

VIRTUAL MOBILITY (VM) GRANT REPORT

This report is submitted by the VM grantee to VNS Manager, who will coordinate the approval on behalf of the Action MC.

Action number: 18140

VM grant title: Writing Lives: stories of movement and displacement [E-COST-GRANT-CA18140-8b4a2b80]

VM grant start and end date: 20/08/2021 to 31/10/2021

Grantee name: Katrina O’Loughlin

Description of the outcomes and achieved outputs (including any specific Action objective and deliverables, or publications resulting from the Virtual Mobility).

(max. 500 words)

The VM Grant has achieved its primary objective of building a strategic collaboration among COST and non-Cost members to develop and deliver a series of writing workshops on the theme of ‘displacement’ for the WG4 *Writing Lives* Project. The first phase of the project (‘Out of place’@ Brunel) was offered at Brunel University, London in September of 2021.

PIMo members Katrina O’Loughlin, Catia Antunes, Giedrė Blažytė, Giacomo Orsini, and Angelos Theocharis worked with Emma Filtness and Daljit Nagra (of Brunel University, London) to develop a methodology for the WorkGroup 4 *Writing Lives* project that could allow for both creative responses and contemporary testimony of experiences of displacement. This development and consultation process resulted in a decision to run the pilot phase of the project at Brunel University, taking advantage of the very diverse student cohort at the university; the existence of a very active Creative Writing department; and the particular expertise of staff. This pilot would invite students from undergraduate to postgraduate levels (including those with little or no previous experience) to tell their stories of displacement as part of a supported writing workshop and ongoing collaboration. These could include their own personal stories of movement, migration, or displacement, that of a family or community member, or a whole community in which the writer is closely involved. The stories can be historical, biographical, or creative, and include words, objects, images and sound, and are designed to be further developed for inclusion in a public-facing website of biographical stories on experiences of movement, migration, exile, dislocation, and displacement.

As professional writers and writing mentors with a great deal of experience in planning and developing writing workshops, Emma Filtness and Daljit Nagra were instrumental in helping us determine the content and process for these writing workshops. In a series of meetings with Daljit, Emma, and Angelos Theocharis we mapped out a workshop structure suitable to a mixed group of

students at Brunel University and for adaptation to the expanded version of the *Writing Lives* project. The first of three proposed workshops was planned and delivered on Wednesday 29th September 2021. 'Out of Place @Brunel' was led by Katrina O'Loughlin and Emma Filtness and attended by 10 participants. It was lively and productive, and has identified a group of enthusiastic student writers interested in the work of the PIMo project. This is the first in a series of three linked workshops, with a further two planned for December 2021 and February 2022.

Description of the benefits to the COST Action Strategy (what and how).

(max. 500 words)

By developing a pilot with students at Brunel University, and encouraging personal collaborations between writer-contributors and the researchers of PIMo, the 'Writing Lives' project seeks to develop a small but significant database of written experience on the themes of the wider PIMo project which can be made accessible to the general public. The project of collecting written experiences of personal displacement and dislocation directly develops the following objectives of the Action MOU:

- To explore common forms and vocabularies of displacement and dispossession across the Mediterranean in order to chart similarities, and significant differences, in the experience and emotional expression of human movement between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries.
- To understand the emotional valences of dislocation for individuals and communities at specific historical junctures, and to evaluate the ways and degree to which these experiences continue to shape contemporary representation of migration and displacement in the modern world.
- To provide an alternative 'displaced' model of migration and human movement capable of recognising and theorising similarities and differences in the historical circulation of people, objects, and ideas through the Mediterranean.

Bringing together contemporary writers and scholars of history in collaborative and mentoring relationships specifically contributes to the following objective to bring historical and contemporary experiences into dialogue:

- To identify a pre-history and context for the contemporary 'crisis' in migration in order to educate scholars, students, governmental agencies, and the public about the emotional vocabulary and impact of current responses to displaced people in the Mediterranean.

The collaborative development of the *Writing Lives* project thus represents a form of strategic outreach outside the specific research traditions utilized by the grant, to include young people and the public (especially members of migrant and refugee communities) in the Action. It additionally provides the Action with a number of potential outputs - written reflections, testimony, interviews, reflective writing, and podcasts - that contribute directly to PIMo's online publication strategy.

Description of the virtual collaboration (including constructive reflection on activities undertaken, identified successful practices and lessons learned).

(max.500 words)

The participants in the virtual collaboration were PIMo members:

- Katrina O'Loughlin, Brunel University London; Vice-Chair PIMo
- Catia Antunes, Professor of History of Global Economic Networks, University of Leiden, Leader PIMo WorkGroup4: People
- Giedrė Blažytė, Diversity and Development Group, Lithuania
- Giacomo Orsini, Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium

- Angelos Theocharis, University of Durham, UK

These members of PIMo WorkGroup 4 collaborated with my colleagues in Creative Writing at Brunel University:

- Emma Filtness, Lecturer in Creative Writing
- Daljit Nagra FRSL, Chair of the Royal Society of Literature, Senior Lecturer & Programme Lead for Creative Writing

Working within WorkGroup 4, I developed an initial outline which included a rationale, and provisional set of goals for the project. In consultation with Catia Antunes, Giedrė Blažytė, Angelos Theocharis, and Giacomo Orsini (the latter whom have worked very closely with migrant and refugee communities on aligned projects) we developed a methodology that could allow for both creative responses and contemporary testimony of experiences of displacement. The goals we developed specifically focused on:

- Creating an opportunity and platform for people to tell their own stories of movement and displacement;
- Capturing contemporary and more recent historical experiences of movement and displacement, within families, communities, and faith groups, locally, regionally, and globally;
- Developing an historically- and linguistically-diverse set of vocabularies for people's experiences of movement and displacement;
- Identifying potential shared languages, and in particular emotional vocabularies of displacement, that might be used to build on common experiences.

A strategic decision of the group was to develop the project in two phases: a pilot project with students which would allow us to create workshop materials and develop strategies for encouraging new writers; and an expanded phase of the project that would extend it to the public, and in particular targeted migrant and refugee communities. This, I think, was a key step in the development of the larger WG4 project. With the expertise of Emma Filtness and Daljit Nagra we were able to develop a workshop programme that featured a mixed structure of presentation, source texts, reflection, writing prompts, and poetry reading to encourage responses to the chosen themes of displacement, or what it meant to feel 'out of place'. This was the structure we used with great success at the first workshop (29 September, 2021) and will be the foundation for both the next set of workshops at Brunel, and for developing into a public call for wider participation in the future scope of *Writing Lives*.

The strategic collaboration between PIMo researchers (whose expertise focuses largely on historical movement and contemporary migration and refugee communities) and Creative Writers at Brunel was critical, I believe, to developing an appropriate and accessible structure for our workshops. In an ideal world we would bring the various expertise together in a room but for these early stages of the project the virtual collaboration resulted in a project whose goals could be thoughtfully developed and built into a workable workshop format for the *Writing Lives* project overall.