

## XENOPHOBIC LANGUAGE: THE MEDIA, THE STATE AND PUBLIC POLICY IN THE UK

*“There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.” — Arundhati Roy*

The use of xenophobic language in the UK politics and media has steadily increased in the past 20 years. This has resulted in systematic dehumanization and demonization of immigrants.

Most recently, it contributed to the Leave Vote in the national Brexit referendum. It is also behind an alarming increase in racially motivated attacks, and has culminated in the government's structural violence framed as the Hostile Environment Immigration Policy. This policy, despite its disastrous applications as in the [Windrush scandal](#) and subsequent ministerial resignations, is currently being expanded into all public services, including the National Health Service. In universities it is also combined with the prejudiced anti-terrorism policy called [Prevent](#), which is supposed to identify extremism, but it ended up being used to curtail civil liberties of many already marginalised groups.

Since the 2008 financial crash, the United Kingdom has struggled to restore the neoliberal narrative of infinite growth, underwritten by the freedom of movement of goods and labour and individualism, summed up in by Thatcher in this quote And, you know, there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families.

Instead the so called austerity policy created a vacuum in which xenophobia began to re-emerge, often justified by the narrative of scarcity. Racist language and ideology thrive in the 'We want our country back' discourse, creating deep divisions in society and [ending up with violence](#).

I will look at these negative narrative can be transformed from the perspective of the grassroots non-governmental organisation [Migrants Organise](#) where I have been Chief Executive for the past 18 years. Our work is about direct support for individuals, as well as community organising and mobilising for systemic change.

Migrants Organise helps create the building blocks of the politics of belonging. It seeks to rally communities and provide an inclusive welcome to recent arrivals. Migrants Organise does this by uniting immigrants and their communities and offering a safe platform for them to share their stories. What we do is not just therapeutic psychosocial storytelling. Immigrants' experiences are shared in order to challenge the conditions and assumptions behind their exclusion and reshape the increasingly xenophobic society.

I propose to share some of the innovative ways in which we use immigrant narratives. This would be done through either a 20-minute presentation and/or in an open dialogue conversation focused on these issues. Some of the key programs I would address are:

[The Haringey Welcome](#) - organising local residents in one London borough to oppose the hostile policy of public services, which targets homeless undocumented immigrant families

[Patients Not Passports](#) – organising healthcare professionals and linking them with immigrants who are refused life saving treatment due to the increasingly systemic hostility of UK health services.

[The Welcome Committee](#) – organising individuals to become community sponsors – raising funds to bring refugees safely into the UK and supporting their living costs for two years.

[Promote the Migrant Vote](#) – voter registration drive that is reframing the civic participation and citizenship

I believe that in order to change policies we must change attitudes and that the best way to challenge the assumptions that underpin those attitudes is through relational storytelling by immigrants. I am convinced that increased public exposure to an inclusive narrative is essential to all positive political transformation.