In Between Welcome and Unwelcome: The Airport Border-Crossing Experiences of Non-Resident Citizens

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Objectives | Freedom of movement has been recognised as a fundamental human right by national and international legislation and regulatory bodies (Aitchison, 2023). However, inequalities are prevalent in many settings. Prime examples of such settings are liminal spaces such as airport borders, where, in the name of national security, systematic 'othering' of the passengers dictates who is 'us' and who could be potentially 'them' and thus not being allowed entry (Zare & Ye, 2023). In the process of identifying 'them', many legal travellers, including international visitors, students, or skilled workers with legal status in the host country, are scrutinized and treated as if they pose a threat. The 'guilty until proven innocent' attitude at the borders towards legal residents who may have been living, working and paying taxes at the host country for a long time could create a sense of weariness and never quite belonging. Not having the passport of the host country (the objective dimension of the belonging) casts shadows the individuals' sense of attachment and affection to the place (the subjective dimension of belonging) (Antonsich's, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Therefore, this study explores the predominant airport border experiences of non-citizen residents of countries including students and skilled workers. The focus of this exploration is on deconstructing travellers' experiences with the airport border procedures and to gain insight on the impacts of these events, especially immigration encounters on residents' senses of welcome and belonging to the host country.

Methodology | Using a purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 10 non-citizen UK university lecturers. The Orchestra model (Pearce, 2011) was used as a framework to help interviewees deconstruct their experiences step by step. Pearce's (2011) Orchestra Model of the Tourist Experience suggests that travellers' experiences need to be examined from five aspects: physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and social.

Demographic Information were critical to understand the impacts of intersectionality on individuals' border-crossing experiences. Therefore, with prior consent, age, nationality, visa type, travel companion, the length of residence in the UK, origin and destination airports were obtained from the interviewees. The participants were asked to describe key parts of their encounter with the

immigration office at the border (critical incidents). Then, they were asked about their perception of the treatment they received, as well as how this experience impacted their sense of belonging and welcome to the host country. The Thematic analysis was adopted to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights from the participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each interview question was aligned with pre-existing themes linked to the five components of the orchestra model. The themes were refined iteratively through a continuous comparison between the data and the underlying theoretical concepts.

Main Results and Contributions | Findings depicted that the airport border encounters for non-citizen residents returning home were physically, emotionally, cognitively, behaviourally, and socially challenging. Sitting for long in aeroplane and then standing in extensive queues at the border control, humans are bodily, emotionally, and cognitively stretched. The findings also demonstrated that the reality of border practices is often onerous, discriminatory, and hostile. Previous studies have noted the inequality in mobility rights and the normative profiling practices among international tourists at the airport border control, shaped by an amalgam of historical colonial orders, capitalist-oriented ways of thinking and asymmetrical power (Bianchi et al., 2019; Torabian & Mair, 2017; Zare & Ye, 2023). This study drew specific attention to the often-overlooked segments of non-citizen residents and their border encounters. The result of this study, therefore, underscores the significance of questioning today's hyper-normalised and standardized airport border practices (Bal et al., 2022). Surfacing the unheard voices, understanding the diverse travellers' experiences, and employing design-based frameworks (Pearce & Zare, 2017) can be a step forward in improving border-crossing experiences.

The accounts in this study also revealed that holding passports from the country-of-origin outweigh having valid long-term visas and biometric resident cards in receiving fair and sensible border scrutiny. The participants' legal status (residents but not citizens) versus their subjective affections and attachments to their life in the host country created a sense of dissonance among residents. This situation is described by Yuval-Davis (2006) and Antonsich's (2010) as dictating rather allowing negotiation for 'belonging'.

Limitations | As an exploratory study, the scope focused primarily on the skilled workers in higher education and PhD students' experiences when entering or exiting the UK. It is arguable that the occupations of the participants are traditionally respected, thus possibly leading to partial border experiences. Future studies could expand the populations and explore a more diverse range of border-crossing experiences.

Conclusions | Theoretically, the routine airport crossings of non-citizen residents returning to their home countries have remained largely unquestioned. This study contributes to the knowledge by

bringing to light these underrepresented voices. It unveils negative effects of border-crossing experiences on migrants' sense of belonging and welcome and responds to the theoretical calls for exploring the ways in which more hospitable, welcoming, and inclusive spaces could be fostered (Chambers, 2022). Practically, the aim of this study was to draw attention to the fact that airport borders are often hostile rather than hospitable places for many travellers, regardless of their legitimate legal status. The key issue arises from the massive asymmetry of power and the absence of visible or easily accessible mechanism for border-crossers to voice their objections (Aitchison, 2023). In almost every other context, travellers are valued as customers with full rights to hold the service provider accountable in case of service failure (Wattanacharoensil et al., 2017). A reform in the current philosophy, assumption and operation of the border control procedures is, therefore, necessary.

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