

Languages in Migratory Settings

Place, politics, and aesthetics

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son Phipps and Rebecca Kay

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Languages in Migratory Settings

Research on migration has often focused on push and pull factors; and on the mobilities which drive migration. What has often received less attention, and what this book recognises, is the importance of the creative activities which occur when strangers meet and settle for long periods of time in new places. Contributions consider case studies in Italy, Kyrgyzstan, France, Portugal and Australia, as well as taking a careful look at the city of Glasgow during the Commonwealth games of 2014. They explore the making and use of literature (for adults and children) of art installations; translation processes in immigration law; education materials; and intercultural understanding. The research reveals the extent to which migration takes a place, and takes different forms, as life is made anew out of intercultural encounters which have a geographical specificity. This shift in focus allows a different lens to be placed on languages, intercultural communication and the activities of migration, and enables the settings themselves to come under scrutiny. This book was originally published as a special issue of *Language and Intercultural Communication*.

Alison Phipps is Professor of Languages and Intercultural Studies at the University of Glasgow, UK; and co-convenor of the Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network.

Rebecca Kay is Professor of Russian Gender Studies at the University of Glasgow, UK; and co-convenor of the Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network.

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Notes on Contributors

Evelyn Arizpe is Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Glasgow, UK. Her research interests include children's literature and literacies, particularly in relation to picturebooks, Young Adult literature, reader-response, Latin America, migration and intercultural communities.

Caroline Bagelman is currently a Post-Graduate Research Student in the School of Education at the University of Glasgow, UK. Her research is entitled 'Picturing Transformative Texts: an exploration of food politics through picturebooks'.

Alison M. Devlin is a Research Associate in DALLAS Evaluation in the School of Education at the University of Glasgow, UK.

Maureen Farrell is Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Glasgow, UK. Her research interests focus on children's literature, particularly Scottish children's literature; picture books; and children's literature and religious education.

Giovanna Fassetta is a Research Associate in the School of Education at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK.

Moya Flynn is a Senior Lecturer in Central and East European Studies at the University of Glasgow, UK. Her research interests include social support and migration in Scotland; and lesbian, gay and bisexual migration.

Robert Gibb is a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Glasgow, UK. His research interests include asylum, refugees and migration, with a particular focus on Bulgaria, Denmark and France. He is also interested in contemporary social theory.

Anthony Good is Professor Emeritus in Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh, UK. His principal overseas field research was in Tamil Nadu, South India, though he also has considerable experience of Sri Lanka as a physical chemistry lecturer and later a human rights researcher.

Rebecca Kay is Professor of Russian Gender Studies at the University of Glasgow, UK; and co-convenor of the Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network.

Natalya Kosmarskaya is a Senior Researcher at the Department of Central Asia and the Caucasus-Institute of Oriental Studies-Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow. She has published extensively on post-Soviet migration to Russia; Russian-speakers' position in the newly independent states (especially those of Central Asia); the trajectories of ethnic/social identity change in the post-Soviet context; and diaspora formation in the CIS.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Elsa Lechner is a Senior Researcher in the Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra, Portugal.

Julie E. McAdam is currently a Post-Graduate Research Student in the School of Education at the University of Glasgow, UK. Her research is entitled 'Supporting Educators to realise the potential of children's literature in developing 21st century citizens'.

Mariangela Palladino is a Lecturer in English at Keele University, UK. Her research interests lie at the intersection of Postcolonial literatures and cultures, migration and diaspora, as well as in narratology and narrative ethics. She is currently working on a monograph, *The Forms of Ethics*, which focuses on the ethical import of narrative in Toni Morrison's fiction.

Alison Phipps is Professor of Languages and Intercultural Studies at the University of Glasgow, UK; and co-convenor of the Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network.

Olga Solovova is an Associate Researcher at the Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra, Portugal.

Yongyang Wang is based in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

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Languages in migratory settings: place, politics and aesthetics

Introduction

In their grounding-breaking collection of essays, *Migratory Settings*, Aydemir and Rotas make a subtle conceptual and discursive shift in order to unsettle prevailing assumptions about migration. The juxtaposition of an adjective of movements with a plural noun suggesting fixture highlights a paradox inviting 'a shift in perspective from migration as movement from place to place to migration as installing movement within place' (Aydemir & Rotas, 2008, p. 7). It is a tension with which each of the papers in this special issue of *Language and Intercultural Communication* wrestles in different ways, approaching the subject of migration from different disciplinary perspectives and using diverse methodologies and analysis. It is also a tension inherent in languages and intercultural communication as a field of research and practice. Transcriptions and thick descriptions capture and fix, installing – to echo Aydemir and Rotas – what is an aural and oral flow in interview narratives, as text. One medium is rendered as another, a medium which is human sound becomes a medium of human technology – that of writing, or of vision. The senses are translated and dissonance occurs, marking an awareness that something has shifted, something has changed, something is not as it was.

