

Transcript: Migration Oxford Podcast

BONUS- Immigration to Innovation

Jacqueline Broadhead 00:05

Ok, so just walking through the doors from Lewisham shopping centre into the Migration Museum, and I'm joined by Aditi Anand, the Artistic Director here, and Curator of the Taking Care of Business exhibition. Hi, Aditi.

Aditi Anand 00:16

Hi, Jacqui.

Jacqueline Broadhead 00:17

So we start off coming into the Migrant Makers Market, the next iteration of the museum gift shop which I really enjoy. So then this takes us up through into the takeaway section but the first thing that we see are two fantastic photos, so one of a kind of...sort of bar Italia, Italian 1950s coffee bar, I guess, and the most 70s, fantastic photo of the original Costa Coffee and I think, Aditi, you were saying that this was, you know, in a kind of family archive and...

Aditi Anand 00:55

Yeah so, when we sort of initially, were researching Costa, you know, we found some basic information online about the family and their origins in Italy. But there wasn't that much visual information available. And we went through kind of the official channels at Costa and they didn't really have an archive. But eventually, they put us through to Sergio Costas' daughter and family. And we were able to, you know, get these amazing photographs that were just in her family album. And, and also, Sergio (her father)'s recollections, which is, yeah, it's amazing, because they really haven't been published elsewhere.

Jacqueline Broadhead 01:30

And here we also see, I guess, a sort of different side of migrant entrepreneurship, which is something that'll be sort of pretty ubiquitous to anybody on the streets of London, which is the Deliveroo bike and kind of Just Eat bikes. I guess they're a different sides of entrepreneurship. Maybe sometimes people who are pushed into a type of entrepreneurship where maybe they would prefer employment? Was it important for you to include that type of kind of self-employment entrepreneurship, gig economy...

Aditi Anand 01:54

Yeah, I mean, well, the fact is...we started with the fact that actually Deliveroo and Just Eat were founded as companies by migrant entrepreneurs themselves. So Deliveroo was founded by Will Shu, who is Taiwanese-American, and Just Eat is a Danish entrepreneur. But yeah, there's obviously the angle of the gig economy as well. So I think it was important for us to, to not gloss over some of the nuances of business practices. So you know, we...while we are kind of looking at this huge contribution

of migrant businesses, that doesn't mean they're immune from, you know, critiques about exploitation and sustainability. I think those are really big issues facing the kind of business world. So we wanted to, we wanted to highlight the businesses, but also raise some of those questions.

Jacqueline Broadhead 02:38

Absolutely. And then we move through into what I would have to say, is a kind of perfect recreation of the Lucky Star takeaway. And also a wall of a kind of imitations of a South London institution of Morley's, but not quite.

Aditi Anand 02:58

Yeah, so this is a really interesting project called 'Morley's or Less'. And I mean, if you live in North...South London, you'll know Morley's, it's a very signature institution, you know, it's got red, red background, white lettering, Morleys. It's a chicken shop that was started nearly 40 years ago now by a Sri Lankan immigrant, but because it's been such, so successful, become kind of a South London institution, a lot of other migrant businesses have kind of riding on the coattails by creating imitation Morley's. So all of these pictures that you see on the wall are all fake Morley's, which...many of them don't exist anymore. But I think it's just, yeah, it reflects a lot of the sort of humor and ingenuity of migrant-owned businesses.

Jacqueline Broadhead 03:41

And kind of how fast-moving some of these businesses are, can be and...

Aditi Anand 03:46

Yeah, absolutely. And it's, yeah, it's just ways that people find to get publicity to survive. It's sort of the immigrant hustle is, really.

Jacqueline Broadhead 03:54

And this whole section feels so evocative. I bet you've had some kind of reactions of people as they've kind of come through this part of the exhibition kind of focused on Morley's, but also Chinese takeaway as well.

Aditi Anand 04:05

Yeah, I think...I think the Chinese takeaway is...is one space where we have lots of really emotional reactions. And sort of all credit for this exhibit. This installation goes to Angela Hui, who put together this exhibition which features kind of photographs of both her family, but also the families of various...behind various takeaways all over the UK. And we also have a film with Angela's mother featured here, where she kind of talks about why they settled in Wales, a typical workday for her. I mean, just grueling, grueling, hard work, but a way of kind of just creating a better life for for their children. And yeah, it's very evocative. There's a space here where you can pick up a phone and dial numbers to listen to memories from takeaway kids. It's very interactive, people can leave their memories. So I think yeah, I think this has definitely hit a chord with a lot of our audiences.

Jacqueline Broadhead 04:59

And it has that contrast between being very focused on South London, but then also having that kind of sense of all around the UK with the takeaway from Wales as well.

Aditi Anand 05:09

Absolutely. And I think...I think, you know, at the Migration Museum we always try to strike a balance between the kind of local story, the hyperlocal relevance, but also the fact that migration and migrant entrepreneurship is very much of a national story, and to reflect that. And I think this is kind of an amazing example, because Angela interviewed people who own takeaways, you know, everywhere from Yorkshire to London to Wales. So it's like a really interesting portrait.

Jacqueline Broadhead 05:35

And then that takes us through to the restaurants section. And what I love about this is, you talked about the interactivity, but the kind of social sense of this bit of the exhibition, so we have [a] number of kind of two-seater tables, where...each of which represents a different restaurant, some of which where you can listen to stories, but also, I guess, where you can, where you can sit down and discuss with each other your kind of thoughts about restaurant culture in the UK, and the contribution of migrant entrepreneurs to that.

