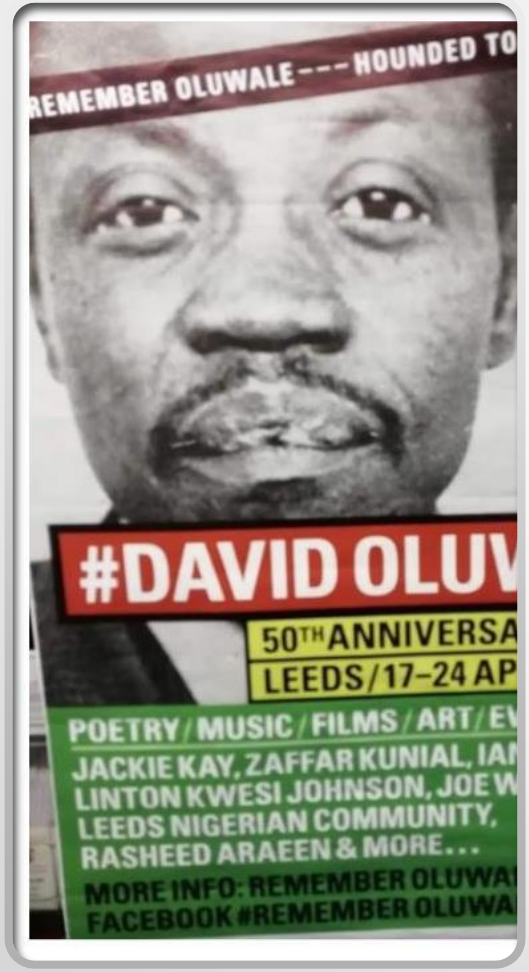
Performing the Refugee Archive: Refugee Theatre, Self-Representation and Empowerment Through Storytelling

Paul V. Dudman
Archivist, University of East London

Introduction 1

- For eighteen years the University of East London has been the home of the archives of the Refugee Council, perhaps the largest collections focusing on refugee and migration issues in the UK
- In recent years, we have been undertaking multiple civic and community engagement and outreach projects on beyond the academy seeking to work with local communities, third sector organisations and especially with refugees and asylum seekers themselves.
- Performing the Refugee Archive: Refugee Theatre, Self-Representation and Empowerment Through Storytelling

Introduction 2



- *For the archive, there are important discussions to be had in relation to our processes of collecting (community) memories especially in relation to the interplay of power dynamics as to which communities and voices are present within the archive and which are under-represented. In responding to refugee crises, how can we as archivists actively engage in ethically documenting, preserving and making accessible reliable, accurate and trustworthy materials and collections which genuinely reflect the testimonies and life histories of refugees and asylum seekers.*

Archives @ UEL

- The Refugee Council Refugee Council Archive and a growing collection of over seventeen individually named collections of aspects of the refugee and forced migration experience.
- Includes both physical archives and oral history collections.
- Hackney Empire Theatre Archive
- East London Theatre Archive
- British Olympic Association Archive
- East London Collections



Conceptual Framework: A Question of Narratives?

- Our work with the analogue physical collections of the Refugee Council Archive and related collections have raised a number of issues associated with how the narratives of the refugee experience are documented, preserved and subsequently made accessible for research.
- A question of (self-) representation?
  - Where are the actual voices of and testimonies of the refugees themselves?
- Disrupting the Archive – challenging existing paradigms of what constitutes and Archive and how we represent narratives of displacement?
- Is there a role for theatre and performance in providing an alternative medium for representing and documenting these testimonies of lived experience?

Archives, Collective Memory & Forced Displacement

- Archives can play a very important role in relation to identity formation and collective memory.
- Especially within the fields of migration and forced displacement within their broadest definitions.
- Archives can have a positive role to play in challenging the negative discourses on this issues within media and society; and can play a role in enabling refugees to have a voice in the social, legal and political empowerment of their communities?
- But also need to consider issues of ethics, trust and representation and how we as Archivists use the materials entrusted to us.
- Archives can also be a nexus of power relations where voices and narratives can be either heard or silenced.

Narrative Engagement in the Archive

- Archives are home to a multitude of interacting stories, narratives and testimonies. Some rise to the surface easily, others are hidden.
- Opening the Archive to life histories of vulnerable communities raise a number of key issues:
  - Engagement: Engendering trust with communities and individuals to enable and facilitate life history work.
  - Representation: How do communities and individuals want their story to represented within the Archive?
  - Ethics: Ensuring that any life history work undertaken is ethical in its approach, ensuring participants are informed of the process from initial engagement through life history process and ending up with archiving and issues of accessibility.
  - The Archivist Researcher: An awareness of your own situated practice in relation to the Archive and the outreach work you are undertaking. Challenging yourself and the Archive.

Community Engagement with Refugees and Asylum Seekers

- From 2015, we have been undertaking internally funded civic engagement projects in an attempt to engage with our local communities and develop new partnerships.
- Who can accesses these Refugee archives and how can we improve access to refugee research archives?
- How does the role of language within the documentary archive impact upon refugee and migrant representation?
- Are refugee archives well-represented in relation to the preservation of lived experience of refugees and migrants? If not, why is this?
- Who get excluded from refugee-archives, and in what ways?