GRAMNet and context setting

We shall return to this and other paradoxes during the course of our discussion of the themes, which this collection of papers raises. First, we wish to provide some context to this special issue. As editors we also act as founding co-conveners of Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network (<http://www.gla.ac.uk/gramnet>), in Scotland, UK. This is a research and knowledge exchange network, supported by the University of Glasgow, which was set up in 2010 to 'think with the City' of Glasgow. Whilst drawing inspiration from Glasgow as a migratory setting with a long and diverse history and both exciting and challenging contemporary interconnections, the network has never been parochial in focus or scope. Instead, and like this special issue, it considers different migratory settings and how researchers approach these migratory settings, teasing out similarities and differences. Consequently in developing this special issue, calling for contributions and editing submissions, we encouraged a focus on place-specific projects where researchers were able to engage critically and with different methodological foci, which have engaged with migration, refugees and asylum seekers.

In doing so, and in the context of our work with GRAMNet, we were mindful of and motivated by contemporary concerns relating to Glasgow and Scotland as specific and fascinating migratory settings. The special issue and its themes connected to Scotland as a country facing a Referendum on Independence and self determination, to be held on 18 September 2014 – and to the importance of 2014 for Glasgow as a place for a present thickening of languages and intercultural experience as it prepares to play host to the

Commonwealth Games. At the time of writing this editorial, the preparations for this sporting occasion include the setting up of the first Pan-African Orchestra – the Ha Orchestra (<http://www.haorcestra.com>) made up of musicians from diverse countries of Africa – including Ghana, Morocco, Zimbabwe, – and musicians from European countries, especially those with a Celtic connection, who are creating a new soundscape through a fusion of musical traditions and movements. There are festivals of Multicultural Homecoming which focus on the Scottish diasporas, established and new migrant communities and which are seeing new dances being created out of the traditions of dance which are meeting at this moment.

Responses to migration have also historically been accompanied by both hospitality and hostility. A look at Glasgow's history finds particular animus towards the Irish in the late 1920s and early 1930s, which sowed the seeds for later concerns relating to sectarianism between Catholics and Protestants, and between two rival football teams: Celtic and Rangers. In response to what has been a more recent rise in xenophobia in the UK, mirroring new waves of xenophobia and racism in Europe more widely, the Scottish Refugee Council organised its Refugee Week Festival 2014 under the title of 'Welcome'. The festival included a 'Welcome Van' and a 'Welcome Tent' as deliberate responses to the 'Go Home Vans' used recently by the UK Government to create a hostile environment for migrants, and to reflect as a temporary material presence, the tented cities of the refugee camps of the world. In the social media campaigns which accompany this effort of migratory aesthetics a thread of resistance and graffiti art has emerged as virtual and viral direct action, somewhat inspired by the graffiti artist 'Banksy' (<http://banksy.co.uk/>) where the political campaigns to assert monocultural identities and to demonise languages other than English, and intercultural initiatives are literally written over with counter messaging. The hashtag #IWelcome Refugees is an example of this kind of more recent technological and linguistic aesthetic and political placing of migratory experience. This said, the writing over of offending signs with counter slogans is not a new feature of migratory settings and contested spaces. In the eleventh century on Orkney Mainland, the neolithic tomb Maes How was visited by Vikings who overnighted within its walls and left their runes equivalent to 'Siegrid was here'.

As Scotland debates the possibilities of secession and prepares for the Referendum on Independence, the implications of and for migratory experience are palpable. Whatever the outcome of this historical vote, the present debate is creating a space for imagining futures, for testing possibilities, for changing aesthetics and for reflecting on the intercultural relations and languages which have shaped Scotland to date.

