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Refugee performance: Encounters with alterity

ABSTRACT

1. In 2006 there were 9.9 million refugees worldwide, as defined by the United Nations
2. 1951 Convention, and 32.9 million persons of concern. In a comprehensive review of
3. settlement programmes in Australia, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship
4. (DIAC) concluded that there was an urgent need for targeted settlement assistance
5. towards this group if they are to achieve full and active participation in society,
6. and further research should be undertaken to track the progress of humanitarian
7. entrants in the future (DIAC, 2009). The emotional, psychological and experiential
8. impact of war and displacement on refugees has significant and long-lasting implica-
9. tions for both the individuals involved and the broader communities in which they live.
10. Performers, theatre activists and human rights workers have for some time been inter-
11. ested in working with refugees. However, the category of refugee performance can be seen
12. to create an essentialist frame from which the extrication of practice is almost impossible.
13. The article will explore the performing of refugee representation through an examination
14. of two examples of practice, one a small-scale theatre project in Queensland, Australia,
15. the other a multifaceted arts project in the United Kingdom involving theatre, commu-
16. nity photography and a combustible 25-metre sculpture. In the article, I will argue that
17. the effort to construct a discourse about refugee performance is enmeshed in an unwav-
18. ering paradox. Put simply, how may practice deal with refugee stories when the stories
19. themselves (bureaucratic performance, personal stories as victimhood, suffering as spec-
20. tacle) make an encounter with alterity more elusive?

KEYWORDS

Refugee
applied theatre
performance
and war
victimhood
othering

Figure 1: Front cover: Copyright Wendy Ewald, *Towards a Promised Land*, reprinted with kind permission.

INTRODUCTION

Conquergood's (2002) discussion of de Certeau's adage 'what the map cuts up, the story cuts across' (1984: 129) highlights the transgressive boundaries between formalized ways of knowing, 'the map', and the subaltern, embodied knowing of 'the story'. In the context of refugee performance, in which individuals and groups in a new 'host' country attempt to survive, remake home, make sense of traumatic past experiences, and locate themselves in new cultures, story can become a site of both negotiation and resilience.

One of the main problems with refugee performance begins with the linking of 'refugee' with 'performance' (Dennis 2008: 212). It immediately sets up a fixed orientation between subject (the presence of the refugee voice) and the non-refugee audience (witness). As Schuman warns, 'this builds a familiar, reductive scaffold that shores up the promise of mutual understanding and the redemptive power of empathy' (cited by Dennis 2008: 212). This is particularly difficult as there is often an emphasis on personal narrative in refugee performances, for example verbatim theatre (performance of refugee or asylum seeker transcripts), testimonial theatre (refugees 'performing' their experiences onstage) or playback theatre (improvised interpretations of personal refugee stories).

The reliance on personal testimony is often part of an effort to 'empower' refugees through the sharing of subaltern experience with a wider audience. However, as Jeffers (2008) warns, these stories can also be interpreted as problematic representations of victimhood. Preoccupied with personal narratives and particularly drawing on the traumatic past, these theatrical representations can be conditioned by what Jeffers calls 'bureaucratic performance' (2008: 218), the judicial context within which stories are constructed: 'These structures require narratives of persecution if the asylum seeker is to be successful in his or her claim for asylum, and such narratives often make their way into participatory work' (2008: 217).

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 2. which the extrication of practice is almost impossible. The effort to construct
 3. a discourse about refugee performance is enmeshed in an unwavering para-
 4. dox. Put simply, how may practice deal with refugee stories when the stories
 5. themselves (bureaucratic performance, personal stories as victimhood, suffer-
 6. ing as spectacle) make an encounter with alterity more elusive?

7. In discussing accountability in playback theatre with refugees, Dennis
 8. argues for a rich aesthetic in overcoming the 'dampening effect of empathy'
 9. (2008: 212). By this she means the presentation of 'injury' as 'reductive and
 10. potentially re-violating' (Dennis 2008: 214). The obvious danger of this kind
 11. of performance is that these representations of personal narratives produce
 12. 'suffering as spectacle' (Salverson 2001: 123).

