carrying the memory with us’ (8th April 2021). This reflection emphasizes that post-arrival life for migrants is not necessarily a linear, forward-moving process but a kind of re-dwelling in lost homes and landscapes, sifting through the rubbles of memories, and looking for precious ‘materials’ that have been lost and left behind. Arrival is also the beginning of a micro-bordering which can continue for years.

GRAPES IN MY FATHER’S YARD

The poem itself tells a story in which nobody is at home. It is a complicated poem comprising connection and dislocation: threads and ruptures; echoes and silences; memories and loss. These experiences are not only described but are deeply embedded within the very form and material of the poem itself. For example, the irregular rhyme is occasionally interrupted by rich, full end-rhymes like ‘shine/time’ or ‘rain/ pain’; while lines with conflicting meanings are connected by the association of a single word. In fact, much of the meaning is made by association: by repeated sounds, images and words in different contexts. Michael Ondaatje and John Berger recorded a conversation in 2002, in which they talked about the kind of meaning that is made possible through association, likening it to the echoes found in a mural.

Ondaatje offered an example: it is like when ‘someone is holding a pencil over on that wall, and someone is holding a wrench on that wall, and it is exactly the same gesture’ (Berger and Ondaatje, 2002, 25:06). ‘Grapes in my Father’s Yard’ does exactly this, making meaning by layering connections; bringing together disparate experiences and insisting they belong together, even when this is difficult or jarring. This occurs in the powerful associative movement from the ‘mother’ to the ‘mother tongue’ to the physical ‘tongue’ as a paralyzed ‘slab of red marble’, for example. And even in the seemingly straightforward repetition of sounds and words, perhaps seen most clearly in those haunting refrains: ‘I want to say, I want to say’/ ‘I want to belong/ I want to belong.’

The poem is not only a desire to ‘say’, or to speak, however, but also an *act* of speaking: of speaking up and out; of language as shelter; of ‘strange voices’ giving ‘comfort’. At the same time, it is a poem about being unable to speak: about the ‘marble wound’; about being desperately lost between alphabets, grammars and languages. Even though the poem luxuriates in rich, sensory language, the linguistic journey it takes us on is awkward and difficult for everyone. Our eyes and ears seek connections, straining for meaning, but the poem’s frequent inclusion of words in different languages and scripts means that no reader (or listener) has access to an easy, complete understanding, even while this technique allows for the inclusion of a range of distinct voices and experiences. This not only has the effect of questioning the adequacy of English as a universal container for all experiences, but also insists on the irreducibility of language, especially the way that memories, knowledge and lived experience are intimately bound up with the languages we grow up with.

One of the writers described how ‘using a single word’ from her ‘mother tongue’ was ‘liberating’, and how hearing this alongside other voices was ‘awkward and odd at the same time.’ She also described how this gave her ‘the courage’ to use her mother tongue in her later poems. In many ways, then, this is a joyful, sensory poem: the assertion of distinct

identities and languages; the lush music of different syllables and sounds; the rich images: grapes, rain, seeds, song.

In this way, the poem celebrates the life-affirming possibilities of different languages, and inflects English, in turn, with the music of the different speakers. This influence can be seen in the diction and grammar of the poem. Lines like ‘I am having foreign music’ and ‘I like to stay forever’ speak something true of the experience of trying to inhabit a strange language and place: not only speaking of loving language, but also of hesitation, caution and exclusion. There is conflict here: the poem calls on us to read between the lines and to seek out the silences, as much as it asks us to listen to the words.

Again, this is deeply reflected in the form. For example, much of the poem relies on the power of the line-break to separate out distinct experiences, slowing the pace, and calling on us to attend to every line as a separate experience or unit. But then as we read (or listen), suddenly a run-on line appears, sweeping us to the next line, from one image to another, only to halt and turn back, like a warning: do not get too comfortable here. In performance, the poem was performed by multiple speakers, which amplified this effect even further. You must listen, but remember: this is a difficult place, a place of loss, a place of displacement.

All of this relates to the central plea of the poem: ‘I want to belong.’ In some ways the poem takes us on a rising narrative of assertion, moving from the more tentative ‘I want to say’ at the start, to the confident exclamations of ‘I want to belong!’ at the end. But at the same time, the closing lines remain ambiguous: they continue to speak of uncertainty, loss and exclusion; they continue the plea for acceptance.

The poem is a new linguistic reality— a polyvocal poetic resistance to singular readings and interpretations. The group agreed they would end the poem with the complex concept of belonging: I want to belong’. Rather than a statement, these words can be read as

an ongoing quest which remains for each migrant to discover for themselves. It is interesting that when the group decided to write 'I want to belong' in their own mother tongues, a couple of participants preferred to say: Accept me ('men ghaboul ka,' in Kermanji Kurdish, and 'mara bepazir' in Farsi).

FROM POEM TO PERFORMANCE

The polyvocal and associative nature of the poem made it ideal for live performance. Two theatre workshops formed the final segment of the course and although they were not designed with outputs in mind, the group gravitated towards the physical and vocal translation of their own work. Indeed, the facilitators commented afterwards that the group dynamic seemed to grow out of the poem itself: more prolific members of the group happy to share or adapt what they had contributed to suit others and those who were more hesitant were encouraged to allow their voices to be articulated in tandem with those of their peers. The process confirmed that participatory theatre can allow 'subjugated knowledges' to come to the surface, 'creating new forms of citizenship' (Erel and Reynolds 2017: 302) in which migrants with diverse experiences transform how they are represented in public discourse by taking control of (and multiplying) the narrative.

