



**VISUAL  
EMBODIED  
METHODOLOGIES**

# **Art & Exclusions**

VEM+ 2019 Artist-Researcher Collaborations

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# Art & Exclusions

## VEM+ 2019 Artist-Researcher Collaborations

1 October-7 November 2019, The Exchange

*Art has a vital role to play in understanding exclusion, stigmatisation and violence. Art& Exclusions is an exhibition that presents the work of four artist/researcher collaborations at King's College London; between a poet, a visual artist, an actor and playwright, an animation artist, and four social scientists working on questions of exclusion, stigmatisation, marginalisation, conflict and violence in the Faculty of Social Science and Public Policy (SSPP).*

*These collaborations, held at the Somerset House Studios in July 2019, are part of the 'VEM+' project. Drawing on the emerging VEM Network (Visual, Embodied and Art-based Methodologies in the social sciences), the VEM+ Collaborations is a cross-departmental project engaging artists and academics in an innovative dialogue about methodological practices in the arts and social sciences, moving beyond viewing culture as a site through which more standard social science research methods can be applied or as a means to illustrate social science research. Instead, these collaborations explore how visual, embodied and arts-based methodologies might transform research practices in social science, interrogating the potential of such methodologies to generate new, insightful and ultimately emancipatory knowledge for both the researcher and the researched, particularly in the study of sensitive issues.*

*Through video, film, performance, poetry, photography, and live events, the exhibition takes you through the collaborative process between the four researchers and artists, interrogating the methodological bridges created through these collaborations. It also invites you to discover some of the artistic forms and artwork that have emerged from this work. Finally, through a series of public events, this exhibition also engages more deeply with each set of collaborative process, presenting art-research works to diverse audiences, and invites you to discover the work of social scientists and artists within and outside of King's College London who use visual, embodied and art-based methodologies in the study of sensitive issues.*

**Principal Investigators:** Dr Jelke Boesten and Dr Negar Elodie Behzadi (Department of International Development).

**Co-Investigators:** Dr Rachel Kerr, Dr Pablo De Orellana, Dr Henry Redwood (Department of War Studies), Professor Cathy McIlwaine (Department of Geography).

**Co-curators:** Dr Negar Elodie Behzadi, Dr Jelke Boesten, Dr Pablo de Orellana, Dr Henry Redwood; Professor Cathy McIlwaine and Jayne Elizabeth Peake.

[www.kcl.ac.uk/vem](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/vem)

## The VEM+ Collaborations

Poetic explorations of contemporary nationalism – Dr Pablo de Orellana (Department of War Studies) & Mariah Whelan (poet)

//Undiscernible// – Dr Henry Redwood (Department of War Studies) & Vladimir Miladinović (artist)

'Nadirah', ethnographic portrait of a woman coal miner in Tajikistan – Dr Negar Elodie Behzadi (Department of International Development) & Kate Jessop (animation artist)

The Right to be Believed – Prof. Cathy McIlwaine (Department of Geography) & Gael le Cornec (actor and playwright)

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War Crimes Research Group, Department of War Studies, King's College London