13. Part of the problem, I think, lies in the intentions of refugee perform-
 14. ance. Applied or participatory projects often seem to get too caught up in the
 15. conventional mode of helping a marginalized other 'find a voice', which can
 16. lead indirectly to the contradictions inherent in refugee performance. In this
 17. article I will discuss two projects, one based in Logan, Australia working with
 18. new humanitarian entrants from Africa and the other a multi-ethnic project,
 19. Exodus, which used participatory photography, performance and a combus-
 20. tible sculpture to explore the impact of migration in Margate, a seaside town
 21. in the United Kingdom. The examples offer different tactics in how to elude
 22. the apparently inescapable antimony of refugee theatre practice, and suggest
 23. how arts practice can respond to issues of refugee representation, bi-cultural
 24. adjustment and social integration.

25. The Multilink project manages this because of the focus on acculturation
 26. issues and the centrality of the target audience (refugees performing for refu-
 27. gees). However, the project also had limitations particularly in regard to
 28. its aesthetic efficacy, and its potential as a piece of performance for a more
 29. general audience. The Exodus project tackles the victimhood issue by priori-
 30. tizing the aesthetic experience and contextualizing the refugee experience
 31. within a broader more generalized frame. The emphasis on a sensual, non-
 32. verbal, aesthetic experience relates to Burvill's ecology of hope, via Levinas, in
 33. terms of performance as an encounter with the other in which we experience
 34. 'infinite and transcendent alterity' (2008: 235).

35. THE MULTILINK PROJECT

36. In October 2007 I was invited by a community organization, Multilink, to develop
 37. a theatre project with newly arrived humanitarian entrants from Burundi and
 38. Ethiopia. Multilink are based in Logan City, Queensland (Australia) and are a
 39. respected service provider of multicultural services whose aim is to assist new
 40. migrants and refugees in settling in Australian communities. The Department of
 41. Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) funded the pilot project that aimed to use
 42. the arts to disseminate experiences about Australia's culture to the Burundian
 43. and Ethiopian humanitarian communities in Logan City.

44. The project's steering group, representatives from Burundi and Ethiopia,
 45. signalled that there were significant settlement problems within their community
 46. groups. With each group of new arrivals similar difficulties emerged, ranging from
 47. pragmatic domestic issues (learning to cook with a gas cooker, understanding
 48. how to use an ATM, etc.) to the more complex negotiation of understanding
 49. new cultural paradigms and values. The community representatives suggested
 50. that beyond the initial 'honeymoon' period of arrival, individuals and groups
 51.
 52.

encountered considerable stress and anxiety in dealing with the acculturation process. This observation is supported by researchers working with other communities. For example, Askland (2005), drawing on Giddens' (1991) work, found that many young Timorese refugees living in Australia suffered from a loss of ontological security: a loss that undermines their sense of control, trust and power. Within school and community settings, this lack of security and identity led to adjustment issues including delinquent behaviour, attention problems, aggressive behaviour or withdrawal (Allwood et al. 2002).

The first stage of the Multilink project was to gather stories and experiences from Burundian and Ethiopian community members who had been here for four to five years, complemented with interviews with community elders/leaders, and other community organizations. There was a deliberate request for a broad range of stories, not just issue-based experiences but funny, surprising and unusual observations about living in Australia. The collated material from these responses provided a rich resource of anecdotes, reflections and moving accounts of difficulties in adjustment. The stories also signalled the considerable pragmatism and resilience needed in the process of making and unmaking 'home'. As one of the participants in the project defined it:

Here is where I am living, because I came from that home, where I call home. I've seen there's no home there. There's nothing, completely nothing. So, I am still alive and I've found somewhere to call home. Now I am at home, where I am living in peace. I am doing everything, so it's home for me.

(personal notes, 2008)

Using the collected stories as a starting point, the project team sought volunteers from a mixed group of Burundian and Ethiopian volunteer participants to workshop and perform the material. The response was beautifully anarchic. The participants came from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Ethiopia alone has over 80 different linguistic groups) as well as countries (Ethiopia, Burundi, Sudan) and had an age range between 55 years and six months. The rehearsals were a chaotic mixture of different performance levels, ethnic languages and English comprehension, and involved developing and refining three stories that would highlight common areas of experience. What (finally) emerged was a composite portrait of a newly arrived African family, told from the different perspectives of each family member.

The first scenario started with a dream and the excitement of arrival. This was followed by the mother's (Ajok) growing frustration in finding work because of her lack of English and transferable qualifications. The second scenario concerns the father (Baheza) of the family. This scenario was based on community concerns about the high incidence of domestic violence and child abuse amongst refugee families. The scenario shows how Baheza is dealing with the dramatic change in status within the family and socially. The third scene focuses on one of the daughters – and highlights a common issue in which the younger generation pick up English faster and become more adept at negotiating a new culture. The relative speed of adaption, and in particular the 'rights' that they see other Australian children having, exist in tension with more traditional family values.

