

## The global politics of a 'poncy pillowcase': Migration and borders in Coronation Street

Article (Accepted Version)

Innes, Alexandria J and Topinka, Robert J (2017) The global politics of a 'poncy pillowcase': Migration and borders in Coronation Street. *Politics*, 37 (3). pp. 273-287. ISSN 0263-3957

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/63656/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

### **Copyright and reuse:**

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

### **The Global Politics of a 'Poncy Pillowcase': *Coronation Street* at the border**

In a 2007 episode of *Coronation Street*, Janice Battersby, Sally Webster and Sean Tully discuss how they might be able to help their friend, Joanne Jackson, who had been identified as an irregular migrant, detained, and was facing deportation to Liberia. Janice suggests 'we could write to our MP', but this suggestion is quickly side-lined in favour of sending her a scented lavender pillow for comfort and stress relief - an idea upon which Janice heaps derision. This focus on the mundane, the domestic and the everyday (notwithstanding melodramatic storylines) means that soaps, like other female-dominated genres receive even less attention than other cultural forms as sites of global politics (Kaklamanidou 2013). Yet everyday life teems with political constraints and possibilities. Although International Relations (IR) scholars are increasingly examining the politics of culture, concerns persist that IR continues to treat culture as ontologically separate from global politics (Grayson et al 2009). This paper investigates the global politics of everyday life in popular culture.

We construct our argument around a 2007 storyline from *Coronation Street* concerning the politics of irregular migration and globalisation. We argue that soaps can offer insight into everyday agencies of migration and bordering while mitigating the problem of isolating migrant experiences from local experiences in migrant-receiving areas. In the narrative style of the soap a community of characters interacts with each other to comment on and to construct a commentary on social issues. Thus, the soap audience are drawn into on-going political contestation within the fictional world of the soap and the broader world from which storylines are drawn.

We proceed by contextualising this discussion in international relations and critical border studies literature. We then draw on cultural studies in its institutional form in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, focusing both on early discussions of the integration of the British working class into hegemonic ideologies and later discussions of the globalisation of

culture and identity. Finally, in our analysis of the *Coronation Street* storyline, we argue that popular culture both stages and supplies resources for political agency in everyday life. By examining popular culture not as a fixed text but as a discursive tool for imagining the contours of everyday life, we explore how the global politics of migration manifest within everyday life.

### **The international politics of popular culture**

By focusing on *Coronation Street* we both draw on recent studies of popular culture and global politics and expand the horizon of those studies. Much attention to popular culture in IR remains in the grip of the high politics of war, conflict, violence, and terrorism, or draws on images of the spectacular and the horrific (for example see Der Derian 1990, Power 2007, Dodds 2008, Giroux 2004, Carruthers 2003, Lisle and Pepper 2005, Weber 2006, Bousquet 2006). However, popular culture is perhaps at its most revelatory for IR when used to access everyday life, attending to forms of politics that are foreclosed by the ordering of the field around the sovereign territorial state (Davies 2010). Davies argues that IR theory tends to separate the international from the everyday, making ordinary political actions invisible from the perspective of theories focused on the scale of interactions between nation-states. As everyday life becomes increasingly marked by global imaginaries (Appadurai 1996), this inability to recognise everyday forms of politics becomes an increasingly significant problem for IR, which risks ignoring the political possibilities and problems arising in the ordinary routines of everyday life. For Davies the everyday as dramatised in popular culture offers itself as a theorisation of global politics. The narratives of popular culture present concepts, hypotheses, and hypotheticals for audiences to explore, conceptualize, and critique. As a site of political contestation (Hall 1981), popular culture elicits, invokes, and indeed theorises global politics.

