



Activism in Sociology Update

The BSA Activism in Sociology Forum (ASF) was established in 2013. Its purpose is to aid those inside and outside academia working on social justice projects to connect with one another for collective action, and to bring academic-activist practices into conversation with research and teaching about activism.

This newsletter reports on some of the activities ASF members have been involved in over recent months. Submissions to future issues of the newsletter are very welcome.

Keep up with ASF activities via social media, on Twitter @bsaactivism, on Facebook at 'BSA Activism in Sociology Forum', and on Jiscmail at: www.jiscmail.ac.uk/BSA-ACTIVISM-IN-SOCIOLOGY-FORUM

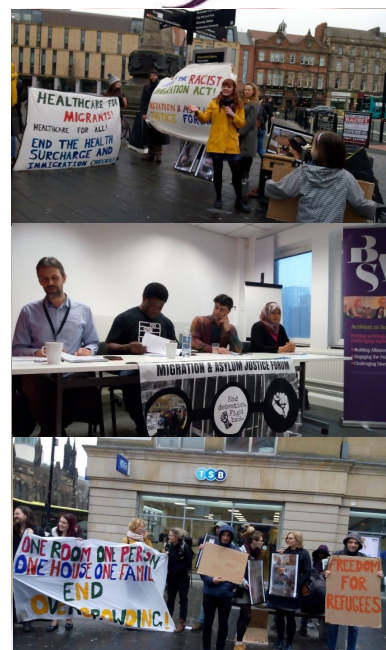
NEW CONVENOR

We are pleased to welcome Karim Mitha as a new co-convenor of the ASF. Karim is a doctoral student at the University of Glasgow and will have a particular focus on improving our social media presence. He joins the other co-convenors Rumana Hashem, Spyros Themelis, and Tom Vickers.

ASF OPPOSE THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

During the 2018 BSA Annual Conference in Newcastle the ASF worked with a local campaign, the Migration and Asylum Justice Forum, to organise a street protest to speak out against the hostile climate and growing hostility toward refugees and asylum seekers.

A group of attendees at the BSA conference gathered in the foyer and braved the rain and cold to march and join the protest. The protest heard from academics and people with first-hand experience of the UK immigration system, distributed information and engaged with members of the public (see photographs on the right). Look out for our public forum, 'Activism in Times of Crisis', at the BSA 2019 conference.



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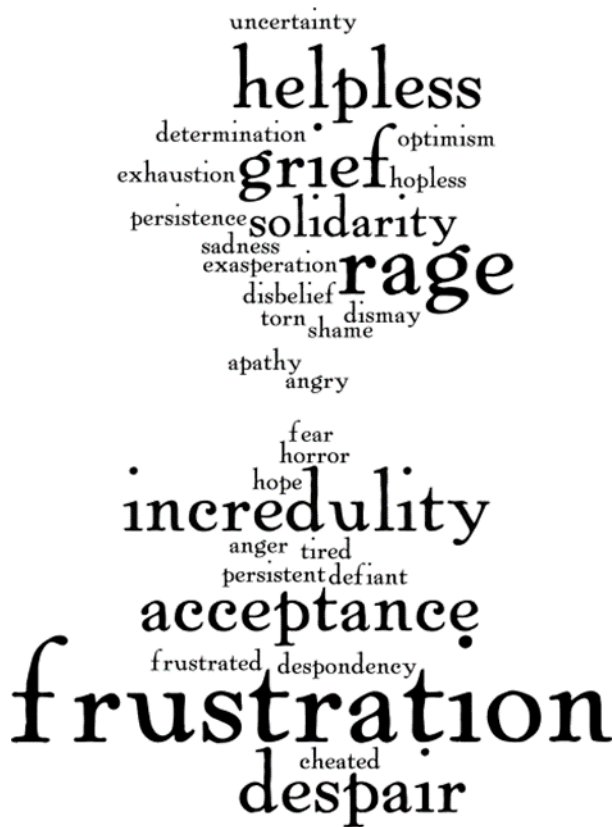


‘DOING ENOUGH’: THE CASE OF RESEARCHING AND PRACTICING PUBLIC LIBRARY ACTIVISM

In thinking about our involvement with campaigns against the decimation of public library services in Lewisham (Alice) and Lambeth (Katherine), we have found Silke Roth’s discussion of the biographical consequences of boundary-crossing to be helpful (Roth, 2016: 33, 36). While Alice, as librarian, activist and library researcher, feels she has crossed multiple boundaries in the field in ways that can be hard to disentangle (Corble 2019), Katherine felt a pivotal shift in her identity from researcher of public libraries to library campaigner, during the night she joined an occupation of a public library (Robinson and Sheldon 2019).