The structure of the performance event was simple. It was introduced by a Multilink presenter (translated by an interpreter), and the invited audience was offered a brief outline and background to 'the family' and a plot summary

for each scenario. Each scenario ends in a dilemma, a problem that is not resolved within the drama, on which the audience are invited to comment. In the presentation the action was stopped after each scene. The facilitator checked with the audience to see whether the story had been clear, and then asked for suggestions from the audience to help advise the characters on what they could do.

The performance was rudimentary; it had a 'job to do', and reflected the need to communicate experiences clearly using basic language. The show was performed for three different audiences, with diverse responses. The Burundian audience responded with a high level of enthusiasm, demanding the actors come onstage to explain themselves (in character). In classic Boalian style, advice, scorn and observations flowed with ease. The second performance was to a group of Afghani women who had asked to see the play. Culturally they provided a very different response. The women were generally quiet when asked for questions or comments, but there was considerable whispered debate between them. The third group was dominated by two to three members of the audience: one was a man who had been separated from his family due to a domestic violence order, and became fixated on trying to solve the problem for the character; the others were young and old members engaged in a rich discussion (conducted in four languages) about the merits of 'traditional values'.

The Multilink facilitator encouraged these debates, and also guided the audience to support networks. In this way the specific needs of the audience were identified through the focus of the discussion. Following the performance a large feast was prepared for audience members. The discussions flowed with considerable enthusiasm out of the theatre space and into the eating space.

The audience responses and questions recognized the extent of the difficulties of acculturation. One woman in the audience explained that the concept of 'social security' or any form of government support was impossible for her to understand. Another response was the difficulties of budgeting and managing money after a long period in a camp: a significant issue for the audiences was that of landlords, who after the first six months (in which rents are paid directly to them via social security) terminate the contract, leaving individuals and families to move at short notice. The intergenerational issue also attracted considerable response. The discussion in the Ethiopian group reflected on how in newly arrived families, the older children are offered places in schools, and both their English and cultural awareness develop quickly. The mother and father (if they are both in the country) feel more isolated by having to look after younger children and/or being unemployed and therefore have little opportunity to gain confidence in the language and culture.

Despite the limited scale of the project, the nature and richness of the stories from the process highlighted important issues. The stories aimed to enable a peer group of performers to communicate experiences of settlement to an audience of new humanitarian arrivals, and focus on resilience in the context of raising what problems might occur, and what pragmatic support strategies might be available. In working with a specific community and developing a performance with a strong aim (communicating strategies for resilience) the project usefully avoids some of the difficulties encountered with other refugee performance practice.

The Multilink project deliberately eschewed 'public' performance, in preference for an invited and specifically targeted audience. The centrality of the audience governed the content of the event. It led to a focus on survival strategies

and tactics of resilience, with attention to the pragmatic present and the possibilities of the future. The practice stemmed from a strong analysis of the needs of new humanitarian groups, as articulated by community organizations, community representatives and the volunteer performers. The project emphasized 'ownership' of the material and the stories were constantly aligned to the priorities of the community, in terms of what community members felt was important to represent. The narratives were generalized fiction, based on personal accounts, but rendered universal by the process. The emphasis was not on who was telling the story (or whose story it was) but on the pragmatic 'what' of the story, in terms of offering strategies to deal with specific issues. The aesthetics were straightforward and functional, perhaps a little neglected, in the rush to encompass all the other objectives of the project. Certainly there was no 'cultural specificity' in the style and the form, and this was perhaps its greatest weakness.

The Multilink project seems, on the face of it, to effectively avoid being enmeshed in the paradox of refugee performance. It might be tempting to leave it there, and develop this as a 'model' approach. However, within the refugee performance group there was always a frustration that having created the work, they wanted to demonstrate their own issues by performing it to a wider audience who might therefore 'get' what kinds of settlement issues refugees face. This raised a dilemma for the performance, as it had been tightly conceived within a particular context (refugees performing for refugees). Changing the nature of the audience would make it susceptible to other interpretations and connotations. The performance's ability to sidestep the problematic of refugee theatre arose not from the content, but from the restricted identity of the target audience. Out of its original context the performance would likely produce the kinds of secure knowing that Burvill (2008) notes as being less productive than other encounters with alterity.