IR's turn to culture complicates the focus on the sovereign state and uncovers new sites of political contestation. Laura Shepherd's *Gender, Violence and Popular Culture* (2013) looks at popular culture as both representational and constitutive of gendered violence, offering new ways

to think about gendered violence in global politics. Moreover, work that examines the global politics of culture (rather than what culture can reveal for global politics) offers techniques that begin to bridge the gap between culture, politics and everyday life (Kaklamanidou 2013, Champagne 2013). Following work such as Anca Pusca's recent article discussing the reality television show *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* (2015) or Priya Dixit's article on aliens and alienness in *Dr Who* (2012), we argue that a cultural approach to the study of global politics must take seriously the type of popular culture that has the broadest appeal, including so-called 'lowbrow' culture forms including tabloids, reality television, chat shows, and soaps, which engage with global politics as part of the ordinary routines of everyday life. Attending to lowbrow popular culture gives access to forms of global politics and global political potential that exists not just in limited circles but that permeates everyday life. Indeed, as Kaklamanidou (2013) suggests in reference to race and television, "it is the small screen that proves more open and attuned to...social reality" (p. 138). We draw on soaps to theorise the everyday as a site in which global (and domestic) politics are made, reproduced and replicated.

### **Agency, borders and bordering in popular culture**

The particular thematic content of the *Coronation Street* storyline we analyse involves migration experienced at the local level. Research in critical border studies (CBS) that has decentred the idea of the border from the edges of sovereign territory is relevant here. As an interdisciplinary research programme, CBS has not been subject to the same spatial limitations of the sovereign state that Davies identifies in IR, instead drawing examples from various spaces where bordering occurs. These include offshore bordering (Walters 2008, Mountz 2011), bordering inside state borders via policing (Stuesse and Coleman 2014), bordering through access to social services (Walters 2009) bordering in cultural spaces (Rumford 2007, 2013; Skey 2010) and bordering in the public sphere through media invocations (Innes 2013). CBS thus investigates the practices that assert and reproduce sovereign power in the form of borders along with the performances that negotiate and attempt to resist that

power, thus constituting borders in different forms and different spaces (Nyers and Rygiel 2012, Squire 2011).

CBS theorises border performativity and resistance that often occurs at the local or individual level (Johnson et al 2011). The on-going nature of border performativity and resistance is difficult to capture: borders are processual, constantly made and remade, and therefore shifting and changing. We begin from the premise that the production of borders relies on 'self' and 'other' identities. Borders are made in reference to an in-group and produce exclusion of an out-group. CBS focuses on how those borders manifest in practice (Ibid). Nevertheless, to understand how different identity groups are constituted in relation to each other often presents a methodological challenge. Borders are not just between territorial states, but also operate between identities and at the level of embodiment through racialised differences, gendered differences and ethnic and cultural visibility (Bhandar 2008, Wilcox 2015). Bordering practices affect identity formations, including those that intersect with each other, such as socio-economic status, age, regional accent or affiliation, gender, ethnicity, religion, and so on. In this way, the bordering practices that sustain, support and splinter identities take place in the ordinary routines of everyday life rather than in direct encounters with state borders. Turning to everyday life, the ordinary, and popular culture in its broadest form resists the impulse "to think of agency in terms of escaping the ordinary rather than a descent into it" (Das 2007: 7). Furthermore, popular culture in the particular form of the soap stages a narrative of how identities relate to each other and how the bordering processes tied to those identities advance and recede in importance in everyday life.

Popular culture allows us to access the various and intersectional experiences that merge around border events or bordering practices. British soaps in particular rely on cultural proximity to their audiences to retain viewership (Castelló 2010, Dunleavy 2005, Straubhaar 1991). For *Coronation Street*, this requires capturing the feel of everyday working-class culture in dramatic if not documentary style. The events might be improbable, but the performance of accent and gesture and the physical settings must resonate with working-class culture. British soaps also include

a pedagogic function. Characters frequently confront moral and ethical dilemmas, which serve both as plot-points and as opportunities for characters to exercise agency. As news and gossip circulates throughout the *Coronation Street* community, characters discuss and assess the actions of other characters, inviting the audience to do the same. Although *Coronation Street* is produced by elites, its pedagogic function is imbricated in its proximity to everyday working-class culture.