## Video, Design & Photography

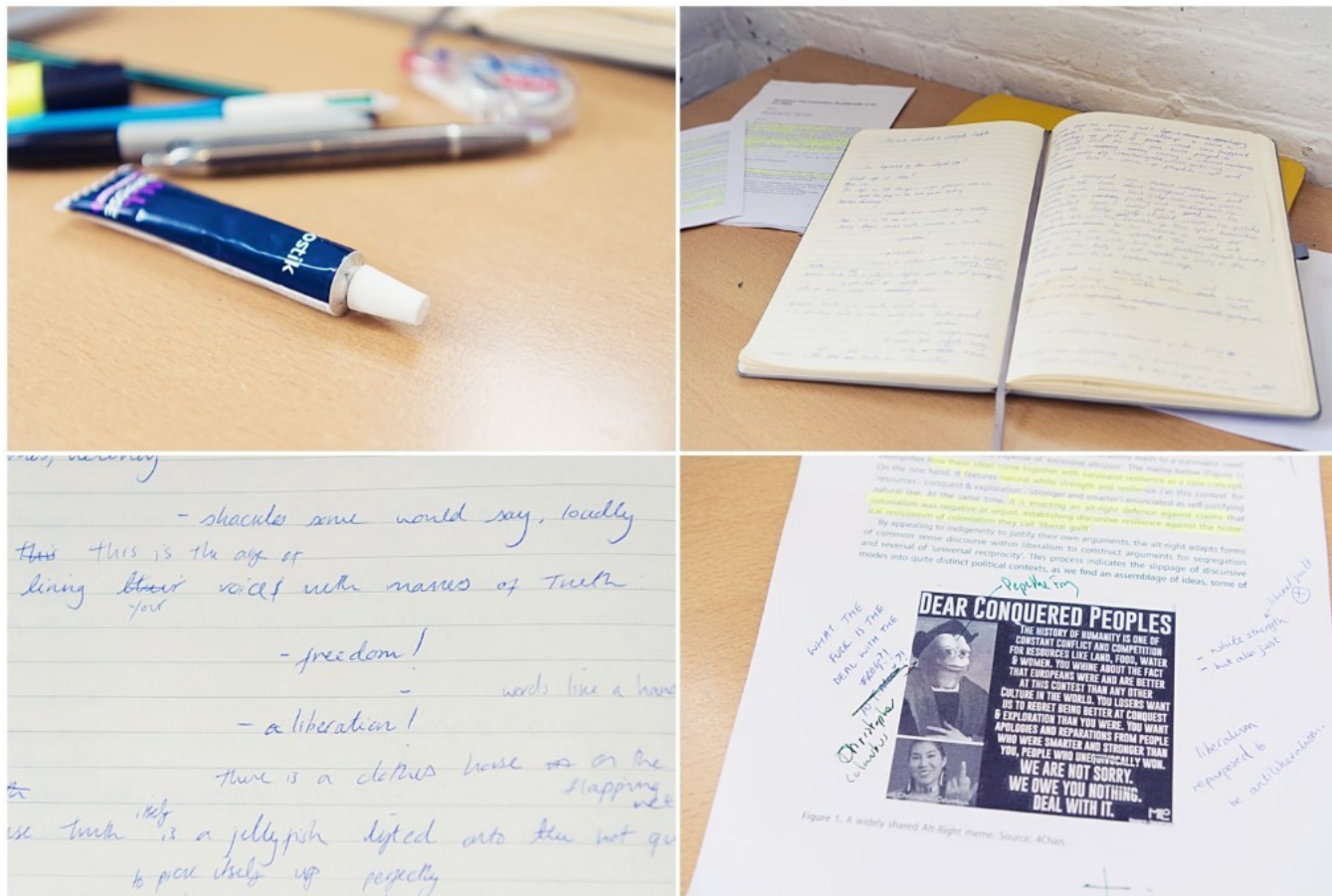
Photography by Lyanne Wylde

Video, design and artwork by Aryan Salazar Volkmann



# Poetic explorations of contemporary nationalism

Mariah Whelan and Pablo de Orellana



## Reading poems as political text: a method

The literary side of the *VEM+* project integrates poetic practice with political science analytics. The scholarly aspect of the collaboration relies on a type of discourse analysis called archaeology. First developed by philosopher Michel Foucault to discern the conceptual mechanics in everyday disciplinary discourses, the version used in this project focuses on retrieving and understanding the instances, structures, references and histories that constitute subjectivity in any piece of writing. In practice, combined with Roland Barthes' approach to systematic literary analysis, the mini-archaeologies carried out on these poems treat them as if they were the political texts we usually examine.

This experimental approach, which we call art archaeology, firstly allows analysis to understand how subjects and their contexts are constituted in the linguistic mechanics of the poem. Secondly, exploring the mechanics of language lays bare how they rely on previous languages, words, expressions and ideas to make sense of events and link them to the rest of reality. Thirdly, and this is where the experimental art archaeology approach reveals its political science utility, the poet has already retrieved the exact aesthetic codes that make sense of events, in this case the political discourses of Brexit, because these codes are the 'planks of expression' poetry itself relies on. At this art-IR juncture, analysis can reap the benefits of aesthetic insight and poetic construction of subjectivity, deconstructing the aesthetic insights.

## Exploring how political concepts are made language

In this iteration of their project, Mariah and Pablo focused on one of the most active, powerful and effective political concepts of our time. This concept, a small logic-machine called 'birth-culture' is at the heart of the politics of Brexit, Trump, Le Pen, Salvini and many other contemporary nationalists. Pablo explored this concept in research carried out in collaboration with Dr Nicholas Michelsen of King's College London, tracing its history, mechanics and effectiveness.

As the intellectual pioneer of the new nationalists, who call themselves New Right, French philosopher Alain de Benoist, explained in 1999: 'Mankind as such does not exist, because their membership within humanity is always mediated by a particular cultural belonging ... Biological differences are significant only in reference to social and cultural givens.' In other words, race is relevant insofar as it determines which culture an individual may belong to. The New Right, like Barrès before them, purport that culture is biologically mediated rather than socially determined. If one is of the wrong biology then participating in another culture is difficult, if not impossible. The restoration of the nation logically requires the purification of culture and – by implication – race. Conveniently, the emphasis on culture circumvents restrictions on – and public revulsion for – overt racism. In this ideological lens, any change to the racial composition of a country undermines its culture and ultimately its survival.

In this collaboration, Mariah retrieved the aesthetic construction of the vital axiom of birth-culture, how it manages to disclaim racism while speaking of "invasions" and "replacement" as a biological struggle for survival, much as Pablo's theory work had found the philosophical mechanics of the concept. The collaboration resulted in two mini poetic projects.

## I. The everyday expression of the nationalist concept of birth-culture



The first poetic project, *Culture (a Reddit Poem)*, explored how this concept has percolated into everyday political discourse. Exploring how it played out in a Reddit forum, Mariah picked a representative example comment and printed several copies of it on tracing paper. On each of the copies, she blacked out the entire text bar a few words, isolating the linguistic expressions that effectively articulate the concept of birth-culture.

For analysis of the politics this is a fascinating contribution, as it isolated the very words, modes of expression, articulations and thrust of how the concept of birth-culture plays out in the political practice of the everyday.

In these poetic exploration of a Reddit comment expressing some of the everyday arguments of today's nationalism, we see in stark contrast the interplay between claiming legitimate political participation through claims to be “moderate”, “common-sense” and “I don’t care about skin color”, and the appearance of the core ethno-nationalist logic of the birth-culture concept. Isolating the words reveals how the birth-culture concept, despite claiming to be non-racist, draws on the far older assumption that human races are species in a struggle for survival, most visible in references to “flooding”, “masses” and, crucially, “out-birthing”, which clearly reveal the assumption that racial impurity is the core risk to the nation.



This exercise reveals precisely how ethno-nationalist ideas of nation, culture and politics express themselves in contemporary political discourse. In other words, the New Right ethno-nationalism promoted by Alain de Benoist in the late 1990s is at work whenever pseudo-biological assumptions about culture are expressed. These poetic explorations furthermore reveal the very words, constructions and aesthetics that make it possible.