Editorial overview of themes in the papers

We have sketched out this context as editors, as our work with these papers through this latest season of change in Scotland has been illuminated by the breadth of the authors' focus on migratory politics, law, aesthetics and interculturality from contexts outside of our own. Though several of the authors in this special issue are drawn from Glasgow Refugee Asylum and Migration Network they have not primarily researched these aspects of the Scottish context, but their contributions come from work in Italian, Kyrgyz, French, UK, Portuguese and Australian contexts. The work also focuses on different aesthetic and linguistic aspects of migrancy, interculturality and of the place of languages in these settings. Arzipe et al., for example, take 'visual literacies' as their main focus; Wang – Chinese literature and curriculum; Lechner and Solovova – clinical silences; Gibb and Good – the law and its translation; Fassetta – children's narratives; Flynn and Kosmarskaya – imaginings of the city and languages of belonging; Palladino – film and

divorce. Consequently this special issue, through its diverse contributory strands, reflects shifts in the discourse of migration studies from a direct concern with geography, politics or the now outdated framings of sending and receiving countries, to a focus on aesthetic and symbolic aspects of communication, in languages, and in the multimodal forms of intersemiotic translations. In short, by encouraging submissions to this special issue of *Language and Intercultural Communication* which drew on research projects relating to language, translation, interpretation, mediation, visual and intercultural literacy, in a range of discipline specific and interdisciplinary contexts, a dialogue has emerged, between methods, theory and approaches to the study of language and languages in the broad field of area and cultural studies.

In the call for contributions, as editors, we asked for work which reflected on the following themes:

- Language and intercultural dimensions of transnationalism as these relate to both migrants/asylum seekers/refugees and local populations.
- Legal and social policy on migration, asylum and refugees relating to languages and policy on integration.
- Narratives of migration, asylum and refugees in art, literature, film, drama, etc.
- Critical perspectives on intercultural language education – schooling, higher, adult and community education.
- Translation and interpreting especially as they relate to law, health, education and the arts.
- Language and social psychological consequences of migration and asylum.
- Intercultural and language dimensions of faith groups and faith practices.
- Intercultural and linguistic perspectives on human security as it relates to migration.

Aesthetic resonance

What has been striking in editing the papers for this special issue has been the extent to which the aesthetic resonance has come to the fore both in individual papers and as a connecting theme. *Language and Intercultural Communication* tends, as a journal, to lean towards Applied Linguistics and Foreign Language/English Language Education fields with critical theorising of empirical work, and its empiricism often follows the conventions laid out in the scientific trainings of applied linguistics and education. It tends, therefore, towards the social scientific, though the rigour of its theorising is of note. From early papers in the journal on Gadamer, contributions from critical scholars such as Henry Giroux, Adrian Holliday, Manuela Guilherme and Shanta Nair Venugopal together with interviews with key thinkers such as Stella Ting Toomey, Noam Chomsky and Boa Ventura de Sousa Santos have created a scholarly context of theoretical and methodological openness, conceptual development and reception. Nonetheless, this does mean that the symbolic and subjective dimensions of language and intercultural communication have often been overlooked, as methodological and theoretical approaches have not heard or seen these aspects. Kramsch (2006, 2009) has more recently pioneered arguments for an inclusion of both aesthetic and affective dimensions to study in this field:

To survive linguistically and emotionally the contradictions of everyday life, multilingual subjects draw on the formal semiotic and aesthetic resources afforded by various symbolic systems to reframe these contradictions and create alternative worlds of their own. (Kramsch, 2009, p. 29)

By stressing the way multilinguals – in the formal classroom or in informal, everyday settings – attend to the subtle cues and codes of the social world, Kramsch highlights the adaptation to and modification of language practices. Be it through switching codes, i.e. registers, languages, accents or listening for patterns in discourse which align subjects politically, geographically, socially and culturally, this practice is one which sits well with the study of aesthetic dimensions to language and also to migration. In the study of migration such dimensions come to the fore as the displacements involved mean taken for granted and normative dimensions to speech and action have to be made anew, in a different context, and smooth aesthetics are complicated by new interactions and the creation of new forms. This emerges very clearly in the contributions from Fassetta and from Arizpe et al., both of which explore children's renegotiations of and creative engagements with new contexts of communication. These new or overwritten forms become important in their own right, indexing happenings in migratory settings, and this is as true for the runes on Maes How left by vikings as evidence of their temporary settlement as it is for layers of multilingual graffiti in Kreuzberg, Berlin, which outwardly manifest the dynamics of migration as it makes its mark and settles into the physical environment.

