

<b>Institution:</b> The Open University (OU)		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> C20 Social Policy and Social Work		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Transforming migrants' security, representation and public participation		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2001-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Prof Marie Gillespie Prof Umut Erel	Professor of Sociology Professor of Sociology	2001 to date 2007 to date
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  OU research improved migrants' safety and generated alternative representations of migrants. It promoted better understandings of migration and greater participation in public life. It led to a new digital platform for migrants (<a href="http://www.infomigrants.net">www.infomigrants.net</a>) that challenged smugglers' disinformation, improving security for over 53.4 million users. It underpinned the co-production of the multi-award-winning OU/BBC documentary series <i>Exodus: Our Journey to Europe</i> that reached 4.39 million viewers globally. It inspired collaborations with Tate Exchange, Royal Museums Greenwich, British Council and UN Women, mobilising transformational, participatory ethnographic methods that created new opportunities for participation and solidarity, and new archives and exhibits that fostered informed citizenship and international understanding.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b>  OU research directly led to the impact described here in improving migrants' access to communicative resources, information, self-representation, participation in public life. It enabled better public understanding of migrants' experiences and their contributions to society. (The term 'migrant' here refers to refugees and asylum seekers, and diaspora and undocumented groups.)</p> <p>Milestones in our foundational research include: (1) developing a multi-stakeholder methodological and analytical framework that integrates research with policymakers, practitioners and migrant publics to bridge gaps in understanding and values. The Cultural Value Model evolved from prior research on the challenges of representing war in ways that do not exacerbate conflicts [G4, G8]. Subsequently, it helped international organisations identify and resolve structural conflicts, align their values with funders and beneficiaries, and achieve greater success [O1]; (2) analysing failure in digital diplomacy projects in order better to understand what success might look like – specifically, a BBC Arabic initiative designed to mediate conflict among social media users in the Middle East and its diasporas [O2]; (3) making visible and legible the historical role of diaspora broadcasters at BBC World Service as diplomatic and cultural intermediaries who ensured the BBC reached and engaged its overseas audiences. Our work also helped BBC reconceive its audiences as global (language) diasporas and shift its strategic thinking [O3].</p> <p>These projects informed subsequent partnerships with the European Commission and international broadcasters around <a href="http://www.infoMigrants.net">www.infoMigrants.net</a>. <i>Mapping Refugee Media Journeys</i> [research published in O4] carried out in collaboration with France Medias Monde, built on insights from the milestone projects by identifying best practice in promoting international dialogue. It was the first report to analyse the powerful role that smartphones and social media play in migrant journeys. It provided the evidence base that led to the European Commission funding a new news media platform in 2017: InfoMigrants (<a href="http://www.infomigrants.net">www.infomigrants.net</a>).</p> <p>The research showed how mobile phones provide a lifeline for refugees, enabling them to communicate, navigate, translate, share maps, contacts and advice on their journeys [O4]. It also shed light on the risks of mobile phone use and the fragility of the digital infrastructures on which the journeys depend, and how deaths at sea and human trafficking could be reduced and even prevented by services like InfoMigrants that countered smugglers' narratives [O4]. Our research deploys a range of ethnographic, participatory, and arts-based methods to elicit migrants' own narratives in ways that contribute to new understandings and practices of</p>		

solidarity and citizenship. These methods have enabled new ways of communicating the complexities of migration, tackling issues of exclusion, voice and perspective [O5, O6]. This research has shown how care and culture are intimately connected in migrant families [O5] and how migrants create a sense of belonging to Britain through challenging exclusionary views of national belonging [O5, O6]. It documented how migrant mothers do 'inclusive citizenship work' by nurturing multi-layered identifications cutting across ethnic and national boundaries [O5, O6]. Erel's model of participatory arts and social action research [O5] also allowed migrant groups to contribute new insights to research and policy, helping to bridge the empathy gap. By systematizing arts-based, ethnographic methods, our work has shed new light on the active role of migrants in making and changing perceptions and practices of participatory citizenship [O6].

