

## The Migrant's Paradox Forum: Introduction

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A few months ago I sent Tariq Jazeel an email asking if he would consider reviewing my new book. It's never an enviable task to send such an email, and more so to receive such a request in the midst of a busy teaching term, in what has been an extremely challenging year. Fortunately, the kind of collective energy that sustains the broader Environment and Planning D (EPD) project provided us with a creative gap: together with Charmaine Chua we concocted a plan that allowed us to think differently about the conventional format of a book review forum. To begin with, the University of Minnesota Press extended a very generous offer to accommodate EPD sharing and co-hosting a podcast discussion of the book. This meant that a conversation with Les Back, Tariq Jazeel, Huda Tayob and myself could extend past the usual limits of singular ownership, with Maggie Sattler at Minnesota Press curating and editing the podcast for us to air on two sites.

My book [The Migrant's Paradox](#) (2021) is located in the brutal contradictions of border-preserving nationalism and border-contravening global capitalism that increasingly constrict the life and space available to the migrant. The process of human bordering as reliant on race-craft is part of an imperial continuum of extraction and subjugation, and I expand on the state of contradiction in the UK's border regime by focusing on what it means to inhabit this violence in the uneven contours of everyday life across UK cities. My work is grounded in streets in the deindustrialised peripheries in places that are under-resourced and over-policed, and draws on six years of research on the life and livelihoods shaped on streets in Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester, London and Manchester. These urban margins have been produced by long histories of migration and marginalisation, and the question of how global displacements map onto urban emplacements allows me to think about a combined political economy of displacement and its racialised effects. Here I have found it crucial to think migration together with deindustrialisation, together with urban regeneration. The multiple forms of dispossession that shape the street livelihoods that are at the core of my book, reveal the displacement of citizenship status through the fractured legalities of a hostile UK migration system, one that calls a person's citizenship into question even when citizenship has been legally conferred.

On the street we also see the coming together of partial citizenships and part-time work prospects through the displacement of secure work in the casualisation of livelihoods and the increasing drift to forms of self-employment that markedly impact racialised minorities. A third central aspect of displacement is through the financialisation and state-led regeneration of urban space, where affordable homes and workspaces are diminished. In our podcast discussion we talk about ways of understanding the everyday cruelties of bordering and displacement, and the claims to space that are integral to the resistance to subjugation and dispossession. Our conversation extends to thinking about the cultural politics of the street, where the idea of livelihood is not reducible to limited notions of economic productivity, and is informed by the quotidian pragmatics of exchange as much as in the solidarities and contestations of the street.

In my book I had drawn extensively on a number of bodies of work from various authors, and I was very keen to engage with ideas and commitments from a selection of these respective authors in relation to my book. Tariq, Charmaine and I discussed how to extend the more usual book review or 'Author meets Critic' format to more of an 'Author to Author' exchange. A second bout of emails ensued, this time with a request for contributors to draw on central political, cultural and/or ethical engagements in their own work and to bring this into dialogue with my book. My first email went out to Yasmin Gunaratnam and Hannah Jones, as I had drawn extensively on their brilliant book [Go Home? The politics of immigration controversies](#) that they had co-authored with Gargi Bhattacharyya, William Davies, Sukhwant Dhaliwal, Kirsten Forkert, Emma Jackson and Roiyah Saltus (2017). In this book they examined the impacts of an intentionally hostile immigration environment unleashed by the UK government in 2012, and its performative malice of taking the hostility to the streets through a campaign that included driving two vans through parts of London with billboards displaying the threatening message, 'Go Home or Face Arrest'. Lest this diabolic politics should ever claim the first or last word in shaping the meaning of migration, the Go Home book actively engaged with and through anti-racist solidarities to push to the foreground the practices of dissent, care and coalition in contravention to the politics of hate. Their book provided me with an axis not only to ask how nationally contrived immigration policies settle in space, but also how everyday configurations of refusal are convened in the urban margins.