Reception is an important dimension to work on migration and intercultural language studies. Reception may be hostile or it may be challenging. Reception can take time and it is, in terms of acceptance or rejection, a one-way process. Scholarly reception is no exception and as editors we are aware that in offering aesthetic dimensions to debates with languages and intercultural communication, through work on migration, we are seeking to enable the reception of new ideas, methods, concepts into the field and we will be testing what are relatively new boundaries and may be at risk of making claims for newness which do not stand the test of time. Migratory aesthetics offer the prospect here, through reception, for a linguistic and intercultural aesthetics to emerge as a mode of reflection and also suggest the need for methodologies and theoretical perspectives drawn from the humanities as well as from the social sciences, for understanding and analysing what is happening in different settings. As the contributions by Gibb and Good and by Lechner and Solovova clearly demonstrate, a lack of attention to the aesthetic and affective aspects of intercultural communications can in fact render multilingual interventions at best meaningless and at worst harmful, especially in contexts of coercive power such as the courtroom or the clinical setting.

North and South

The aesthetic thematics are not the only elements which this collection of papers highlight. Of note is an aspect which recurs in several papers – that of North and South. These cardinal points of the compass orient the analysis and act as symbols where the North tends towards privilege and the South is 'othered' and relegated to a subordinate positioning. These geographical markers organise the placement of migrants, and empirical work also reflects this, notably in Flynn and Kosmarskaya, as the cardinals are used by residents of the city to describe the migratory aesthetics of the city-scape and the city's history. This has consequences for domestic Kyrgyz migration politics. Similarly in Fassetta's analysis, with an international focus, the northern and southern slopes of the Mediterranean become symbols of the international border, policed by FRONTEX and the European Union. The North represents arrival, security, hope and even economic prospects of care for family back home. The South represents that being left behind. Both have their ambivalences, and both 'stand in for' gritty discussions of the

reality of poverty in the empirical material here. Poverty is not often discussed directly in *Language and Intercultural Communication*. Discussion does take place, however, relating to the dominance of academic discourses formed by the histories and thought of the 'West' (Graeber, 2007) and in recent contributions, notably from Shanta Nair Venugopal (2012) this has been challenged by occidental critiques from the 'East'. Thus, the cardinals which have emerged as key to discussions of languages and intercultural communication in the contributions to this volume are also present, albeit along different axes, in *Language and Intercultural Communication's* scholarly debates. It should also be noted that Boa Ventura de Sousa Santos has discussed the critical potential of Nord-Sul (north south) perspectives offered by the Centro de Estudos Sociais, Coimbra University (Santos, 2002). In Lechner and Solovova's contribution the inequalities of North and South, which are often discussed in scholarship as those of West gazing on East, come through in the complex inadequacies of communication in clinical settings of mental health, with migrants from the global south. Roberts and Sarangi and Corbett and Lu have both discussed these complexities in their work. Roberts and Sarangi (1999) have questioned whether clinical workplaces really constitute settings for intercultural communication given some of the formulaic ways in which interaction is undertaken, and Lu and Corbett (2012) have raised the question of empathy and time asking how intercultural consultations of 7–10 minutes might perform empathy and to what extent this is possible. What Lechner and Solovova bring to this particular discussion is a strand of theorising, which also echoes that of migratory aesthetics. Citing Michael Agier's work in refugee camps in sub-Saharan Africa (2011), Lechner and Solovova show how metaphorical borders are created between north and south through administrative discourses, and how identity, e.g. refugee, foreigner, gives way to markers of *place*. This, Lechner and Solovova argue, following Agier 'corresponds to a political status of extra-territoriality and dependency that determines the terms and contents of possible communication with non-refugees.' Borders cease to be points of contact and exchange and become part of metaphorical and symbolic 'daily-life' politics to be survived.

Inter-

The final thematic aspect we wish to highlight here, following on from that of migratory aesthetics and the symbolic use of cardinals, is that of the prefix 'inter-'. This is present, of course, in *Language and Intercultural Communication* – 'intercultural' – and we will not add to discussions about this term and its definitions here. Rather the 'inter-' prefixes which interest us here are those of 'intersemiotics', 'intertextuality' and 'intersectionality'. The papers deal with these interstices, which adds to a liminal layering in the papers, a sense of their setting in places which are thick with border crossings of many physical and metaphorical kinds, a space where the English language has to stretch and add to its root words in order to, somewhat clumsily, render in a single word what are complex processes of experience and being. The papers in this special issue reflect the intersemiotics of language with film, literature, clinical interview, law and administrative justice, visual image, film. In each case language itself is intersected as text and/or as verbal utterance. This creates a rich setting and also creates a requirement for much deeper analysis than is within the scope of this paper.