## I. From birth-culture to constituting adversarial politics and action

The second mini poetic project (below) quite literally deconstructed an article by Nigel Farage. While the first project explored everyday expressions of nationalism by voters politically engaged online, the second explored how nationalist leaders expressed these concepts and their politics. Its objective was to understand how contemporary nationalist politicians construct categories such as 'the little people', 'revolt', 'elites', all of which are very important because they are the basis of a political call to arms. It has frequently been commented that many of these leaders, as is the case with Farage, Johnson, Salvini or Trump, are themselves glaring contradictions to the 'little people' vs 'elites' politics due to their own elite privilege. The fact that these contradictions do not collapse their populist message is a testament to the effectiveness of the concepts and their communication, whence our focus on its construction. This work can be seen in the magnetic words game that Mariah has made for this exhibition.



As is evident in the photograph above of Mariah's process, she literally deconstructed the speech by Farage, cutting all words into single scraps of paper, which were then grouped into grammatic categories such as verbs, nouns, adjectives.

The work allows the viewer and the political scientist to truly appreciate how linguistic construction wields power, but in particular, by playing with cut-outs the game reveals very distinctly the conditions of possibility of political language. Participants are invited to construct a new or different speech from the available words.





**Mariah Whelan** is a poet and academic based in The Centre for New Writing at The University of Manchester where she is writing a new collection of poems and researches trauma, memory and form in contemporary Irish fiction. Her poems and critical writing have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies including: *Writing in Education*, *The Aesthetica Creative Writing Anthology* and *Best New British and Irish Poets*. The manuscript for her first collection won the AM Heath Prize and will be published by Eyewear in October 2019. A second collection of poems exploring archival material from The Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford and the writer's own unconscious participation in discourses of white supremacy will be published by Dancing Girl Press in 2020.

**Dr Pablo de Orellana** is a Lecturer in International Relations in the Department of War Studies, King's College London. His research focuses on the role of identity in diplomacy, nationalism, International Relations theory, as well as Art History. He completed his PhD in International Relations at King's College London in 2016, specialising in how diplomacy constructs knowledge about political subjects. He has published articles on the history and mechanics of nationalist ideas, diplomatic communication, the role of identity in diplomacy, and an upcoming monograph on the diplomacy of the First Vietnam War. His latest work, developed through projects such as this, seeks to develop research collaborations at the Art-IR nexus.

**//Undiscernible//.**

Vladimir Miladinović and Henry Redwood



//Undiscernible//. is one of the visual arts strands of VEM+. In the work, Vladimir Miladinović and Dr Henry Redwood engage in a dialogue about the politics of knowledge production after war. This resulted in a new series of work, //Undiscernible//., and an essay that probes the politics at work in Vladimir's aesthetic engagement. Throughout, they question how certain aesthetic practices might open new vectors of knowledge about past violence, and offer up alternative forms of post-conflict politics.

## Aesthetics as Method and Politics

Vladimir's work engages with archives related to the wars that broke out in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Vladimir reproduces selected archival artefacts in ink-wash, focusing on records that have receded from memory or have been actively excluded from dominant narratives. In many respects, the work visibly draws back in silenced and overlooked aspects of war-time memory. What is most striking about this work is how detailed and labour intensive these reproductions are, as the process of making the work becomes central to the work itself. The medium of ink-wash is vital. For in the final artwork, the ink draws attention to the time, effort and thought that underpins the work, rendered visible through evidence of brush strokes. The emphasis on process and drawing back in are crucial to the politics of the work.



*Memoria Bosniaca*, Vladimir Miladinović, exhibited as part of Reconciliations, in The Exchange, November 2018.



This approach resonates with Rancière's and WJT Mitchell's understanding of aesthetic politics. Rancière was concerned with how the 'distribution of the sensible' (coordinates that make certain information appear 'common sense' whilst delegitimizing others) function within societies and how these could be potentially disrupted through an aesthetic politics. In pointing to persistent 'silences' within contemporary memories of war, Vladimir's work questions the coordinates and structures that resulted in the original acts of wartime violence and the subsequent silencing of these acts (i.e. nationalism and capitalism). In drawing these silences back in, Vladimir disrupts these coordinates.

Yet, at the heart of the work is a restraint and pensiveness. This is not a declaration of an alternative truth (which, as Barthes notes would see art transcend into propaganda), but it is the opening of a space of contemplation and reflection. When confronted by Vladimir's work, it becomes clear that there is no one way of reading the assemblage of artefacts. Moreover, in the very fact that these are clearly reproductions, a gap is produced between the image as evidence or something factual and the artistic representation. This results in what Mitchell calls a 'third image', as the division between reality and representation creates an imaginative space, and initiates a process of understanding, and the beginning of a conversation.

Vladimir's work has the potential both to challenge what it is that we assume we know about past violence, and to ask questions about what type of knowledge is valuable in the wake of violence. This moves beyond an approach to post-conflict transition that focuses on uncovering the truth to draw a line under the conflict; instead Vladimir produces an understanding of transition as ongoing (and arguably unending) process of questioning and contestation.

## I. The ICTY Archive and Mladic Cables

This approach underpinned the project //Undiscernible//. Vladimir and Henry sifted through the records of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to understand how the archive renders some knowledge 'common sense', whilst concealing others, how this feeds into practices of remembering and forgetting, and how an aesthetic encounter with these records might disrupt this and open up new political horizons.

The ICTY was created by the UN in 1993 as a response to the violence that broke out in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Over the Tribunal's twenty-six year existence, 161 persons were indicted and 90 sentenced. One of the by-products of this was the production of an enormous volume of evidence of the crimes committed during these conflicts, amounting to thousands of metres of records.

Transcript  
Conversation with /undiscernible/? MILOŠEVIĆ  
/undiscernible/? in 1994/.

/undiscernible/.

/undiscernible/.

/? M-hm. There is there is.//undiscernible/.

/undiscernible//.

/? take a little Bensedin. // Blood pressure/? is/ a little  
elevated, just a little. // take Bensedine to lower it.

/undiscernible/. How you doing, brother?

/undiscernible/.

/undiscernible/. Can it be done. Where are you now  
What are you now?

/undiscernible/.