In searching for other examples of theatre that might respond to these issues, specifically those that feature refugee performers acting for a general audience, it is possible to trace fleeting moments of transcendence that escape the 'personal narrative' paradox (the demonstration of victimhood, etc.). Jeffers highlights how in *A Letter from Home* the central character is 'momentarily elevated' (2008: 220) from her victim status through moving from testimonial dialogue to a sudden 'rowdy, adversarial dance' (2008: 219) in which she reveals a provocative demonstration of her internal rage. The abrupt switch between the realism and the fantastical breaks the audience's sense of secure knowing. Dennis also appreciates that the act of improvising testimony in playback theatre is a fine synthesis between authenticity and essence:

Far from bringing a script to life or presenting a transcript or testimony, the playback theatre actor is responding to a real-life story, in the presence of the (real-life) teller. In this distinctive form, efficacy is somehow tied up in the negotiable nature of the improvised aspect.

(2008: 214)

These examples, while useful, break the audiences' sense of secure knowing only partially. The performances are still deeply embroiled in the quagmire of personal narratives and victimhood discourse. They offer a hint at some possible devices, in the ways that they momentarily destabilize audience expectations through disrupting the mode of performance or rephrasing familiar stories. Another example offers a little more scope. The Margate Exodus project suggests, in certain areas of its practice, feasible tactics that respond to

both the paradox of refugee performance and the Levinas mode of interpolating the spectator in powerfully affecting moments.

'I AM NOT A SOCIAL WORKER': THE MARGATE EXODUS PROJECT

In 2005–2006 a new arts project called the Exodus project was developed by Artangel in Margate, United Kingdom. The project had three strands, Penny Woolcock's Exodus play, a day-long experimental film/performance version of the Biblical fable; Wendy Ewald's *Towards a Promised Land*, a participatory photography project; and Anthony Gormley's 25-metre *Waste Man* sculpture. I want to concentrate on Ewald and Gormley's sub-projects, as I think they offer pertinent strategies for examining how refugee experiences can be brought into dialogue with general audiences, while avoiding, or at least eliding, some of the paradoxes associated with refugee performance.

Margate is a small seaside town, an hour from London, with a highly transient population. One of the local primary schools has a 40 per cent turnover of pupils (Aitch, 2006). The town provides a temporary home for many of the asylum seekers who arrive at Dover every year. Will Self describes Margate in the following terms:

Next to the station stands the enormous, wrinkled digit of Arlington House, a Brutalist 20-storey block of flats that seems to waggle a warning at all asylum seekers: 'Enter this land of promise, and you'll be banged up in here forever.' Or worse, in the decaying terrace of the Nayland Rock refugee hostel. Once this was a luxury hotel, now it houses Roma on the run from central Europe, Congolese fleeing the meltdown of central Africa, Iraqis evading the maelstrom of the Middle East. Strange, that so many people escaping the dread gravity of these landmasses, should find themselves clinging on to the very tip of the Isle of Thanet, which in turn is like a cold sore on the Kentish lip of old England.

(2006)

The imperative of the Exodus project is drawn from delivering an aesthetic project, rather than responding to the needs of a specific community (refugee or otherwise). Unlike the Multilink project, there is no specified social objective, other than producing a show or series of events. The difference in intentionality between the two projects is marked. Engagement with non-actors was part of the process, but the makers were keen to distance themselves from 'bad' community art. Woolcock, the director of the theatre show, asserted, 'I am not a social worker' (Durrant 2006). Perhaps to exaggerate this, Woolcock is dismissive in quite maverick terms about the notion of 'community'. When asked about the choice of Margate to host the project, she simply states, 'random' (Woolcock 2008). Therefore, unlike community art (good or bad), the needs of the community were not the starting point, nor the foundation of the project.

The development of a large-scale project exploring the theme of exodus and exile in a town simmering with tensions and disharmony may be perceived as an ambitious, rather unethical undertaking. Particularly troubling, from an applied/community theatre perspective, is the disavowing of identifying and attempting to understand the complex needs of the community, before shaping a performative response. If Exodus had operated under more traditional community/applied theatre orthodoxies, surely a more responsive

entanglement with the complexities of different community values and perspectives would have been central to its process?