Similarly with the intersectional elements here which, from the starting point of migrancy, race and ethnicity, bring in a range of elements. These cover childhood, (Arizpe et al.; Fassetta); marital status and divorce (Palladino), disability and mental health (Lechner and Solovova); learner status (Arizpe et al; Wang); legal immigrant status (Good and Gibb); rural/urban background (Flynn and Kosmarkya). And throughout these,

languages emerge as a key intersectional dimension, little discussed as such, but of equal standing and requiring equal scholarly attention, as the original intersectional trinity of race, gender and class. What the contributions show, in some cases starkly, is that markers in language and of languages create aesthetic settings, especially in aural perspective, which heighten the likelihood at one and the same time of xenophobic discrimination and inequality rooted in fear of what is not understood, and of cosmopolitan celebratory aesthetics such as those found in tourism to many so-called 'world cities' or 'arrival cities' (Goldin, Cameron, & Balarajan, 2011; Saunders, 2010). Which language you speak and how your language is judged acts in ways which bear comparison with the discrimination of markers of race, gender and class. It makes a difference which language you speak and how you speak, where and with whom. Code switching analysis discusses these elements at length within Applied Linguistics, but not readily as an element requiring political and critical analysis (exceptions include Block, 2012; Duchêne & Heller, 2007; Heller & Duchêne, 2011). The move to wrap language and languages into scholarly terms such as 'discourse' or 'code' has also had the effect of masking the intersectional aspects of language. These markers are held in place by particular political economies (O'Regan, 2014) which adapt themselves to different contexts and connect to discussions of English as a global/world/international language often referred to as English as a lingua franca (ELF). The limitations of this latter element have been discussed rigorously by Jenks (2013), in *Language and Intercultural Communication* and by O'Regan (2014). Both criticise ELF for its theoretical incoherence and lack of contextual nuance, and have provoked considerable discussion (Baker, Jenkins & Baird 2014; Widdowson, 2014).

The special issue therefore offers the intersectional dimension of languages, in intercultural communication and across the arts, humanities and social sciences, as a field for analysis and of political economy. As editors we argue that the 'Inter-' prefix, with its considerable liminal valence also underscores our first point relating to migratory aesthetics. Liminal zones (Turner, 1987; van Gennep, 1909) are also zones of contact and of notable creativity and even carnivalesque performance. Following Bakhtin it is clear that heteroglossia have carnivalesque potential, troubling, thickening the aesthetics, performing difference and acting as sites of language-making. They can also be spaces in which extreme measures are taken to strip out the aesthetic diversity and insert template-like formats for interviews as noted above. These templates seek to offer sameness as fairness to ensure all are equal before the law (Gibb and Good) and before the clinician (Lechner and Solovova).

Migratory settings, with their interstices, aesthetics and geographical orientations, offer significant challenges in terms of methodology for intercultural communicative research. The normative frameworks of social scientific methods begin to falter when faced with phenomena – aesthetics, aural resonance, intertextuality, symbolic representation of north and south – which fall more comfortably into the broad domains of the arts and humanities. Theoretically, too, the terrain is tricky and the operational approaches which focus on process and acquisition meet suggestion, interpretation, and abstract concepts such as beauty, ugliness, sound, kindness, strangeness, hospitality and carnival. The search for solutions to social problems – of language and intercultural communication – is queered by critical suggestion that these may not exist and their pursuit may be highly problematic (Ahmed, 2000). Adapting to new situations and making new forms of life are part of the arts of intercultural practice.

In what follows we wish to analyse this problematic in a case study from Glasgow which incorporates the dimensions we have highlighted in this special issue. Rather than beginning with a set of research questions, with a research design and then presenting

data and our analysis of it, we begin instead in an aesthetic setting where arts and residents have been working interculturally and doing new things with language.

