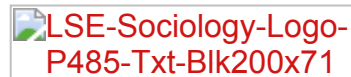


## Are We Living In An Urban Vortex? An Interview With Suzi Hall (2 of 2)



*Part II of Maria-Christina Vogkli's interview with **Suzi Hall**. Part I can be found [here](#).*

**MC:** *Being an urban ethnographer, how do you think that this methodology sheds light on the interconnection between the street, the local and the global?*

**S:** Ethnography is always my enter point into exploring a social process. So, although migration is fundamentally about the global organization of bodies across space, the way I begin to understand that is by having conversations with people who've migrated and have ended up on the streets in the U.K. So, for me that first point of entry, the human voice and the complexity that comes through listening to human voices is absolutely a fundamental starting point.

But I think a potential limitation of ethnography is that it remains within the place of investigation. There has been important moves by those who are interested in global ethnography or multi-cited ethnography or something that I call trans-ethnography, to move across different kinds of articulations of space, whether we call that symbolic space, such as the space of the city, or the collective space, such as the space of the street, or the intimate space, such as the space of the interior. To see how processes such as migration are differently or differentially configured in these different realms. I'm increasingly interested in understanding the complexity of migration not only within a particular space but within a variety of spaces.

**MC:** *You were recently awarded an ESRC Future Research Leaders Grant (2015-2017) for a comparative project on "Super-diverse Streets: Economies and spaces of urban migration in UK Cities". Would you like to share what the projects explores and what your preliminary thoughts and findings are?*

**S:** We are a year into our "Super-diverse Streets Project", which is an exploration of migrant economies and how these reconfigure streets in the UK, but also how these migrants themselves are reconfigured by the places they live. We've chosen four cities, Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester and Manchester, because these four cities are outside of London, they have amongst the highest populations of foreigner citizens. We've also chosen streets within these cities that are in comparatively deprived urban locales, because we want to understand not only the processes of reconfiguration that migrants undergo as a form of capacity making but also as a reality of enduring and new forms of inequality. What we've seen across these streets is essentially in the first instance variegation. We've seen remarkable success stories, people who keep business over long periods of time and who've managed to expand their businesses in interesting ways. But we've also seen stories of desperation, people who are barely managing to get their businesses going.

And this is why the street has become a really useful analytic device. Instead of looking at a single ethnic category of person or a single type of economy, such as the South-Asian entrepreneurs who set up curry shops, the street allows us to look at a variety of retail occupations and a variety of ethnicities. To understand where the inequalities really matter and where the capacities become more pronounced, we've developed a term that we call "creative precariat" to try and capture what we've seen in this process of people moving across the world, namely remarkable and persistent form of making a capacity or a skill and we see that people acquire all sorts of occupations, all sorts of educations dimensions and incredible language proficiencies.

But at the same time, we're also seeing that because the borders are getting higher, both the external and the internal borders, that is migrants are also subject to pronounced forms of inequality. So, they are landing into the street, because they find it very hard to enter the formal employment sector. They are by and large finding it very difficult to communicate with their local authorities because of racial and ethnic differences. So we're finding this peculiarity of side-by-side skilling and deskilling, this process of mobility means that people to be enormously competent, but at the same time they are dealing with persistent, enduring and increasingly difficult hurdles to cross. And so I don't know whether the story of the street is a positive or a negative but more to say that the migrants' mobility is a highly contradictory mobility, where they are both required to participate in society but also prevented from fully participating in society. They are acquiring very much 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, but at the same time they are being very much kept to a certain place both in the job market and in the neighbourhood where they live by the unequal structures of society.

That's why we can't afford to think of diversity simply as conviviality, simply as how people from different backgrounds come and mix with one another. We have to begin to think of diversities in terms of these new forms of competency and enduring forms of inequality. So, the enduring forms of inequality, essentially how people get ethnicized and racialized, are very much prevalent on our streets, but we are also seeing additional forms of inequality making that have come about from 2014 Immigration Act, which means it is very much harder for people to fully participate in society. They are being checked at every respective interval of their lives whether they are looking for a house or try and look for a GP; every aspect of their lives is vetted and controlled, which is a humiliating and depleting process which kind of strips people from the energy of fully participating in other aspects of human life.

For more details about Suzi Hall and her research projects please see:

*Ordinary Streets:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bKWr2IjyIM> and <https://lsecities.net/objects/research-projects/ordinary-streets>  
*City, Street and Citizen: The measure of the ordinary.* London: Routledge <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415688659/>

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