Initially the creative facilitators, Kirsty Surgey and Zelda Hannay, focused on breathing and moving exercises, bringing the focus to the use of the space and of simple props, including chairs and tables. We explored how speaking the same line from various positions (sitting, kneeling, standing) and in different tones of voice (angry, sad, joyful) or in languages other than English affected the meaning. This broke down the habits that we all have of being and behaving in a certain way and allowed everyone to experiment. The approach shared features with Theatre of the Oppressed (developed by Augusto Boal in the 1970s) in that participants were prompted 'to make conscious how they use their bodies in everyday life' (Erel and Reynolds 2017: 306). It was playful and inclusive, allowing the

facilitators to get to know the group and easing inhibitions. When we moved on to develop the poem for performance, first at St Mary's Community Centre, which had hosted the workshops, and later at the Migration Matters Festival, the flexibility of the group dynamic remained an important feature. The 'cast' was slightly different in the two performances, and everyone knew and could take up each other's' parts. As Kirsty emphasized in an interview, although she assisted the group in developing the performance, she did not direct it, rather 'they built it' from the foundations of the poem they had written (21st April 2021).

The performers inhabited the poem differently depending on the space. At St Mary's they were in a familiar environment but had to work hard to 'fill' the space with their presence – as a converted church the building has high ceilings and plenty of light, which gave the performance a feeling of energy and hope. The audience included many people learning English at St Mary's or participating in voluntary and community activities and as such was already invested in the group's message. Alongside the performance, artwork including colourful prints was exhibited as well as a series of professional photos of the workshop activities. In this context, the performance itself became part of a larger narrative; the storying and re-storying process was understood as ongoing with the live event being a key juncture but not the endpoint. It's important to recognize the work as unfinished and to acknowledge that its message remains, to some extent, untranslatable. The poem, its performance and the accompanying artworks are part of what Umet Erel and Tracey Reynolds, reflecting on their participatory research with migrant mothers, call 'a collective repository of strategies for challenging exclusion' (2017: 307).

This notion of collective resistance speaks to the purpose of the Material Stories project, which brings people together not just for mutual support and reflection but in order to address the wide and growing social inequalities that migrants face and that affect all of us. The participants and facilitators of the project were aware that they had an important part to

play not only in vocalizing individual struggles but also in highlighting the structural factors that mean migrants are often left in limbo economically, socially and politically, or living under threat of deportation. Even as they form bonds with each other and with British citizens, they are subject to state demands that 'increasingly frame citizenship as having to be "earned" by a display of migrants' "integration"'(Grove-White 2012: 42). As expressed in the poem, there are many ways in which migrants navigate their new localities and communities and yet they feel the pressure to 'adhere to state-determined criteria in order to attain […] social belonging' (Grove-White 2012: 42).

The second performance took place in the evening at Theatre Deli in central Sheffield and the Migration Matters festival audience included many students and professional people as well as artists, creatives and activists. The performers were nervous of speaking at a large public event but determined to succeed in communicating the message of the poem. Dillo commented that she felt proud that her family could see her on stage (Interview 8th April 2022). All the participants were aware that they were speaking up and speaking out in a space that was unfamiliar to them but was supposed to be *for* them about a situation that requires collective action and they rose to the challenge.

Since that performance the poem has been shared online, used as a teaching tool on migration and in 2022 lines from the poem were made into pin badges for the Liberty, Legacy, Leadership conference at the University of Sheffield. The poem is a story and it has its own story. It is an uncomfortable one, without a single narrative: a twining together of distinct stories which cannot be homogenized or integrated into a single voice. The poem honours the uniqueness of the voices it contains, while acknowledging the connections between them. It is a poem about the changing meaning of 'home', acknowledging what survives and what is left behind.

GRAPES IN MY FATHER'S YARD

I want to say please, don't confront me about speaking

So many identical faces crushed in so less space, trying to shine.

Sorry loneliness, I disturb you all the time

And now my mother tongue is a shadow in the background.

I want to say *kem che* કેમ છે

Mother tongue, marble wound

I love English,

I love my language too

And I love to see my children speak my language,

I thank my mum for my mother tongue

Mother, our tongue is like a slab of red marble

I want to say કખગઘ A B C D

I am lost between alphabets

I like to stay forever in the UK

Is this the dreamland?

Around me are different faces

and I am having foreign music.

English is full of music

Can I still learn its melody?

I want to say sorry life, I call you hell because I just see flames

Sorry love, I call you a dream because you can turn to a nightmare

I used to watch blooming grapes

in my father's yard,

I used to listen to my father’s song,

sadly I am not a soprano

and I can’t choose the right tone

And for this reason my song is silent ....

Maybe I could have expressed myself better.

Maybe I could cut across the field of grapes

and reach that place in my mind faster.

What am I doing in the dreamland?

Daydreaming in a café,

thinking of my hopeful eyes

like specks of caramel

in a dark chocolate brownie.

On the way I broke my shiny star,

it has been hurting me so far,

what am I now?

A dandelion or just a seed waiting for a drop of rain,

Maybe you can imagine the pain,

I want to say I am lost between grammars

I pretend to laugh at the jokes that I don’t understand

I feel at home when I hear my great grandfather's tongue

Strange voices in Gujurati give comfort.

strange voices in Kurdish give comfort.

Strange Polish voices give comfort.

Put a face to the voice

Weave my foreign threads into your fabric

I want to belong, embrace me Sheffield!

I want to belong

Laßt mich mitmachen!

مرا بپذیر

Aș dori sa mă simt bine venită

من پټویستم پې یه

મને ભેટી લે

من قبول که

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