### 3. References to the research

- O1. Gillespie, M., Gow, J., Hoskins, A., O'Loughlin, B., & Žveržhanovski, I. (2010) Shifting Securities: Theory, Practice and Methodology: A Response to Powers, Croft and Noble. *Ethnopolitics*, 9(2), 269-274 <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449051003764921>
- O2. Gillespie, M. (2013) BBC Arabic, social media and citizen production: An experiment in digital democracy before the Arab spring. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 30(4), 92-130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413482382>
- O3. Gillespie, M., & Webb, A. (Eds.) (2012) *Diasporas and Diplomacy: Cosmopolitan Contact Zones at the BBC World Service*. London and NY: Routledge. ISBN-10: 0415508800
- O4. Gillespie, M., Osseiran, S., & Cheesman, M. (2018) Syrian refugees and the digital passage to Europe: Smartphone infrastructures and affordances. *Social Media + Society*. Special collection: Forced Migration and Digital Connectivity in/to Europe. May Vol. 4 No. 1, 1-12 <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118764440> This special section represents a new field of scholarship in Digital Migration Studies. The initial 2016 OU-published report "[Mapping Refugee Media Journeys](#)" laid foundations for this new field and is a key reference point.
- O5. Erel, U., Reynolds, T., & Kaptani, E. (2018) Migrant mothers' creative interventions into racialized citizenship, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41(1), 55-72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1317825>
- O6. Erel, U. (2010) Migrating cultural capital: Bourdieu in migration studies. *Sociology*, 44(4), 642-660. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038510369363>

### Grants

- G1. European Commission, France Médias Monde, Deutsche Welle, and Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata (2017-2020) [www.infomigrants.net/](http://www.infomigrants.net/) Research and Development EUR220,000. PI Gillespie.
- G2. British Council and Goethe Institut (2016-2018) '[The Cultural Value Project](#)' in Collaboration with Hertie School of Governance. GBP150,000 PI Gillespie.
- G3. AHRC (2013-2014) [Understanding the Changing Cultural Value of the BBC World Service and British Council](#). GBP48,000. AH/L006065/1. PI Gillespie.
- G4. AHRC (2007-10) [Tuning In: Diasporic Contact Zones at the BBC World Service](#). Ref AH/E58693/1. GBP496,476. PI Gillespie.
- G5. AHRC (2011-12) [The Art of Intercultural Dialogue](#) GBP89,000. Public Policy Fellowship.
- G6. AHRC (2013- 2015) '[Migrant Mothers Caring for the Future: Creative Interventions into Citizenship](#)', AH/K00591X/, GBP32,500, PI Erel.
- G7. ESRC (2016- 2017) '[Participation Arts and Social Action in Research](#)', GBP366,662. ES/NO12224/1 PI Erel.
- G8. ESRC (2004-07) 'Shifting Securities: News Cultures Before and Beyond the Iraq War 2003'. ESRC 'New Challenges to Security' Research Programme. GBP140,338. Ref: RES-223-25-0063.

### 4. Details of the impact

The research has led to improved safety for refugees, changed international practice in communicating about and with migrants, changed public perceptions to generate solidarity and mobilise compassion, and changed curatorial practices to improve representation of and engagement with excluded communities.

#### 4.1. Impact on refugee safety through reliable news and information provision

Research on Syrian refugees' use of smartphones [O4] and on the BBC's diasporas [O3], led to the European Commission funding www.InfoMigrants.net [C1a] run by a consortium of European international broadcasters (value: EUR15,000,000). The OU "Mapping Refugee Media Journeys" report *"provided the evidence base on which the decision to set up a new online information and news platform for migrants was made. InfoMigrants was launched in 2017 to serve the needs of migrants. [...] The main problem that OU research helped to resolve was that of how the EC and InfoMigrants consortium could best provide reliable, timely, accurate news and information that would contest smugglers narratives and that would protect vulnerable groups and prevent deaths and dangerous journeys to Europe"* [C2a]. The OU undertook the research and development of InfoMigrants in its first three years (current reach 54.3 million unique users on Facebook alone in five languages) [C1b]. InfoMigrants reduced the dangerous dependency of migrants on misinformation and fake news by smugglers on social media. Our co-researcher in Ghana reported: *"As a result of reading InfoMigrants, several interviewees told me they decided not to take the Libya route in their lives; that they will never try again"* [C3]. The project has been welcomed by Pope Francis as an important initiative, and by German Chancellor Angela Merkel [C1c].

#### 4.2. Impact on international practice in communicating with and about migrants

The research inspired European media organisations to collaborate to improve the quality of their news for migrants. Director of Research at France Medias Monde stated *"OU research led to new ways of thinking and working, new tools for researching online and social media engagement"* [C2a]. Editor of InfoMigrants, Deutsche Welle reported *"your research and insights have helped us become more refined, more tailored to our audience and more sensible to the vastly diverse migrants' background/migration stories"* [C2c]. Head of Communications Sector at DG Home/Migration at the European Commission, stated our research *"helped to change how we think about anti-smuggling campaigns, ways of evaluating them and communicating with refugees more effectively [...] The research helped [...] better understand the needs of the migrants and in so doing helped the EC policy-makers involved in their management of migration from 2016-20"* [C2d]. The significance for international organisations of the Value Analysis Framework [O1, O4] underpinning all this research and impact is evidenced by the Head of Evidence (Arts) at the British Council who stated *"The Open University's research using the Cultural Value Framework on a dozen or so case studies of our international programmes since 2014 has led to a rethinking of approaches to and practices of evaluation [...]. It has helped us understand how the goals of funders, delivery teams and audiences/users differ but can be better aligned to achieve a greater level of all-round success of our programmes aimed at improving international understanding and intercultural dialogue"* [C2e].