/undiscernible/.

/Yes/.

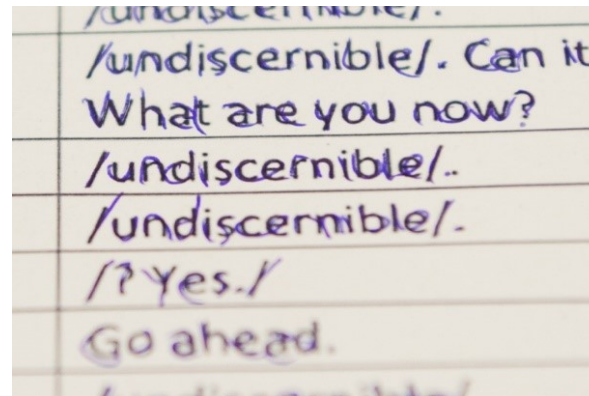
From this vast array of records, Vladimir and Henry selected a series of intercepted cables linked to the trial of General Ratko Mladić. These cables recorded conversations between Mladić and largely unknown persons in the year leading up to the genocide at Srebrenica in July 1995, one of the worst atrocities of the conflict. The cables link Mladić to individuals that would later be tried and found guilty for crimes against humanity elsewhere in Bosnia (including Duško Tadić, the first defendant convicted by the ICTY) those also found guilty of genocide in respect of Srebrenica (General Tolomir) and even to former Serbian President Slobodan Milošević (whose trial was never completed). They show a link between these persons and acts of genocide committed in 1993, they give an insight into the mentality of those in charge of the conflict (such as Mladić's obsessive focus on national identity, and his attempts to retain political and military control), and they contain a number of interesting insights into Mladić himself (including that due to the stress of the conflict he was taking Bensedin). In this way, the records offer important proof material related to crimes committed during the war, and of the persons and structures involved with enabling these to occur. In the context of post-war memorial culture within the former Yugoslavia, this type of proof remains central in attempts to establish peace within the region.

General TOLIMIR	/undiscernible/
Ratko MLADIĆ	All right. I do not want to compromise you and if you promised it, then fulfil 126 tons, allow to enter Sarajevo five tons, even six, however much you said, in Sre... in Zepa, five and a half in Zepa. Call ĐORĐEVIĆ, have him call me and get it approved.
General TOLIMIR	/undiscernible/
Ratko MLADIĆ	Well, next. Does T hear that?
General TOLIMIR	/undiscernible/
Ratko MLADIĆ	Yes. Well, if he does, then let ĐORĐEVIĆ approve it, sign, approve and tomorrow ĐORĐEVIĆ is immediately to report, if the agreement is signed or not. And to tell them if they do not sign the agreement tomorrow, to stop sending supply orders for units and food and not for fuel by far.
General TOLIMIR	/undiscernible/
Ratko MLADIĆ	All right. Agreed. Agreed.
General TOLIMIR	/undiscernible/
Ratko MLADIĆ	Alright, brother.
General TOLIMIR	Thanks.
Ratko MLADIĆ	Bye!
General TOLIMIR	/undiscernible/.
/end of conversation/	

Ultimately, however, what drew us both to the cables was the constant appearance of the word 'Undiscernible'. This points to the fact that a considerable amount of the cable contained unknown utterings by unknown persons about unknown subjects. This poses questions as to what constitutes 'meaningful knowledge' within the ICTY archives, and drawing on Vladimir's engagement with the cables, offers a way to engage these records in the production of a different type of post-conflict politics.

## II. The Logics and the Limits of the Archive

Through the meticulous examination of facts, courts are often seen as producing 'verified' accounts of past crimes. This idea helped to legitimise the existence of international courts, such as the ICTY, as uncovering the truth about the conflict was deemed essential to achieving peace. Vladimir's process of painstakingly reproducing these 'proofs' in many respects pays homage to this. But it also draws the viewers eye to the limits of this way of knowing.



First is the presence of the word 'undiscernible' throughout the cables. Given the potential significance of this record, this brings into sharp relief the potential silences and absences that penetrate the archive. Vladimir once spoke with a prominent ICTY translator, who told him that, because of a lack of resources, the cassette recordings of intercepted cables, such as the Mladić cables, often had to be transcribed immediately, so that the tapes that had recorded them could be reused for other intercepted cables. This suggests one possible cause for the 'undiscernible' nature of the record. This also points to what Derrida called the 'death drive' of the archive, as the desire to record everything ultimately ends up corrupting and eroding the possibility of knowing. However, whilst the exact reason behind the 'undiscernible' nature of swaths of these cables remains unknown, in putting 'undiscernible' at the heart of the work, Vladimir questions how this 'verified account' is produced, what else is not known and cannot be known, and what else is potentially corrupted, silenced or ignored through the way the archive is produced.

But what is lost is not only factual detail. One of the main criticisms of the legal process is that it cannot possibly comprehend this type of collective violence. These cables focus on the bureaucratic and banal nature of genocide, and in the process ignore much of the reality of these crimes, and of the human experiences of them. Perhaps the only exception, which renders the absence more overt and jarring, is the mention of the physical and emotional stress that Mladić (nicknamed the 'Butcher of Bosnia') was under. This, then, asks questions as to what types of experiences are prioritised within the archive, what is left out, and with what consequence?

### III. Re-politicising the Archive

Vladimir's work, however, does more than simply reveal how knowledge is produced after war. By reanimating and reinvigorating this material, Vladimir looks to open it up to different types of engagement (and politics). The work in many respects becomes an extension of the archive as its contents and politics are reimagined through the aesthetic lens.

