Afterword

I am a migrant. After 15 years in Britain, I am now also a citizen but I insist on claiming the migrant label as a form of protest and a badge of pride. The ever intensifying anti-immigrant rhetoric and the expansion of border control into all areas of life, as part of the current government's hostile environment campaign, makes migrants like me feel that their citizenship is always conditional and their sense of belonging is fragile.

Getting indefinite leave to remain status meant that I was free from immigration control and gave me a sense of freedom. I felt free to protest against the injustices of the immigration system. I am ashamed that I waited until I felt 'safe'; many others in far more insecure situations speak out at great risk to themselves. But, like many others, I had kept my head down for years, anxiously monitoring Home Office pronouncements on immigration, trying to figure out how to stay ahead of a tightening net, navigating the uncertainty of finding out that you no longer qualify for the immigration category you're in. It felt like a finish line of sorts. Finally, I was home.

When I took up citizenship in 2013, the Go Home vans were already on London streets, ostensibly to encourage those who might be in the country illegally to return home. In reality, it felt like they were talking to all migrants, but especially ethnic minorities – regardless of immigration status – who had long heard the phrase 'Go Home' from the far right. For this message to be espoused so openly by the government of the day marked a turning point in how I viewed Britain and my citizenship. The message I heard was that while I held two homes in my heart, as far as this country was concerned, my right to claim this one would always be conditional.

During my citizenship ceremony I stood with people of all ages and experiences, each with their own stories of how they got here. For the first time I was told that my contribution to Britain mattered, that the vision for the country was for 'the common good'. My letter

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from the Home Secretary, who would go on to defend Operation Vaken and the Go Home vans in the face of criticism, told me for the first time that I was welcome, not far from one of the areas that the infamous van had been on tour.

The atmosphere in Britain at the moment does indeed feel hostile to migrants but its chill wind touches us all. Recent years have seen multiple Immigration Acts; no sooner had the 2015 Immigration Act passed than the Immigration Bill 2016 was being prepared. Yet despite the flurry of ever more restrictive legislation, public confidence in the immigration system does not improve and public anxieties about the level of immigration are not assuaged. Immigration critics like to say that we don't really talk about immigration but we talk of little else; the issue also underpins other debates – such as the EU referendum. Unease about immigration is expressed by politicians on behalf of 'the public'. In reality they are only listening and talking to one sector of the population. And instead of engaging with tangible concerns about services such as housing or living with difference and change, all too often they trade on fear with cheap gimmicks and soundbites, 'gesture politics' that give the impression of being tough on immigration.

However, it goes beyond crass stunts like the Go Home vans or staged immigration raids with the Prime Minister in tow. There are policies that undermine the rights of migrants and citizens alike. As the authors of this book show, the hostile environment campaign also entails the outsourcing of border control to private citizens such as landlords, doctors, teachers, lecturers – even the police, who under the newer Operation Nexus are forced to take a more active role in immigration enforcement, potentially jeopardising relationships with vulnerable groups and deterring those with insecure immigration status from seeking help. The media play their part in this 'performative politics' of immigration, sometimes reproducing, sometimes countering invasion imaginaries or the narrative that the UK is a soft touch when it comes to exploitation by certain migrants or 'bogus' asylum seekers. Media narratives reduce migrants to stereotypes – most often villains or victims, reinforcing the narrative of 'good' and 'bad' migrants and denying the complexity of life, which continually overspills neat immigration categories.

What does this do to us? Despite the rush for headlines, policies and publicity stunts, there is scant reflection on what this performative politics means for communities, for migrants and British citizens alike. This body of research is a timely and vital exploration of the changing face of immigration control, government communication campaigns and their effects.

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Migration is not just about a journey; it is also the story of settlement – be it for a little while or a lifetime. Infrequent tabloid stories about the children of foreign-born parents sometimes label them as migrants despite the fact that most, along with their parents, will be British citizens. When do we get to belong? Who gets to decide? Is it dependent on the right paperwork? These are some of the questions that underlie the research discussed in this book.

In this context, for people like me reclaiming the undesirable label of migrant is an act of resistance. It shouldn't have to be. But this is one of many effects of the contemporary immigration debate and policy; the many strands of which are unpicked in this research. The lives and rights of migrants and citizens are more entwined than ever; where migrant rights are eroded, so are those of the most vulnerable British-born. Resistance requires solidarity, breaking out of the artificial categories that immigration legislation puts us in. After all, Britain's story is one of migration. The gesture politics mobilised for the purposes of immigration control, not only mystify the past, they are a failure of imagination and courage.

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