A collaboration between OU and UN Women in Jordan including focus group interviews with some 500 Syrian refugee women in Za'atari and Azraq camps has led to changes in policy and practice on digital access, use and inclusion for civic participation and community engagement before and after Covid 19. UN Women stated OU research *"assisted UNW to meet the challenge of using digital technologies to empower women for work, education and training, community engagement, civic participation and tackling gender based violence [...] and better understand how poverty, privacy and security concerns powerfully shape women's uses of technology [...]. These changes in understanding and practice feed into revising and developing our evolving strategic goals and decision-making about how best to implement new technologies and how they can best be used to meet our overall aims"* [C4].

#### 4.3. Changing public perceptions of migrants and migration

OU researchers Gillespie, Erel and Canning contributed knowledge, fact checking, ethical advice and feedback to the production team of *Exodus: Our Journey to Europe* [C5a]. Production company Keo Films drew on their research as they invited refugees to film their journeys on smartphones. In regular meetings with the production crew at the height of the 'migration crisis', Gillespie and Erel shed light on various issues, including the ethics of working with and representing refugees which helped them to avoid the pitfalls of portraying them simply

as victims. As the testimony provided by Keo confirms, OU input ensured that the films offered unique and alternative insights into refugee journeys through mobilizing refugee creativity and self-representation. The BBC series changed audience perceptions: *“The heroes of the documentary are Akkad and the other refugees [...] their bravery has helped create the most powerful and moving account of the refugee crisis to date”* [C5b]. The impact on the public has been profound, and many reviewers described the extent of their emotional engagement, calling the documentary *“essential”* (Prix Italia) [C5f]. 4,390,000 viewed it in the UK in 2016 [C5d] and scores of millions across the world [C5e]. It has won eight major awards including an Emmy and two BAFTAs [C5f]. 14,473 viewers visited the OU’s Open Learn educational resource [C6a], many leaving comments that the documentary generated a feeling of solidarity with refugees and prompted them into action to support refugees as a result, e.g.: *“Registered with a couple of charities to campaign and make small donations [...] including an on-line petition to [...] help unaccompanied children”* [C6b].

#### 4.4. Making refugee voices heard, changing curatorial practices

The OU’s contributions to the *Who Are We?* Tate Exchange programme [C7a] (2016-20) are based on the concept of ‘cultural citizenship’. The project attracted a high proportion of young, migrant, and black and ethnic minority audiences [C8] among 11,500 in-person and 117,000 online visitors [C7b]. The programme changed audience’s views of refugees. Visitor feedback to exhibition, workshops, and symposia showed how visitors learned more about the situation of refugees and migrants and felt more keenly that they were personally connected to the challenges of migration. *“That exhibition gave me so much stimulus, hints and ideas. So, then, I did something else after the exhibition [...]. Having much more clues about what refugees are experiencing obviously pushed me to take the decision to volunteer, to be much more involved”* reported one visitor [C7c]. Another: *“definitely broadened my understanding and deepened my compassion for people displaced by war”* [C7d]. Audiences spoke to researchers, artists, and others, who discussed and engaged in participatory activities, such as co-creating poetry with refugee poets who joined over Skype from refugee camps in France and Germany.

*Who Are We?* was one of the most successful of the various Tate Exchange programmes. Its success contributed to a change in culture and practice at Tate Exchange with an intention to continue the participatory programme. Our training of Tate staff in participatory methods changed curatorial practices, inspiring them to *“think about [...] participatory research”* with different audiences [C7e]. It resulted in the Tate Neighbours project, *“one of the central programmes by which Tate Exchange and Tate opened its doors to artistic and cultural expression from marginalised and diverse migrant audiences”* [C7f]. As part of the OU’s contribution to *Who Are We?* a travelling exhibition and book were produced *Communities of Solidarity: the Story of Pikpa refugee camp*. 1,000 copies of the book were disseminated in UK, Greece and Norway generating donations of approximately EUR10,000 to support Pikpa and migrant solidarity [C9].

A digital map of refugees’ journeys discovered during the research [C10a] was the focus of a BBC Radio 4 online feature [C10b], and the first object acquired by the Royal Museums Greenwich as part of their permanent collection on ‘Europe’s migration crisis’. The Director of Acquisitions said the report *“sensitized museum audiences and educators to the role of communications technologies and border regimes in refugee journeys in the contemporary world. In influencing the permanent collection of a national museum, the research will continue to reach museum publics for generations to come”* [C11]. It was part of a Maritime Museum Facebook webinar discussion on Navigation, Twitter and You Tube [C10c].