	Ratko MLADIC	U-hum.
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	U-hum.
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	Who? That?
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible//?SIVILOVIC/.
	Ratko MLADIC	/?SIVILOVIC/aha.
	Unknown speaker D	So I don't know what he did about /undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	U-hum.
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible/ However, I mean, that was saved. /undiscernible/copies, /I did then, give it there to him/undiscernible/. /undiscernible/.... /It was supposed to /if you ask me, they should check it out, work. It check the stalks...
	Ratko MLADIC	U-hum.
	Unknown speaker D	... /undiscernible/ but it is interesting. /undiscernible/ then he gives him a job/so that he works for a while /undiscernible/ after that he insists, stubbornly insists that Gaja /undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	Where is that TADIC now?
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible/ But he is here, he is accessible.
	Ratko MLADIC	You should have picked him up.
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	U-hum.
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	U-hum.
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	And in the new one, who /was/ your boss?
	Unknown speaker D	In the new one, he was at that time... he was supposed to be the one /undiscernible/ there is a number of people they simply have chosen, hired, /undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	Who is he? /undiscernible/? KUPNER /?
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	U-hum.
	Unknown speaker D	It is not going to happen, /?that compromise/ /undiscernible/ but there is room /?for some other /undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	U-hum. /?who are all these /undiscernible/? /
	Unknown speaker D	Let's say, one /undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	/undiscernible/.
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	U-hum.
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	U-hum.
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	U-hum.
	Unknown speaker D	/undiscernible/... clean up /undiscernible/ he should not here, on the locale /undiscernible/.
	Ratko MLADIC	U-hum.

//Undiscernible//. proposes a different understanding of the post-conflict process to that which underpinned the ICTY. Like most post-conflict processes and mechanisms, the ICTY was centred on the idea of drawing a line under the past. As with Vladimir's other works, this logic is rejected in favour of an approach that looks to constantly question and interrogate in an arguably unending process.

The focus on the word 'undiscernible' contributes to this process. Whilst it marks out an absence, this absence becomes a potential site of engagement and interaction between the viewer and the records of the violence. The confrontation with the 'undiscernible' has the potential to spark a moment of imaginative engagement as the

viewer fills in these blanks, and so contributes to the production of the record. Each viewer will do this in different ways, which produces a sense of both the indeterminacy of the work, but also has the potential to unlock a potentially more open (and as Barthes would suggest, more radical) encounter.

This shift towards imagination is key. For the last twenty-six years the former Yugoslavia has become overwhelmed by this question of proof. New nations and identities have been formed around particular truth claims, and other states opposition to these have become an equally central aspect of national identity. However, as Vladimir argues, by this point in the post-conflict cycle anyone that wants to know what occurred (whether in Srebrenica or elsewhere) can. That thousands of Bosnian-Muslim men were killed under Mladić's orders, in the presence of UN peacekeeping forces, in Srebrenica in 1995 is incontestable. This is not to say this is now an accepted fact; it remains a highly contested, particularly within Serbian collective memory. The issue becomes, however, that reengaging with questions of proof only works to re-draw the battle lines that underpinned the violence throughout the 1990s (and arguably in the present). Indeed, one of the criticisms of the ICTY is that in the production of legalistic truths it has had the effect of reproducing the political divisions of the conflict.

In *Images in Spite of All*, Didi-Huberman asks, 'do we need an image to believe in Shoa?' This opens up a series of questions about the use of 'proof' and its value beyond the official legal and bureaucratic forum. To whom is the proof addressed, especially in light of overwhelming evidence? To the non-believers? To those for whom believing is a central facet of their being? Responding to this, Vladimir moves beyond looking for proof of what is already known, in search of an imaginative engagement that brings the past to life in different ways, in order to imagine a new future.

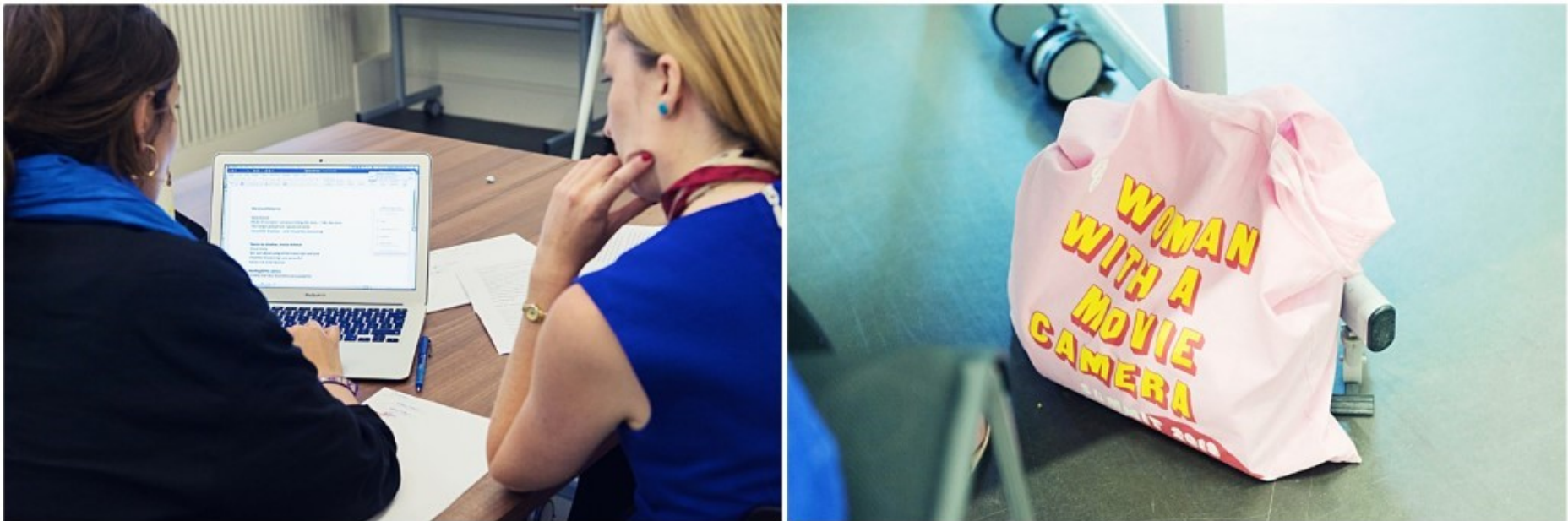
**Vladimir Miladinović** lives and works in Belgrade. He graduated from the Faculty of Applied Arts in Belgrade and has completed doctoral level courses in the department of Art and Media Theory at the University of Arts, Belgrade. He has been working as an independent artist since 2007. He was a member of the Working Group, 'Four Faces of Omarska', an art/theory group that questions memorial production strategies. Miladinović's main interests lie with the politics of remembering, media manipulation and the creation and reinterpretation of the history, focused on war and post-war trauma. He uses art to create a counter-public sphere that raises questions about war, media propaganda, manipulation of narrative, historical responsibility and intellectual engagement. He was the laureate of the 53<sup>rd</sup> October Salon Award in Belgrade and won an award from 'Vladimir Veličković' fund. He has exhibited across Europe, including at the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, Basque Museum Centre of Contemporary Art, Münchner Stadtmuseum; Salzburger Kunstverein, FreiraumQ21, CACT-Thessaloniki Center of Contemporary Art, and The Exchange, King's College London.