The *Coronation Street* community and the show's audience thus debate, assess, and imagine agency within the constraints of everyday working-class culture. We thus examine, through a thematic content analysis of the 2007 storyline featuring Polish factory workers, how *Coronation Street* dramatises the resources for agency available within the ordinary routines of everyday life. We turn now to the tradition of British cultural studies, early iterations of which directly influenced the production of the soap. Later theories demonstrated the political power of popular culture to shape everyday common sense and demonstrated how globalisation allows culture to permeate national borders. Drawing on British cultural studies, we focus on how popular culture both constrains common sense and provides resources for agency in the everyday.

### **The Politics of the popular: British cultural studies and *Coronation Street***

'Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and struggle against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost *in* that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured. It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture - already formed - might be simply "expressed". But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why "popular culture" matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about it.'

—Stuart Hall, 'Notes on Deconstructing "the Popular"', 1981

These are the final four sentences of Stuart Hall's canonical essay 'Notes on Deconstructing the "Popular"'. Hall wrote the essay in 1981, seventeen years after the Richard Hoggart founded the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964 but still in the early years of the Centre's expanding transatlantic influence primarily in departments of English, American Studies, Communication and Media. In many ways, these four sentences capture the career of a movement that would fundamentally reshape the way scholars of the humanities in the Anglo-American

academy approached their work, expanding their object domain and revising the theoretical frameworks and methodological imperatives they brought to those objects. What was so radically new about the Centre was not the emphasis on the study of culture—after all, Matthew Arnold (2003) proposed the study of culture understood as the ‘best which has been thought and said in the world’ in 1867—but the study of *popular* culture, not that which is the best but that which has the broadest appeal. Hall claims popular culture as a privileged site of politics, a site that stages the struggle over power, provides avenues for resistance, and promotes or corrodes the consolidation of hegemony. Indeed, Hall goes so far as to claim that popular culture is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. These were startling claims in 1981, and for anyone familiar with popular culture, they were likely to remain so. How could popular culture possibly be a place to constitute socialism?

One can find the answer by reversing the terms of the question: how could any dominant political force sustain itself without reproducing its ideas on a mass scale through popular culture? As Hall’s reference to the constitution of socialism suggests, he and his colleagues at the Centre were committed Marxists, and they approached political analysis from a distinctly Marxist perspective. However, the Centre’s scholars also routinely railed against ‘vulgar Marxism’ that analyses class only in terms of economic position, and then reads ideology directly from class, assuming that the dominant class sustains its position by disseminating its ideology through mass culture, mystifying the hypnotised masses by deluding them into accepting the dominant ideology. This is what David Morley, in his 1980 study of television, calls the ‘hypodermic needle’ approach to ideology. Such an approach erases agency from consumption and politics from the popular, treating the latter as an uncontested site that reproduces dominant ideologies in a one-to-one fashion: a cultural industry produces, and the mass audience receives, without questioning, contesting, or repurposing the product. This is why Hall is careful to emphasise that popular culture will not simply ‘express’ a preformed socialism; instead, popular culture might be the site of its constitution, or the site of the consolidation of capitalism in the form of, say, Thatcherism. Popular culture can thus be a

site of resistance, but it can also be the site where consent is won, securing what Hall, following Antonio Gramsci (1985), calls 'hegemony.' Hegemony refers to the domination of civil society and culture by a particular class, allowing that class to control the repressive functions of the state. Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) argument that hegemony is produced through the consolidation of dominant discourses into a delimited system of concepts, Hall argued that culture was a primary means of consolidating dominant discourses. Culture therefore shapes the ordinary routines of everyday life, but it also sustains state power. Popular culture is thus a key site of struggle. If popular culture is not corralled into the hegemonic framework, that framework quickly frays.