Interestingly, it is the very antagonism to the 'social' imperative that enables the project, at times, to subvert, if not completely elide, contradiction. Chiefly, it is the prioritizing of an aesthetic task in governing the participatory relationship between artist and non-actors, community members. The form, quality and substance of the 'art/performance' work were markedly in the control of a professional 'creative team'. Woolcock directed; she did not facilitate. Gormley designed and built the giant sculpture without community involvement. Ewald's photographic portraits were her work, not those of the children. Aside from the accidental and anecdotal moments of social encounter, how then did the project deepen the moments of alterity between individuals from a refugee background and the local community?

THE WASTE MAN

Because of the profile of the artists, and the fact that the performance was due to be screened on national television, the project attracted considerable attention from the press. A. A. Gill likened the project to 'offering missionary art to the natives' (2006: 46). Will Self approached the project with the same level of scepticism, until he saw the giant sculpture in context:

I have to say, the stated aims of Exodus – to call attention both to foreign incomers and the internal exile of Margate's disadvantaged – struck me as just a little patronising when I heard about them. It hardly seemed likely that the furious – often quasi-fascistic – denizens of Thanet were going to respond to the art-house filmic conceit by throwing their arms around the inmates of Nayland Rock in a gesture of human solidarity. Nor could I envision the burning of a lot of old chairs becoming the fire from which the phoenix of Margate's civic beauty would be reborn. But that was before I saw Waste Man in all his fleshly, wooden glory, towering up above the defunct rollercoasters of Margate's Dreamland Funfair. His peculiar, 3D collage of a body was reminiscent of a giant Arcimboldo, devised to remind us all that all is vanity.

(2006)

The sculpture was created over six weeks with over 30 tonnes of waste materials collected by Thanet council and local people. The debris was deposited in 'Dreamland', an empty wasteland next to the sea that had been the former site of a vast funfair. Gormley's sculpture was part of Woolcock's promenade retelling of the biblical Exodus fable, and for Gormley was 'a sign of those who had been dispossessed or refused a place, standing up defiantly to be recognised' (2008: 62).

The process of constructing the *Waste Man* enabled a wide range of people to engage at whatever level they wanted. The work was a collective body made from the raw materials of people's home lives: beds, tables, dining chairs, toilet seats, desks, pianos and rubbish (all the limiting baggage of the householder), 'transformed into energy' (Gormley 2008: 62). Volunteers donated waste from the bottom of their gardens, the contents of their sheds and old furniture, as well as documents, photos and mementos they wanted – for whatever reason – to see ignited.

The Exodus project approached the issue of exile not by specifically engaging with community politics, but by taking a universalist stance, in which

Figure 2: Waste Man 1: Copyright Anthony Gormley, Waste Man, reprinted with kind permission.

the enforced movement of people is portrayed as the result of larger socio-economic, political and historical interplays. It avoids specific ethnographic stories and experiences, by representing displacement as a broad generalized human happening. Like the popular theatre of the medieval morality plays, the tale is a lesson about the vicissitudes of political leaders, and their manipulation of prejudice. Given the lack of interest in the social imperative, the generalized approach to exploring the issues was probably the most appropriate one. While Woolcock's performance/film resided in this moral paradigm,

Figure 2: Waste Man 2: Copyright Anthony Gormley, Waste Man, reprinted with kind permission.

it was not until the audience encountered Gormley's *Waste Man* sculpture that there was any sense of a Levinas connection or comportment towards the other. The explicit morality of Woolcock's performance/film returns us not to the problems of victimhood narratives, but to Burvill's (2008) 'secure knowing' in which morality is not discovered or revealed by the representations, but is merely reconfirmed as a general social value. Gormley's burning *Waste Man*, on the other hand, approaches the thematic of exile 'crabwise', as Hamlet might put it. The (somewhat limited) process of local residents helping to build the *Waste Man* meant that the sculpture was filled with the town's debris purged from attics, sheds and furtive hiding places. The expunging of unwanted objects and mementos, piled up into a beautiful and awe-inspiring structure that was then burned to the ground, seems to literally embody Margate's secrets and material secretions. The depositing of the waste had been an individual act. The residents had turned up with stuff in the boots of their cars, from wheelbarrows pushed across the town, and in large transit vans. The depositors were asylum seekers, refugees, employed and unemployed; the full range of the town's inhabitants. The contents of the structure were implicated into the town's identity. The statue was not a representation of Margate or its community politics; it was an embodied performance of the town. The audience for the burning represented a full and varied demographic of Margate town. It was unusual to have such a range of people present for a single event. The 'burning' became an odd form of communion – more than a collective response to something like a council-funded firework display, it was imbued with a certain wordless significance. The transition from following the play's promenade through the town to the 'Dreamland' site moved from a performance about the morality of exile to a performance that created an embodied symbolism – a moment of shared collective emotion.