**Dr Henry Redwood** is a Lecturer in the Department of War Studies, King's College London. His research draws on critical IR, law and aesthetic theory to explore the politics of knowledge production after conflict, with a particular focus on post-conflict archives and artistic interventions. He completed his ESRC-funded PhD in the War Studies department at King's College London in December 2017, drawing on critical theory to examine the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda's archive, and asked what rules underpinned the construction of knowledge within the archive, and what implications this had for the court as a response to the Rwandan genocide. Since completing his PhD, Henry spent a year as an ESRC post-doctoral fellow, and also worked as a Research Associate on the AHRC funded project, *Art & Reconciliation: Conflict, Culture and Community*, which explored alternative approaches, and forgotten instances of, reconciliation in the aftermath of violence.



## **'Nadirah': An animated portrait of a woman coal miner**

Kate Jessop and Negar Elodie Behzadi / with the support of Nicholas O'Brien





## Making visible invisible stories of gender, shame and exclusion through animation: A method

‘Nadirah’ is a collaborative feminist art-research project between a geographer, Negar Elodie Behzadi and an animation artist, Kate Jessop based on the co-production of a short animated ethnographic portrait of one stigmatised female coal miner in Tajikistan. Based on long term ethnographic research undertaken by Negar in a coal mining community in 2014-15, the project aims to make visible otherwise invisible stories of shame, raising awareness of issues at the intersection of gender, work, resource extraction and exclusion. In the village of Kante in the mountains of Tajikistan, most men, most children and some women work in the illegal coal mines that emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union. While work in the illegal mines is acceptable for men and children, women’s work in mines is considered as shameful (*‘ayb’*). Women miners’ work, a heavily masculinised type of work, bridges all norms of acceptable femininity, leading to women’s restricted access to natural resources, their stigmatisation and shaming.

Kate and Negar’s collaboration aimed, in particular, at telling these embodied and lived experiences of shame. Complex and ambivalent emotion, shame is, in Elspeth’s Probyn’s words, the key to the question of what it is to be human, both a way to discipline a right performance of gender and a productive emotion. Intimate, shame is also inherently political, shaping, as Sara Ahmed mentions, collective bodies and marginalised others. Nadirah’s experience of work and shame illustrates this complexity at the same time as it reflects the gendered violence of an extractive landscape that pushes women at the margins. Her intimate experiences highlight the ambivalence first between shame, guilt, anger, pain and pride, and second between two conflicting desires: to tell her story and to protect her intimacy.

Working collaboratively with an animation artist appeared as a way to make visible this complexity. Animation in particular is a medium that allows to highlight the subtlety of gendered experiences by capturing nuance, affect and physicality. As a method, ethnographic portraiture through animation allows to address sensitive issues using an art-form that respects anonymity at the same time as it makes explicit intimate and embodied forms of suffering in a suggestive yet accessible way. As such, animated ethnographic portraiture is also in line with feminist epistemologies and methodologies, and in particular, their dedication to unearth subjugated knowledges and challenge gendered forms of exclusions.



## (Re)writing through images: a collaborative process

Kate and Negar's collaboration focused on the (re)writing for and through images of Nadirah's story. During the first phase of this collaboration, Kate and Negar exchanged photos and texts on Kate and ethnographic portraits of Nadirah and other women miners in the village. Kate found inspiration in some of the words of Negar's ethnographic portraits: 'shame and the coal that never leaves Nadirah's face', 'shame and Nadirah's bodily pains'. Images of mountains, fabrics, Tajik artefacts, teapots, old passports from the Soviet times, faded out pictures of Soviet women working in the collective farms and factories, started resonating with the story. Central to this phase were also discussions on two main themes. The first revolved around the mode of narration to adopt: Abstract or factual? Which voice should speak? Should we have a voice over? Which language should we select: English or Tajiki? And what are the implications of these choices? Second, a series of question around the politics of visibility/invisibility emerged: How to tell Nadirah's story while still protecting her intimacy? How to draw a portrait without caricaturing? What are the politics involved in choosing one object to identify Nadirah? Shall we see her face?



In parallel with these discussions, Kate and Negar started writing the voice-over for the film through an iterative process. Kate's perspective on Nadirah's story, the striking visuality of Kate's approach, allowed Negar to refine her writing and move away from conventional ethnographic portraiture and towards more visual, emotional and embodied (re)writings. After recording a first version of the voice-over, Kate started producing the animation, based on a mixed-media approach drawing on photos, stop-motion animation and drawings. 'I love bringing peoples stories to life and Negar had such interesting research and source material to work with', shares Kate. With the support of the sound engineer Nicholas O'Brien, Negar and Kate then finalised the sound for the film. The result is a 2 min animation film that tells the story of Nadirah in sound and image.