These boundary-crossings are also felt in the temporal tensions in the practices of being both a library researcher and a library activist.

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The slow, careful, attentive work of ethnographic listening required for research is qualitatively different to the urgency of acting in response to library cuts and local authority manoeuvres through grass-roots interventions. We embody a sense of being pulled and pushed between different ways of doing and knowing, both collectively and alone. And with professional and precarious academic work in the unhealthy state that it is, how on earth can we find the time to be both good academics and good activists?

As we work with these conflicting temporalities, affects and modes of production, we also acutely feel the need to protect against burnout and care for ourselves, as well as for other activists. Roth suggests a way forward in “activism-work-life balance” (2016: 36), but for us, this concept also evokes neoliberal and highly gendered associations with ‘having it all’ (Rottenberg 2018). Could we perhaps rather accept that sometimes simultaneous involvement in both activism and research can be overwhelming and all-consuming, and, that for commitment to activism to be sustained over time, we might also sometimes have to call time on involvement in campaigns, or take time out? Or, should we settle for doing ‘just about enough’ in our activism and research, so that we can keep a foothold in each sphere of practice and find new ways of conceiving research as activism and activism as research?

Whichever route we take through these dilemmas, significant emotional labour is involved, as evidenced in this word cloud, generated by Alice using Twitter to crowdsource fellow library activists’ feelings towards their ongoing struggles.



DECOLONIZING KNOWLEDGE AND POWER: POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES, DECOLONIAL HORIZONS

The First University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Decoloniality Summer School 21-25 January 2019, Durban, South Africa; organised by Dr Saajidha Sader.

Report by Eleanor Tiplady Higgs (eleanor.higgs@uct.ac.za)
Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town

Decoloniality is at risk of colonisation. This was one of the most urgent messages I took from this summer school, at which participants explored the demands of decoloniality through lectures and workshops with a focus on the South African context. Led by nine lecturers including Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, and Elelwani Ramugondo, our discussions ranged from the definition of racism, to the history of universities in Africa, via Frantz Fanon, the Black consciousness movement, and #FeesMustFall. The definition of decoloniality that emerged was: the politics and process of dismantling the epistemic hegemony of modern rationality and overthrowing white supremacy. We learned that decolonial interventions in academia involve addressing foundational assumptions and entrenched power relations; a demanding and uncomfortable task that cannot be undertaken alone. However, examples of student and staff activism reminded us that universities are embedded in local and transnational networks of academics, students, outsourced and precarious staff, and their families and communities. Not everything that is done to (or within) the university stays there, so decolonial interventions should be collaborative with, and accountable to, those outside academia.

Changing institutional culture was emphasised as equally necessary for decoloniality as centring the knowledge production of southern, feminist, disabled, and queer authors in our syllabuses. Betty Govinden's lecture 'Decoloniality and Feminist Thought from the South' demonstrated the power of storytelling as a decolonial mode of knowledge production, and modelled accessible interdisciplinary teaching by blending poetry, (auto)biography, theory, and performance. Such reflexive, transdisciplinary scholarship illustrates another concern of the summer school: addressing students more holistically by altering teaching methods, (re)defining the university as more than a machine for producing employable graduates, and recognising 'epistemic diversity'. There are more ways of knowing, besides modern rationality, that students already bring with them into the classroom. This vision of decolonial education centres on empowering students as agents and as knowers, equipping them to recover suppressed knowledges, and facilitating the co-creation of new ideas and strategies for decolonisation. To label anything less than this 'decolonial' is to participate in the colonisation of decoloniality.

ARCHIVING ACTIVISM: THE REFUGEE COUNCIL ARCHIVES AT UEL

The University of East London (UEL) has a long history of supporting positive engagement and activism on refugee and migration issues. In response to the UEL's long running postgraduate courses in Refugee Studies and related subjects, and through direct engagement with refugees through our Erasmus+ funded OLIVE course, the University has also been home to a growing collection of archival resources on refugee and forced migration issues.

The Refugee Council Archive was originally deposited at UEL in November 2002 and consists of the historical archive of the Refugee Council as a working charity from 1951 to the present. It also contains materials in all formats which have been created by different organisations and collected by the Refugee Council to form perhaps one of the largest thematic archival collections in the UK focusing on this issues.

We have continued and expanded this work over the last 16 years to include both the collection of other archival collections on refugee issues as well as individual materials (e.g. reports, conference papers, AV materials, etc). Our current interests focus on civic engagement and outreach work, exploring who we can document, preserve and tell the stories of activists and activist organisations working with refugees, migrants and asylum seekers. Both the narratives of refugees

themselves and also the activists who support them offer a vitally important counter-narratives to the more formalised narratives which are often found within more traditional archive collections and feel it especially important that we look to record as much of this for the future as we can. In addition to the Archive, we have also established a Migration Special Interest Group with the UK Oral History Society and an international Working Group for Archiving and Documentation of History of Forced Migration and Refugees. We would be very interested to hear from any activists or organisations working in this area who would be interested in learning more about how they can preserve their own materials as well as how can look to develop a means of documenting the great activist work that is so vital to helping support those who have sought refuge in this country.