[...] with a sudden 'crack', smoke began to pour from his belly and lick up his chest. He was on fire – and so were we. I have no paradigm for what it's like to watch an enormous wooden figure burn – save perhaps the film of the Wicker Man. But without fear of hyperbole, let me tell you, it was a beautiful sight. The silence of the crowd transformed from being surly, to being awed, and we were all moved. Perhaps that was the mystery of the Margate Exodus? A voluntary exile, away for them quotidian ills of the early 21st century, and towards some deeper, darker, more chthonic place and time.

(Self 2006)

The *Waste Man* offers a possible instance of how an exposure to the other might be most effectively created as indirect experience, an 'ethical performance whose essence cannot be caught in constative propositions. It is a performative doing' (Critchely 1992: 7).

As Burvill (2008) argues, these types of ethical performative encounters with the other often appear fleetingly. The openness and responsiveness to alterity are bounded by the more constant fixed ways of knowing. Performance might seek to dislodge or destabilize, but often these tactics fall short. In escaping the paradox of victimhood narrative and understanding refugee experiences, Exodus seems to set up a fresh contradiction, in that the meaningful, corporeal encounter with alterity is often accidental and momentary; therefore, the closer the art moves to trying to create a comportment towards the other, the faster the meaningful experience disperses.

Figure 2: Waste Man 3: Copyright Anthony Gormley, Waste Man, reprinted with kind permission.

Figure 2: Waste Man 4: Copyright Anthony Gormley, Waste Man, reprinted with kind permission.

The other part of the Exodus project was Tracy Ewald's *Towards a Promised Land*, and this offers yet further tactics of how to explore this issue.

Towards a Promised Land

In *Towards a Promised Land*, Wendy Ewald worked with 22 young people who had arrived in the area from diverse locations, including Iraq, Belarus, Egypt, the Congo, London, Derby, Belfast and Germany. Ewald is an experienced 'participatory' photographer. She strives to develop close working relationships with her co-photographers, helping them develop camera skills and a strong sense of ownership over the material. Her portraits are of the children taken from locations of their choosing around Margate as well as images of their possessions, selected from belongings brought with them. The possessions are designed to evoke memories of home and lives left behind. As well as being used for an exhibition in the local library, the photographs were made into large-scale banner images displayed along Margate's seawall, as well as smaller images shown in Dreamland Amusement Arcade, a cinema, a pub, a fish and chip shop, and a domestic home. A downloaded audio 'banner trail' around the multisite gallery was created, which included interviews and moving testimonies by the young people. Visitors followed a map and were guided by the stories of the children and the places and possessions they had chosen.

In her approach and process, Ewald seems to be able to bridge the seeming disparities between Woolcock's disregard for participatory processes and the significance of the aesthetic. The intimacy created in Ewald's longer-term work between artist and co-artist in which both work together in the shared understanding of the artistry is a governing element in the process.

Ewald's project seems to have constructed a useful process and an engaging and important ethical encounter with the other. The process enabled the development of skills and reflection on the new situation in which the young people found themselves. The negotiation of the portrait, and the selection of possessions, neatly encompassed the link between two versions of home: one lost, the other in transition. The visitor/gallery experience brought into relief the different experiences and feelings associated with the exodus theme: the children's excitement, sadness, longing and anxiety of displacement. While some of the children disclosed the background to their exile, others did not. Within this ambiguity, the categories of refugee, migrant, asylum seeker and transient became superfluous. The project deliberately explored the theme of exodus from the children's different experiences of enforced as well as economic and circumstantial relocation. The diversity of cultural backgrounds of the 'exiles', ranging from Middle Eastern to Belfast, also helped to loosen expectations of what or who a refugee might be. It splintered the 'secure knowing' of the listener/viewer, and interpolated it in the stories as broad human experiences, away from categories and victim narratives.