**Kate Jessop** is an award-winning animation film director whose work spans across animated shots, promos and artist's film and video. She has exhibited extensively internationally being selected for numerous national and international festivals and touring programmes such as the Raindance; The Best of Birds Eye View; London International Animation Festival and Tricky Women. Her first film 'Desires' was a Virgin Media Shorts Finalist, represented the UK in the Best of Women in Film and Television and is distributed through Shorts International. She is the founder of Animation Girl Band and is the creator of the comedy web series: 'Tales From Pussy Willow'.

**Dr Negar Elodie Behzadi** is a French/Iranian Lecturer in the Social Science of International Development at King's College London. In her research, Negar uses the insights of a feminist geographer, the sensibilities of an ethnographer, and her passion for visual and art-based methodologies to bear on questions of resource struggles, migration and labour with marginalised Muslim communities in Central Asia. Negar is also co-directing a video ethnographic documentary on extractive violence 'Komor' (Coal) and is the co-founder and co-convener of the VEM at KCL.



# 'The Right to be Believed'

Gaël Le Cornec and Cathy McIlwaine



## Adapting verbatim theatre methods to create a sound-performance installation

The performance dimension of the VEM+ project draws on verbatim theatre approaches, adapting them as a way of creating a legacy from a collaborative social science project on gender-based violence among migrant women. Verbatim theatre, sometimes also known as documentary theatre, uses the exact words of people interviewed to create a performance. Usually, the playwright interviews people and creates a performance based on their testimonies. In this case, the verbatim material was drawn from Cathy's research as the source for the testimonies and turned into a sound piece through Gaël speaking the actual words from the women. The voices were combined with Gaël's singing and movement to create a sound-performance installation.

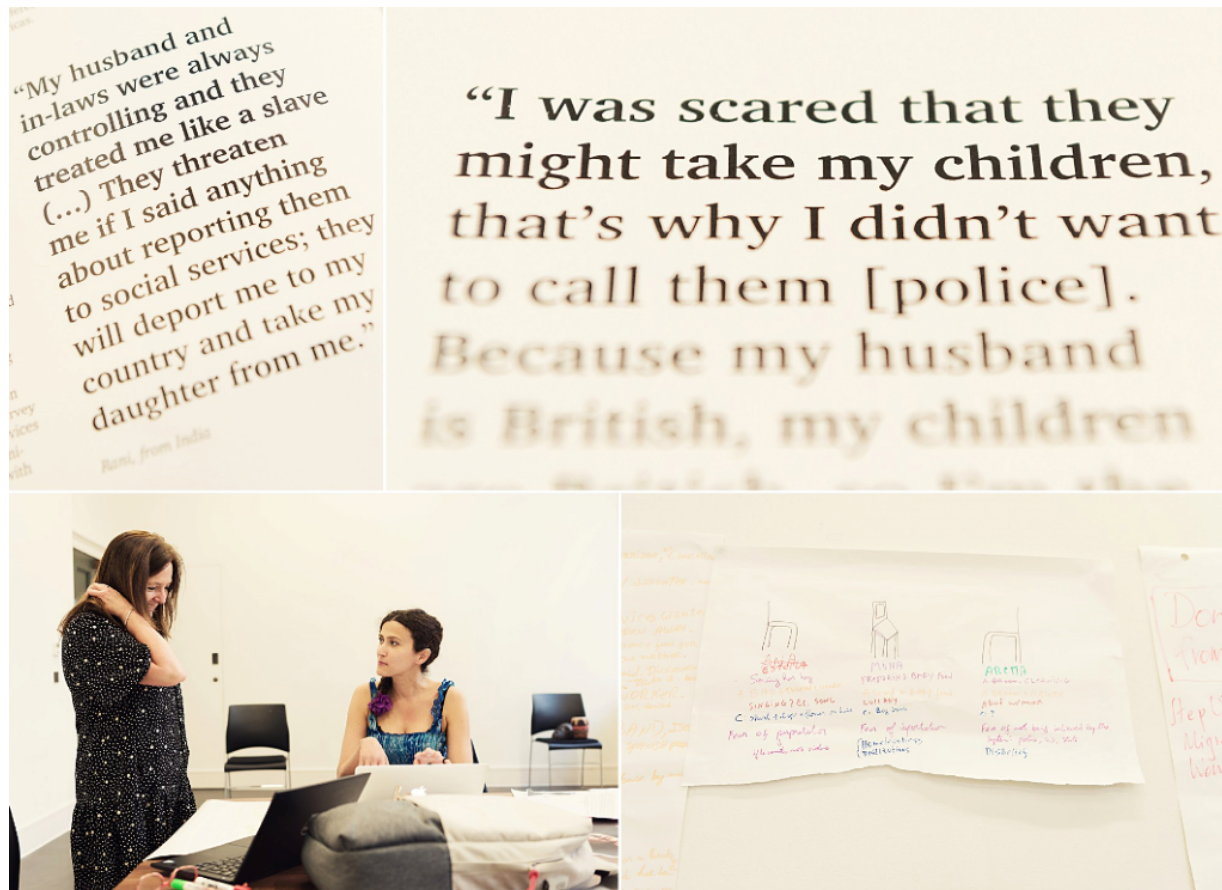
This adapted verbatim theatre approach aimed to heighten the power of the women's voices as a way of portraying their agency in the context of their stories and memories that are potentially disempowering. Ultimately, the method of verbatim sound-performance where the voices and bodies of women are at the core, reflects a feminist theorisation following bell hooks where pain and triumphs from the past can be rethought and used to transform the present. This type of artistic production is also important in visibilising the lives of migrants especially when they have been excluded and where their conventional political expression may be limited. The aim of the sound-performance installation is therefore to give voice to migrant women in ways that illustrate how they suffer gender-based violence which is corporeally embodied, yet also how they are able to resist, discover and challenge sexism, racism, and classism which has roots in structural and symbolic violence.