The pandemic has created new problems and opportunities for migrants, as explored in the OU digital resource *Covid Chronicles from the Margins* [C12a] and associated digital exhibition *Unlocked Archive* [C12b]. The exhibition launch in December 2020 attracted 174 people from UK, USA, Greece, Netherlands and Ghana and engendered numerous positive comments confirming improved understanding of the issues, motivating some to donate to support refugees, particularly those living in dire circumstances on Lesbos in Greece [C12c]. The Covid

Chronicles website tracks the unfolding of the impacts of the pandemic over *time*, particularly on inequalities and solidarities. A digital *space* for encounters, it hosts contributions from over 200 migrants. User analytics data [C12d] are impressive given the website's short life (since April 2020). Its impact can be felt most acutely in the quality of the engagement it inspires in bringing together diverse groups of people, leading them to a better understanding and motivating them to participate, to represent themselves, and to contribute to policy debates [C12b]. Prominent asylum-seeker support group representatives commented: "*It is rare for refugees to find such a platform [...]. It is a living archive of this extraordinary moment*" and "*It will last forever as piece of oral history that promoted the rights of asylum-seekers [...] a very important project in enabling participation*" [C13]. These digital resources bring together a global community of migrants, artists, academics and community organisations to debate matters of collective concern, represent their lives under the pandemic, enabling greater social solidarity with migrants and contributing to policy change.

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1. InfoMigrants:** a) <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/about> b) Awards and User Data c) Messages [Pope Francis and German Chancellor Angela Merkel](https://www.dw.com/en/infomigrants-online-platform-expands-offer-to-five-languages/a-44173653). d) <https://www.dw.com/en/infomigrants-online-platform-expands-offer-to-five-languages/a-44173653> . (2017-20).
- C2. InfoMigrants:** Testimonials from international organisations: a) Head of Research, France Medias Monde b) Head of European Affairs, Deutsche Welle c) InfoMigrants Editor-in-Chief, Deutsche Welle d) Head of Communications Sector, DG Home and Migration at the European Commission e) Head of Evidence (Arts), Research & Policy Insight, British Council. (2017-20).
- C3. InfoMigrants:** a) Testimonial from Ghanese researcher b) report about impact on users. (2018-20).
- C4. UN Women:** Testimonial from UN Women Jordan re: Za'atari and Azraq refugee camp research and its impact on improving digital access, information security, opportunities for civic engagement, community participation, training and employment. (2017-20).
- C5. Exodus: Our Journey to Europe** a) Film <http://www.keofilms.com/projects/our-journey-to-europe/> b) Review quote..."*the heroes are Akkad*" c) Critical reviews d) UK audience ratings e) Keo Films testimonial and global sales f) Awards. (2016-20).
- C6. Exodus: Our Journey to Europe** a) Open Learn user data (Understanding Refugee Experiences page plus subpages) b) Audience quote ..."help unaccompanied children". (2016-20).
- C7. Tate Exchange:** a) [Tate Exchange: Who Are We?](#) b) Tate footprint and online figures to exhibition spaces (2016-19) c) Visitor feedback: "*I decided to volunteer [...]*" (p.5) d) Visitor feedback, e) Tate Exchange staff member quote: "*thinking about using participatory methods [...]*" (p.36) f) Tate Exchange staff member quote: "*opened the door to marginalised groups [...]*" (p.39). (2016-2019).
- C8. Tate Exchange:** testimonial from the Director. (2016-2018).
- C9. Lesvos Solidarity and Pikpa Refugee Camp:** Testimonial from collaborators. (2017).
- C10. Digital Map: The Road to Germany** a) [The Road to Germany WhatsApp Map](#) b) BBC <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03v0lb8> c) Maritime Museum webinar data (2016-19).
- C11. Royal Museums Greenwich:** Testimonial from the Director of Acquisitions. (2016-20).
- C12. Covid Chronicles from the Margins** a) Screen shot of Cov19 Chronicles [Project website](#) b) Screen shot of associated digital exhibition [Unlocked Archive Exhibition website](#) c) Microsoft Teams comments during the exhibition launch d) User analytics data Unlocked Archive Exhibition website and COV19 Chronicles project website. (2020).
- C13. Refugee and Asylum-Seeker Support Organisations Testimonials** from: Chair of Trustees, Swansea Asylum Seekers Support, and Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team Wales in the Welsh Government funded Asylum Rights Programme. (2020).