Aditi Anand 06:06

Yeah, because I mean, in any given exhibition, you can only, you know, really feature a fraction of the kind of stories that you can possibly tell about food and migration. So I think it was important to kind of highlight a few stories that we thought would bring up different themes, but also give space for people to have conversations, because I mean, everyone's got an experience with a migrant food business that they have either eaten at or know about. So, so giving kind of space for that conversation is really important. But yeah, I mean, I hope that like the different businesses featured, give you different angles in the story. We talked about kind of the monsoon restaurant, and you know, the Bangladeshi curry houses in Brick Lane, their history and the kind of current pressures they face. But...and then we also have a story here, which is about Smokey Joe's diner, you know, which is about a very pioneering Caribbean diner, but it's also kind of an interesting and, and really relevant story about Black businesses and financing. And when Charlie Phillips was trying to expand the business, you know, there was a lot of couched racism from the banks, refusing to kind of give him a loan, because they just couldn't see that it was a proven model for a business. So I mean, it's really also about, you know, a lot of the struggles that some of the smaller businesses face in kind of being able to scale up.

Jacqueline Broadhead 07:25

And you have that real contrast of both stories like Rosa's Thai where that's become kind of larger chain businesses, and then some of the kind of smaller businesses, where as you say, there is that struggle to scale up or also, presumably, in some cases, there isn't...people want to keep a kind of small-scale, one restaurant as well. a

Aditi Anand 07:46

Yeah, certainly. I mean, there's also, you know, the kind of local family-owned businesses. We have an example of Maggie's Cafe, which is kind of an institution in Lewisham Central. It's been running for 40 years and it was started by Maggie who came from Ireland, and then met her husband who's also of a

migrant background, and it's now run by their children. But you know, it's very much kind of, yeah, it's...it's a family-owned business and it's kind of continued in that same vein that it started 40 years ago.

Jacqueline Broadhead 08:13

Is that a portrait of Maggie? Yes, that's a portrait of Maggie. That was actually done by an artist called Karimah Hassan, who's done kind of...we commissioned her to do portraits of nine local business owners in Lewisham. And we've kind of, yeah, featured those portraits in...elsewhere in the exhibition as well.

Jacqueline Broadhead 08:31

And so then as we kind of wind our way past the tables, what I can see coming next is a whole load of shopping bags, very apt for our location, and of basically, nearly all high-street shops that you could think of, ranging from Selfridges to Dune to Kurt Geiger to Marks and Spencer's and then also to fast-fashion providers like boohoo. I presume, yeah, shopping was a kind of an important part of the exhibition. But was there some sort of tension with some of the questions around fast fashions and the stories around exploitation and those, kind of, areas?

Aditi Anand 09:15

I mean, the exhibition is kind of set up a bit like a high street in a way, so you've got these different sections that look at different types of businesses. So you know, we touched on food, we touched on technology. This particular section was looking at style and the ways that migrant businesses have shaped our styles through the ages. And yeah, I mean, you know, so you see that a lot of these fast-fashion, high-street brands were either founded by migrants or their descendants, because historically, you know, migrants have really played a very key role in the garment industry, whether that's in manufacturing or in retail. And obviously, that brings up a lot of important questions about exploitation in garment factories, about sustainability and climate change linked to some of these fashion...fast-fashion brands. So, I mean, I think we wanted to highlight the migration stories behind these brands, but also question some of those practices. You know, just because you're a migrant-owned businesses doesn't make you sort of immune from the fact that some of these industries are very exploited...exploitative. So we kind of have a section on the rag trade, for example, here where we talk, we look at, you know, kind of experiences of garment workers through the ages and some of the kind of garment workers strikes and unions and all these different perspectives on the industry, because I think it's very important to have those conversations at the moment.

Jacqueline Broadhead 10:40

Absolutely. And I guess we're sort of...if this is the high street were maybe in like the town square here, I guess, because we've got fashion, we've got sort of homeware, we have the perfect sort of evocation of a corner shop. And then finally we have the Golden Scissors, it has a 'Come in, we're open' sign, so this is the barbers. So...and I think I recognise this perhaps from one of the previous exhibitions, is that right?

Aditi Anand 11:02

Yeah, so we had, we had a barber shop in our Room to Breathe exhibition before where we had this installation which is about, you know, migrant barbers and their customers having conversations. You sit down in the barber's chair, and you can kind of listen into these conversations. So we kept that but we also expanded the space to look at the history of kind of hair and beauty businesses. And, yeah, explore some of the stories that aren't as particularly well known, for example, the story of Dyke & Dryden, which was a business founded by two Jamaican men who were later joined by a third partner, and they were Britain's first kind of Black-owned, multi-million-pound brand. And, you know, the first kind of manufacturers of Black hair products, so it's kind of a good example of entrepreneurs seeing gaps in the market and seeing, you know, which customers aren't being served by the larger marketplace and creating specific products. But again, you know, it was...it was I think, they face quite a lot of racism challenges in getting bank loans, getting spaces, retail spaces to open their business, quite a lot of discrimination, which is kind of told through the story here. But they were definitely pioneers then, I think they opened up a lot of spaces for Black-owned businesses, particularly hairdressers and barbers.

Jacqueline Broadhead 12:22

Yeah, and I think it really speaks to something we talked about before, which is migrant entrepreneurship that is kind of looking outwards, but also within communities. And that is spotting gaps that perhaps other parts of the economy don't want to address because of discrimination, etc., and being...and the capacity to be able to react to that and create new businesses and...but also the challenges within that, yeah. Great, thank you so much for that tour round Taking Care of Business.