## From Step Up Migrant Women campaign to sound-performance installation

The research on which the sound-performance installation is based is part of the Step Up Migrant Women campaign. This campaign is led by the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) with whom Cathy and Gaël have previously worked on a project on violence against Brazilian women in London and which resulted in a verbatim theatre play called *Efêmera*. The Step Up Migrant Women campaign was established in 2017 and is currently supported by 38 organisations from the women and migrant sectors in the UK. Led by migrant and black and minority ethnic (BME) women, the project and campaign aim to increase awareness around the challenges faced by migrant women survivors of gender-based violence when they have insecure immigration status. The main purpose is to ensure that the rights of victims of gender-based violence take precedence over immigration control so that migrant women can report violence to the authorities safely and obtain support without fear of deportation, detention and/or destitution. The research and the campaign have directly influenced the drafting the UK government's Domestic Abuse Bill. The campaign draws on an evidence base derived from research directed by Cathy with migrant women and entailed a survey with 50 migrant women, most of whom used services of specialist migrant organisations, as well as semi-structured interviews with 11 migrant women with current or previous insecure immigration status and with 10 representatives from organisations supporting them, together with two focus groups with stakeholders from migrant organisations and with migrant women service users. The results from the research were written-up as a report called *'The right to be believed: migrant women facing Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in the 'hostile immigration environment' in London'* and from which the title of the audio-visual installation is drawn.

Together, Cathy and Gaël chose three stories of migrant women that were outlined in the report, and which reflected different aspects of women's experiences more broadly: Estela from Ecuador, Mona from Morocco and Aretta from Nigeria. All three women had experienced various forms of intimate partner violence including

coercive control, physical beating, imprisonment and verbal abuse. All three women spoke of how their situation was exacerbated by their insecure immigration status as the hands of their husbands/partners and through their dealings with the state. Estela, for example, spoke of how her husband manipulated her insecure status as a tool to blame her for the violence and to prevent her from reporting to the police, who she said would never believe her anyway: 'Inch by inch he used the system that he knew about and I didn't, he made me look like the perpetrator, I was just defending myself from him'. Mona's husband would not allow her to have friends: 'I'm not allowed to have friends, no female friends, because he used to say 'they will change you' and even when she contacted a woman's organisation they were only able to let her and her baby stay for one night as she had no money. Aretta discussed her traumatic experiences with social services when a social worker accused her of having a sham marriage, told her to 'go back home' and even threatened to take her baby away.



## The sound-performance installation: The Right to be Believed

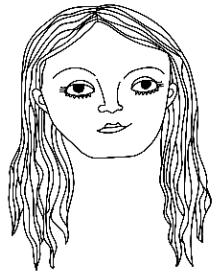
Gaël and Cathy created a script that linked together the three short testimony extracts from Estela, Mona and Aretta and which Gaël recorded. Gaël then developed a performance involving song and movement to capture the themes of violence, entrapment, invisibilisation, disbelief and barriers to seeking and securing support. Each woman's voice is played in turn as Gaël sings a song and moves between three chairs; in essence, these are three short acts of the performance. On one hand, the voice recordings served to disembody the experiences of the women; these women are migrants, they are different, their lives don't matter. On the other hand, the songs and performance re-embodies their experiences of different types of gender-based violence at the hands of partners, in terms of the structural and symbolic violence perpetrated by the state and even by organisations that try to help them. The final act sees Mona with her baby trying to find somewhere to stay the night yet everywhere she turns, she is shunned. The doors close on her face. Yet none of the women are victims, they are survivors. They have sufficient agency to write the key slogan from the Step Up Migrant Women campaign: 'Don't ask us where we are from. Ask us if we are safe'. The performance ends when Mona writes this and posts it on the wall behind her. She has rights as a woman who has experienced gender-based violence that do not depend on her immigration status. She has the right to be believed, she has the right not to be deported and she has the right to receive support from the British state regardless of her immigration status.





**Gaël Le Cornec** was born in the Amazon, which is where her fascination for theatre started as a child when reading plays at night by candlelight. After graduating with a BA in Biology at the University of São Paulo, Gaël trained as an actor at the Grotowski Institute (Poland) and the Meisner Ruskin School of Acting (Los Angeles). She holds a Masters in Cultural & Critical Studies from Birkbeck University in London and attended the Royal Court Programme for emerging writers in 2009. Fluent in 4 language: English, French, Portuguese and Spanish, her acting credits include 23 stage productions around the world including the one-woman shows *The Other*, *The last days of Gilda*, *Camille Claudel* and *Frida Kahlo: Viva La vida!*. Writing credits include the plays *'The Broken Clock'*, *'Kitchen'*, *'The Late Hour'*, *'Under the skin'* and *'Camille Claudel'*.

**Cathy McIlwaine** is Professor of Development Geography at King's College London. Her research focuses on gender and development issues in the global South, and on transnational migration in London with a specific focus on the Latin American community from the perspective of livelihoods, citizenship and gender-based violence. Cathy is currently working on a project on Violence Against Women and Girls among Brazilian migrants in London and Rio de Janeiro (funded by ESRC) and another on the experiences of migrant women and gender-based violence in London, both with the Latin American Women's Rights Service where she is also an advisor and with CASA Latin American Theatre Festival, as well as another on Resisting gender-based violence and creating dignity in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil with the People's Palace Projects and Redes da Maré. She is currently a trustee at the Latin American Bureau and Latin Elephant.



**Portraits by Aryan Salazar Volkmann**

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