

## KATE DUFFY-SYEDI BA, MA

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## PROFILE

### Project title

Performing 'unaccompanied minor': rethinking young refugee identity through self-authored performance.

### Supervisors

Dr Amanda Stuart Fisher and Professor David Harradine

### Qualifications

BA Drama, Applied Theatre and Education, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (Central)  
MA Migration and Diaspora Studies, SOAS

### Profile

I am a PhD candidate, theatre maker, visiting lecturer and activist, focussing on issues relating to forced migration. My practice research project engages with how autobiographical performance puts risky identities of young male refugees under pressure.

Alongside my PhD research I am a founder and co-Artistic Director of Phosphoros Theatre, a charity which makes nationally touring performance work with refugee actors who came to the UK as unaccompanied asylum seeking children. As well as co-creative leadership, I oversee the company's participation and training work, including its Young Company at the Unicorn Theatre, national development workshops for social workers and other professionals working with refugees, and training programme for early career artists from refugee backgrounds. I have extensive experience working with refugee young people and adults aged 5-25 in both creative and advocacy based management positions. Between 2012-18 before starting my PhD, I worked for Paiwand, an Afghan refugee community organisation, in various roles including running a housing project for unaccompanied male refugees aged 16-21, and then senior management. Since 2018 I have been a visiting lecturer and tutor on Central's BA Drama, Applied Theatre and Education and MA Applied Theatre courses, including co-running a new BA contemporary studies module called Theatre and Migration with Rebecca Hayes Laughton.

## **Abstract**

My practice research examines how practices of self-authorship can perform care, solidarity and belonging, to establish alternative understandings of male refugee experience beyond their secure positions as 'service users'. Due to their extreme experiences of survival 'without papers', unaccompanied minors are often positioned in migration studies outside a Western paradigm of childhood, and are frequently misunderstood by host communities. The voices of refugees are often absented from research, performance and public discourse, enacting forms of erasure and silencing. My research considers how performance practices might reposition and/or destabilise dominant knowledge about young male refugees in order to restore agency and trouble discourses of suspicion, distrust and victimhood that have become associated with asylum seekers in general, and male unaccompanied minors specifically. Working collaboratively with activist-actors and young participants from Phosphoros Theatre, all of whom are current or former unaccompanied minors, as well as refugee young people around the UK, this research develops performance practices rooted in care and resistance, developing new ways for refugee actors to interact with and articulate their lived experience. My research reframes who gets to speak about forced migration, adolescence and solidarity, in what way and how.

## **Performance Practice**

2020-21 Co-director, 'All the beds I have slept in'. Phosphoros Theatre. Written by Dawn Harrison. (postponed to 2021 due to COVID-19)

2020 Co-director and producer, 'After the Storm'. Phosphoros Theatre. Short film devised with Phosphoros Young Company

2020 Co-artistic director, 'Sun Up, Rain Falls, River Rises'. Phosphoros Theatre. Audio narratives commissioned by Journeys Festival International as part of Liberty EU funded by Creative Europe. Written by Mohamed Abdu, Goitom Fesshaye, Syed Haleem Najibi, with Dawn Harrison.

2020 Co-artistic director, 'Strung Out'. Phosphoros Theatre. 40 minute short film. Written by Dawn Harrison.

2020 Director and producer, 'Hold Onto Your Hope'. Phosphoros Theatre. Short film made with young people from CARAS, People's Palaces Project and Protection Approaches.

2020 Co-artistic director, 'But everything has an ending'. Phosphoros Theatre. 5 digital shorts exploring the experience of refugees living in lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Written by Dawn Harrison.

2018-20 Co-artistic director, 'Pizza Shop Heroes'. Phosphoros Theatre, 47 date national tour including Summerhall, HOME Manchester, Nottingham Playhouse, Leicester Curve. Written by Dawn Harrison.

2019 Co-director, 'Wonderland'. Phosphoros Theatre. Devised by Phosphoros Young Company.

2017-18 Co-artistic director, 'Dear Home Office: Still Pending', 21 date national tour including Gilded Balloon, Pleasance Islington, Southbank Centre, Pegasus Theatre. Written by Dawn Harrison.

2016 -17 Co-artistic director, 'Dear Home Office', Underbelly (Edinburgh Festival Fringe) followed by 12 date tour including Pleasance Islington and Southbank Centre. Written by Dawn Harrison and Rosanna Jahangard.

## **Other Practice**

2020 Co-lead, training course for arts facilitators with lived experience of forced migration, Phosphoros Theatre

2018-present Advisory board, Springboard Youth Academy. I'm a co-founder and creative consultant for this trauma-informed, creative English learning programme for newly arrived refugee youth.

2019 Project producer, Write yourself in, BA collaborative outreach project in partnership with Tara Arts

2018-19 Research Assistant, Embrace Project, Little Fish Theatre and Central

Additionally: various arts work in community settings from 2012-present, predominantly with refugee and newly arrived young people.

## **Publications**

2016 'Unheard voices, unseen faces: staging stories of male refugee youth'. Critical Stages, issue 14 (with Rosanna Jahangard)

## **Teaching**

2018-present Royal Central School of Speech and Drama: co-leading Theatre and Migration module for BA Contemporary Performance Practice (CPP); dissertation supervisor for BA & MA students; project tutor; visiting lecturer on CPP course

2020 Brunel: Applied Theatre module for BA students

## **Conference Presentations/Papers**

2019 'All the beds I have slept in' (work in progress). Practice research performance. Collisions Festival – annual practice research postgraduate festival, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

2019 'Truth on whose terms? The significance of beginnings in theatre and performance work with refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.' Theatre and Performance Research Association (TaPRA), University of Exeter (with Rebecca Hayes Laughton)

2018 'In my chicken shop people look at me like I'm nothing, but these people pay to hear my story' Storytelling and refuge / storytelling for refuge. The George Ewart Evans Centre for Storytelling (with Syed Haleem Najibi)

## **Academic Events organised**

Co-organised Intersections 2020 – Central's annual postgraduate conference

## **Teaching Expertise**

Theatre and migration  
Applied and socially engaged theatre

Participatory theatre with young people, with an emphasis on refugees  
Youth work

Creative ESOL  
Conflict resolution