Future memory at Red Road

One of the pressing dangers of language and intercultural communication is its presentism. The focus on empirical data within applied linguistics and in linguistics, together with the privileging of the 'transcript' and 'audio recording' as pre-eminent and rarely questioned forms of data collection, creates something of a fetish of these forms. Training in the field of language and intercultural communication means setting data in the certain scientific conventions which dominate its presentation. The data, which have migrated from the field to the research setting, and have thus undergone a considerable transformation from their original state, become coded, enumerated, analysed and thematised. Of itself, this method has proved helpful in privileging systematic study of language in social settings, including migratory settings, more or less within the present. A give away for this is the reliance on audio recording. Disciplines concerned with the historical record before the twentieth century barely have recourse to comparative, aural, historical sources, for instance, and it is therefore relatively easy for claims to be made regarding the present which are rather more claims about the kinds of methods available for data collection than any definitive statement about how people really live with languages and in intercultural interaction through history. It is, however, only one convention which may be used in what is an interdisciplinary field.

The study of migration takes many forms and different disciplinary fields come to the languages and forms of intercultural communication which manifest within their purview, with different methods and theoretical frameworks. The project we discuss below found its initial form in a collaboration between an ancient historian, Elena Isayev, and a landscape artist, Catrin Webster, in an AHRC-funded project called 'Future Memory in Place' which aimed to consider how archaeological and ancient historical artefacts and records showed through their aesthetics and symbols, the kinds of activities which had form in migratory settings. By taking, for instance, a *tessera hospitalis* – friendship token, Elena Isayev was able to demonstrate the complexity of journeys between families, trading partners and loved ones around the ancient Mediterranean, over long periods of time. No aural transcripts are present in her work as none existed, but the comparative records of the archaeological finds, in different settings, point to the use of these tokens in journeys made and traces left of those journeys. They also tell of the affective dimensions which took form in the *tessera* and in a gift economy. Together with Catrin Webster a project seeking to recreate this aesthetic form in the twenty-first century Welsh context with schoolchildren allowed for an encounter with objects across historical timeframes and also for new forms to be made which would 'set' a new work in situ. Linkages between visual arts and musical 'soundscapes', bringing in a collaboration with composer and conductor Marion Wood furthered the interaesthetic scope of the project and culminated in public performances of '1000 colours blue' (<http://projects.beyondtext.ac.uk/deplacingfuturememory-fo/index.php>). As such participants were involved in making memories anew, out of the forms made by others in the past, focused on the dynamics of migration in the present, but equally conscious of the dynamics and forms of migration in the past.

Singing goodbye to the Red Road flats

The imaginative and artistic methods used in the project became the inspiration for a further iteration of 'Future Memory'.

The migratory setting for this new iteration of the project was the social housing scheme: 'Red Road' in Glasgow. It was an example of the kinds of large-scale, high-rise housing schemes which were built in the 1960s in order to re-house those who had been evicted as part of the slum clearance programmes of the post-war period. These modernist forms dominate the cityscapes of many large cities, icons of the positivist faith in modernist architecture. Plans to demolish the Red Road flats have led to the gradual rehousing of former residents. They have also inspired a number of literary and artistic projects seeking to capture the hopes and fears, friendships and divisions, joy and sadness of life in the flats (Irvine, 2011). Many of these projects were brought together through a partnership of Glasgow Housing Association and Glasgow Life (<http://www.redroadflats.org.uk/>) including the work of photographer Iseult Timmermans of Street Level Photoworks, who coordinated the work of the Red Road community studio for many years. Through the community studio and other community art projects Iseult has worked collaboratively with residents and the particular architecture of the flats since the late 1990s. In the project 'Future Memory at Red Road' Iseult worked alongside the original Future Memory in Place team, as well as archaeologist Michael Given and Rebecca Kay, to co-create a particular aesthetic which would neither overly celebrate nor overly grieve these ambiguous homes and landmarks but would weave the need for a migratory aesthetics into what were originally housing for indigenous Glaswegians and became housing equally strongly associated with asylum seekers. The images below, for example, show how the history of the residents was brought to life along the garage doors leading to the foot of one particular block (Figures 1 and 2).

Through a series of archaeological and artistic workshops led by Elena Isayev, Michael Given, Catrin Webster and Marion Wood, children at the local primary school collected objects, created stories and reconceived these as swathes of colour. Strips of fabric were painted with colours which moved in and out of shades and tones, blended



Figure 1. Photographic portraits of former residents, from the archive created by Iseult Timmermans were displayed on the now derelict garage doors. (Image by Alison Phipps).