The process of walking through the town, with the headphones, searching for the next image, also brought the context of the town into play. The children's commentaries talked about their favourite places in the town, or first impressions of arriving, as well as aspects about themselves. However, the listener/viewer following the map and audio commentary was involved in an active and dynamic way with the town, as he or she inevitably had to navigate unexpected changes and encounters. Myers (2008: 174), who has used similar site-specific modes of walking tours with refugee participants, describes the process, drawing on Ingold, as 'wayfaring'. Ingold distinguishes the ways

Figure 3: Towards a Promised Land 1, Copyright Thierry Bal, 2006, reprinted with kind permission.

Figure 4: Towards a Promised Land 2, Wendy Ewald, *Towards a Promised Land*, reprinted with kind permission.

in which wayfaring is neither 'placeless nor place-bound, but place making' (cited in Myers 2008: 174). Myers states that 'These contexts and environments of enactment can be understood as relative and as developing, coming into being through a process of discovery and attunement of attention and perception rather than through a mental construction' (2008: 176).

The process that the viewer/listener undertakes while wayfaring his or her way to view the photographs around Margate, and listening to the children's commentaries, emplaces him or her in the contextual layers of the town. *Towards a Promised Land* demonstrated how the children have contributed to the formation of place, made accessible the ways in which their lives coexist and co-inhabit the other identities of the town, and articulate 'a plurality of forms of place and provide mechanisms for passing on knowledge and experience to others in similar situations' (Myers 2008: 177).

Ewald's project seems to offer another tactic for dealing with the unwavering paradox of refugee performance. Although the children do discuss personal stories related to exile, the stories are contextualized within a complex set of frames that serve to disorientate a viewer/listener from secure knowing. The selection of stories from a broad cultural base, for example Belfast, London, Iraq and the Congo, sets up questions about who or what is an exile. The content of the children's contributions ranges from discussions about special possessions, to favourite places in Margate, and episodic accounts of home and the journey to the United Kingdom. These stories surprise, and extend any fixed notion of refugee. The diverse location of the images around the town (from the seawall to a fish and chip shop) force the viewer/listener to engage with and at times actively negotiate the plurality of place. The viewer/listener is therefore able to encounter the ways in which the children's stories and lives interpolate with other experiences and perspectives.

The examples of refugee performance in this chapter demonstrate an effort to avoid the victimhood narrative – a common problematic in refugee performance (Jeffers 2008). The Multilink project deliberately side-stepped the issue by focusing on the needs of a specific audience to develop present-day and future strategies for surviving and adjusting to relocation. The stories provide a basic outline to adjusting to the 'other' from the perspective of experience. The actors are all from the same region and have similar backgrounds, and the material has been generated from research, interviews and the actors' own experiences of the first few years. The 'otherness' (Australianness) is presented through the dilemmas and disruptions the fictional family experience – the cautionary stories that might lie ahead, but underlined with a discussion about strategies and support networks that are available.

With the Margate performances there is a deliberate displacing of victimhood from ethnic-specific experiences. Refugee narratives are framed as part of a wider historical and political context (we are all subject to history). In Ewald's work, the narratives of the children offer a collage of impressions of the town, likes and dislikes, favourite objects, reflections on different ways of being at home. In Gormley's work, narratives are displaced into objects, ritual and the non-verbal. The paradox of refugee performance is that it can imply the production of a secure map of experience, by fixing testimonial points and coordinates, which make an encounter with alterity more elusive. These examples offer tactics on how to 'sneak up' on the paradox, by exploring 'the other' in different ways:

This is [...] not necessarily so much about knowledge of the other, or information about their situation [...] as [it] is about the ethical quality of the experience itself, about a certain kind of affect. It is not perhaps even about, in the first instance, empathy or sympathy with the other, as these forms of relationship may be more about seeing in the other

what is like oneself (what Levinas calls the Same). It is perhaps something more purely embodied than that, less explicit.

(Burvill 2008: 236)

The alternative to the map may be some form of wayfaring that suggests 'a more temporal, embodied, and sensorial relation within the world, a movement along a trajectory through the world and through memory' (Myers 2008: 175).

Perhaps, as Conquergood affirms, the potential promise of performance and story lies in the 'promiscuous traffic' between different ways of knowing (1988: 145). These ways of knowing involve engaging the arts to help transcend the process of mapping secure forms of knowledge onto others, through avoiding victimhood narratives, and foregrounding the importance of listening for stories that emerge in their own time and their own ways.

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