Community Engagement – Performing the Archive

- "***Performing the Archive*: Living Narratives and the Politics of Performance**." Working with undergraduate theatre studies students to create performance theatre based upon narratives discovered in the Archive. Link to full performance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLjQvOZdnjo&t=18s

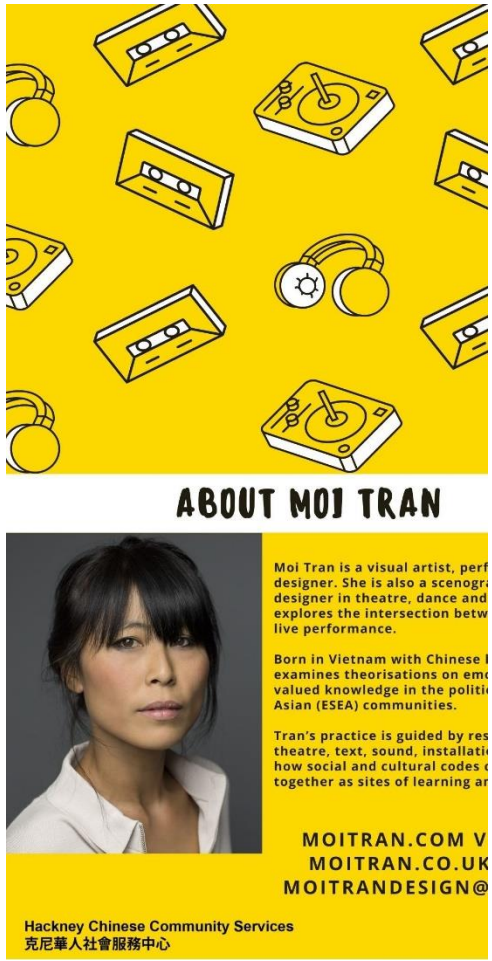


Refugee Theatre & Storytelling

- The Performing the Archive project was an example of how we continue to work with and collaborate internally with colleagues in our UEL School of Performing Arts to facilitate engagement with our Archive collections and to encourage the use of testimonies in exploring new ways of representing narratives.
- We also looking build relationships with theatres (Hackney Empire) and theatre groups, especially those involved with migration and social justice themes, including:
- Ice and Fire ; Bezna Theatre ; Legal Aliens ; and The Parastoo Theatre Team.
- We are interesting in exploring the intersection of refugee theatre; archives and storytelling to provide an engaged ethical platform for self-representation and empowerment of migration stories in an ethical and informed way.

Engagement – Civic Voice Archive

- Working on a UK National Archives Testbed Funded project with performance artist Moi Tran
- Art - www.moitran.com
- Design - www.moitran.co.uk



ABOUT MOI TRAN

Moi Tran is a visual artist, perf
designer. She is also a scenogr
designer in theatre, dance and
explores the intersection betw
live performance.

Born in Vietnam with Chinese
examines theorisations on em
valued knowledge in the politi
Asian (ESEA) communities.

Tran's practice is guided by res
theatre, text, sound, installati
how social and cultural codes
together as sites of learning a

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MOITRAN.CO.UK
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Hackney Chinese Community Services
克尼華人社會服務中心

CIVIC VOICE ARCHIVE

CONTRIBUTE TO AN ONGOING ARCHIVE OF SONGS & POEMS IN ESEA LANGUAGES & DIALECTS

HOW TO SUBMIT

1. *Record yourself or someone you know singing a song or reading a poem in an ESEA language or dialect*

- A cappella is preferred. If there is accompanying background music, please ensure it does not overpower the voice.
- Video is preferred. This could be the performer performing directly to the camera or recording something as they sing. Audio files will be accepted.

2. *Make a word document with the following:*

- Name of the original singer/poet
- Name of the song/poem
- Song/poem text
- Name, gender and age of community performer (optional)
- Language/dialect of the piece
- Country/region of the piece
- Memory/feeling of the community member when singing the song

3. *Email the recording and word document to moitrandesign@gmail.com*

- with subject 'Civic Voice Archive - Submission'
- The recording will be kept in a community-led archive which artist, Moi Tran hopes to exhibit.
- Participants may withdraw their submission at any time.

Hackney Chinese Community Services
克尼華人社會服務中心

Disrupting Existing Paradigms

- Through her work, Moi Tran aims to explore creative methods to disturb and challenge traditional archives usage and structure, including taking agency in narrative as activism, promoting conventionally subjugated knowledge systems through archival processes and to explore contemporary arts practice in community archive.
- This project will explore innovative new ways of archiving community history and narratives through performance, exploring how voice can be used as a transformational technique for emotional expression, utilising song research as personal testimony and science based studies on emotional prosody. It will consider how multiple elements can be utilised to form an open creative witnessing of underrepresented narratives and enable new forms of representation within the archive for these communities.
- We believe it will shift the perspective and attend to the omission of Refugee voices, archiving evidence of lived experience that is presented through the lens of an existing community.
- We will also be working with a Sign Language school in Vietnam to create a sign chorus and an archive of communication beyond conventional linguistics in conjunction with UEL Students.

IFTR Working Group on Theatre & Migration?

- International Federation of Theatre Research – In partnership with colleagues at Central European University in Vienna, we are looking to explore options to consider trying to establish an IFTR Working Group on intersection of theatre and refugee studies.
- This would provide platform for inter-disciplinary engagement with theatre practitioners, academics, independent theatre groups, and theatre archives within an international context.
- If you are interested, please do contact me at p.v.dudman@uel.ac.uk and we can look at approaches to how we can take this forward?

IFTR International Federation for Theatre Research

Contact Details

- My slides and a copy of this presentation are now available on the Living Refugee Archive at : https://www.livingrefugeearchive.org/iftr2021-presentation-performing-the-refugee-archive-refugee-theatre-self-representation-and-empowerment-through-storytelling/
- If you have any questions, please do contact me via one of the following methods:
  - Email: p.v.dudman@uel.ac.uk
  - Twitter: @paulvdudman (https://twitter.com/PaulVDudman)
  - Contact me via the #IFTR2021 Conference Platform.