For further information, please contact the Archivist, Paul Dudman, on:

p.v.dudman@uel.ac.uk

+44 (0) 20 8223 7676.

Website: www.livingrefugeearchive.org/



Living Refugee Archive

The Living Refugee Archive (LRA) is an online archival resource run by staff at the University of East London (UEL) Archive. UEL hosts the Refugee Council Archive, one of the largest archival collections in the UK documenting the refugee experience.

Link: www.livingrefugeearchive.org/
Twitter: @LivingRefArch



WE ARE MOVERS: WE ARE TOWERS OF STRENGTH

From 8 February-3 March the exhibit *We Are Movers: We are towers of strength*, took place at The Migration Museum in Lambeth, London.

We Are Movers challenges hostility and discrimination against migrants by offering new ways to see, feel, and understand conditions of mobility and settlement. The exhibit was developed through a series of arts-based conversations intended to bridge academic research and lived experiences of migration.

Participants included staff and students from UCL and women and children from Helen Bamber Foundation and Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network.

We Are Movers was funded by a bursary from UCL Culture and the Department of Social Science at UCL Institute of Education.

Rachel Rosen



ACTIVIST ORGANISING AT MULTIPLE FRONTS:

SOLIDARITY WORK WITH ANTI-DEPORTATION ACTION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT FOR CLIMATE, NO WAR, SECULARISM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In an age of uncertainty and war, an activist-sociologist would find it hard to concentrate in one or two projects. From a realisation that it is not enough to undertake digital public engagement or social media activism, I have engaged in solidarity work with groups working on anti-deportation and radical action on global climate crisis, land rights of indigenous communities in the global South, anti-war movement and Palestinian rights, secularism and one law for all, and of course, women's rights – in this case minority women and transgender rights. In the past eight months, I tackled activist organising ranging from social movements in Bangladesh to Colombia, India and the UK.

Solidarity work with anti-deportation and end-detention activism are critical. I was involved in petitioning and collating signatures for #Stansted15, and co-organising a powerful #WorldWithoutBorders protest outside the UK Home Office to end deportation that was being held on 13 February 2019, to raise awareness about criminal activities of UKBA and hostility against migrants.

On an environmentalist front, working with Extinction Rebellion International Solidarity Network which emerged in late October in 2018 to take radical actions against government inaction on climate breakdown, colonial environmentalism and ecocide globally felt crucial. As well I direct a grassroots activist group challenging a London-listed company who want to build a massive open-cast mine by displacing 130,000 people in north-west Bangladesh. Founded in 2010 by eye-witnesses to the killing of three people in Phulbari, the Phulbari Solidarity Group oppose mining, displacement and fossil fuel. We held several vibrant protests in conjunction with UK based climate activists and successfully disrupted the AGM of Global Coal Management last December.

Alongside helping with producing manifestos and strategy, I oversee the Extinction Rebellion fund and am now helping with a great gathering of international activists in London forthcoming on 15 April. Also I write narratives for THIS IS NOT A DRILL and give oral testimonies to build solidarity network of struggles in the minority world with the majority world. Solidarity work with Foil Vedanta, London Mining Network, Reclaim the Power and South Asia Solidarity were also crucial to help build social movement against mining in Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia and India.



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This April, I co-worked with an anti-war coalition organising against fossil finance giant HSBC bank. Under the banner of “No War, No Warming” we held a protest outside HSBC AGM in Birmingham in April and some of us attending the meeting to challenge the board of directors inside the AGM by raising questions on coal-finance in delta region and investment on arms trading and war in Palestine.

On women's rights fronts, I coordinate a community women's group working to end abuse and violence against minority and non-binary women and men in the UK and Europe. Earlier this year, we initiated a campaign seeking justice for Tomalika Shingha, an atheist Bangladeshi refugee woman whose body was recovered in Berlin on 18 December 2018. The campaign for #JusticeforTomalikaShingha is launched to create pressure on authorities including German police and Bangladesh government to undertake a prompt and fair investigation into Tomalika's mysterious death.

In addition, I've been actively participating in solidarity work with groups and activists working at the frontline for secularism and equal access to justice. A large part of this organising happens online though I attended and gave speeches in physical conferences such as the great gathering of women's rights campaigners for One Law For All on International Day to End Violence Against Women that was held on 25 November, 2018.

Rumana Hashem