The questions of how a resurgent politics of fear and hate emerges in the current ordering of sovereignty and nationhood is central to a critical body of thinking that Sivamohan Valluvan (2019) has brought together in his vital book on [The Clamour of Nationalism: Race and nation in twenty-first-century Britain](#). In his essay in this Forum, Valluvan probes at the complex relation between

individualism and nationalism, questioning whether the notion of the entrepreneur - as inevitably entangled in the practices of commerce – holds any possibility for connecting with a collective anti-racist politics. One central thread of my book is to unsettle the overly ubiquitous and generic encapsulation of ‘the’ entrepreneur as emblematic of the spirited figure of capitalism ensconced in the promise of resilience and self-made prospect. Through the multifarious proprietors on streets I researched, I think through the far more varied and precarious trajectories of those who became entrepreneurs in the de-industrialised urban peripheries. This is not a story of choice, but of circumstance, where the intersecting forces of racialised border regimes and labour markets push to the edge those rendered redundant, casualised and self-employed. A question we both raise in this Forum, in different ways, is how to think with this fragmented and depleted edge to re-imagine collective politics.

Antonia Dawes’ finely-attuned ethnography (2020) on [\*Race Talk: Languages of racism and resistance in Neapolitan street markets\*](#), examines the practices of political solidarity in liminal spaces of work associated with street markets in Napoli. Dawes brings in the infractions of racism and inequality in how space in the city is claimed and lost, revealing for us the ongoing and always required labour of translation, negotiation and contestation. In what she articulates in this is Forum as the arduous demands of ‘linguistic toil’, Dawes acutely aligns the fraught prospects of the street vendor with the deathly passage of the Mediterranean, underscoring the expansive claims of Europe’s sovereignties in the subjugation of migrant life. It is worth signalling here that all three aforementioned books have been published in recent years by Manchester University Press. This curatorial focus on work that engages with the politics of race-craft and racism and the cultural modalities of its refusals, requires considerable editorial care and commitment, and is yielding a superb array of scholarship.

As on the streets in my book, there is a masculine performativity in claiming street space that is part of Dawes’ exploration, one that incorporates both the lively requirements of claim-making and the gendered nature of discriminatory migration regimes. Huda Tayob’s rich writing on the interior life of pan-African markets shaped by migrants in the context of Cape Town, offers important insights into the feminised spaces of migration. Like me, Huda has trained as an architect, and her slow mapping and marking of objects, arrangements and surfaces is a recognition of an inventory of meaning-making that attests to the minutia of decisions, designated allotments of space, and limited availability of resources that coalesce in small shops in the urban margins. Tayob (2018; 2019) develops the concept of ‘opaque architectures’ as evoking both a spatial and methodological concern; one in which a dense spatial palimpsest is shaped that cannot be revealed at first glance,

and in which an everyday archive of improvisational practices is sustained. Drawing has also been core to my processes of learning the city, and I am compelled by the rendering of shop interiors as comprehensions of culture from the inside out, as well as ways of seeing the violence and limitations imposed on migrant city-making.

Myfanwy Taylor's research (2017; 2020) on diverse economies merges the boundaries between academia and activism to find ways of nurturing small-scale urban economies that are all too often displaced in processes of urban speculation and redevelopment. Taylor's practice emerges through coalitions that mobilise and re-present alternative narratives about what it means to sustain life and livelihoods within the exclusionary circuits of the global urban economy. The displacement of affordable homes and work places is frequently disproportionality born by racialised minorities, compelling us to address what it would mean to nurture social justice in relation to the improvisational imperatives of the street, and against the regimes of everyday bordering.

I am deeply appreciative of how our Forum has come together; it is a reminder in the midst of a callous and aggressive milieu, that academia is also our space to be claimed for unmarketised dialogue and for thinking and making work together. My gratitude to Tariq Jazeel and Charmaine Chua for the supportive steer, and to Maggie Sattler for curating our podcast. To Les Back, Huda Tayob, Yasmin Gunaratnam, Hannah Jones, Sivamoham Valluvan, Antonia Dawes and Myfanwy Taylor, it's been brilliant to do this with you. Thank you.

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