Although Hall finishes his essay on popular culture with the perhaps surprising claim that beyond its political potential, he doesn't give a damn about popular culture, it is important to recall that Hall was doing battle with those who sought some exterior aesthetic standard to justify their objects of study—some version of the 'best which has been thought and said in the world'. For Hall, the point was not that popular culture was in fact far more interesting than most had noticed—although the Centre's various analyses certainly proved that it was—for that would be to commit to a depoliticised version of cultural studies, one that set about proving that culture was interesting and complex in its own right and thus worthy of the same criticism typically reserved for the products of 'high culture'. This approach would allow humanists to continue extolling the value of culture and political theorists to continue with their analyses of politics while the struggles unfolding in the domain of popular culture go unnoticed and untheorised. This is why the cultural turn in IR holds such potential: scholars of cultural studies have routinely been criticised for simply applying the techniques of the literary critic to popular culture—as Hall put it in a 2007 interview, 'I simply cannot read another cultural studies analysis of Madonna or *The Sopranos*' (quoted in MacCabe 2008, p.29)—and scholars in IR, as so many are now arguing, have routinely missed opportunities to discover the political potential of popular culture (Neumann and Nexon 2006, Grayson et al 2009, Kangas 2009). Rather than examining how *Coronation Street* 'represents' politics, as Hall suggests



cultural studies analyses of Madonna and *The Sopranos* tend to do, our approach focuses on how cultural forms both respond to the forms of agency that saturate everyday life and provide resources for political agency and political contestation. This approach draws on Davies' emphasis on popular culture as a theorisation of everyday life and CBS' emphasis on intersectional identity performances, allowing us to examine popular culture as a shared resource for ordinary agency. Perhaps the IR turn can resuscitate some of the political potential that has been attenuated along with the institutionalisation of cultural studies. IR's turn to culture will have to avoid, then, the mistake of claiming that popular culture simply reflects, expresses, and promotes dominant discourses without considering how popular culture, at particular historical conjunctures, in fact stages and supports political contestation. Popular culture matters because it is a site of consent—where hegemony is secured—but it is also a site of potential change—where hegemony might be rearticulated into something new.

### **Cultural *Corrie***

It may seem that we have strayed far from *Coronation Street* with this brief review of the Centre's version of cultural studies, but, apart from the fact that IR will benefit from engaging with the history of cultural studies approaches, this history of cultural studies is in some sense the history of *Coronation Street* itself. The show was conceived as part of a plan to rearticulate hegemonic notions of Britishness. It first aired on Independent Television (ITV) in 1960, a time when the BBC was still the bastion of Received Pronunciation most commonly heard in the middle-class environs of the Home Counties rather than the industrial north. Where the BBC audience was middle aged and middle class, the ITV audience was more working class and northern (Buckingham 1996, p.577). *Coronation Street* is produced by Granada Television, a Lancashire-based firm that fit well into ITV's preference for 'regional flavour' in its programming (Paterson 1981, p.56). Through *Coronation Street*, ITV contested the hegemonic vision of Britishness promoted by the BBC, which was

articulated to the state in a concrete way through the license fee, which supports its operations and which it is legally sanctioned to collect from anyone who uses a television in Britain.

This is not to say that *Coronation Street* and ITV were ever in the business of liberating the working classes—they were in the business of attracting their attention and thus raising their ratings—but the desire on the part of the show's creators to represent working-class and Northern life was earnest, and one should not underestimate the impact of broadcasting the 'interactions of everyday life as realised in common-sense speech and philosophy' of working-class Northerners to a national audience (Dyer 1981, p.4). Indeed, the show's creators were directly influenced by the early texts of Cultural Studies. The show first aired only three years after the publication of Richard Hoggart's (1998) *The Uses of Literacy*, an autoethnographic account of working-class life in the North that sought to capture the everyday, 'air-that-you-breathe' feeling of culture. Along with Raymond Williams' (1957) *Culture and Society*, and EP Thompson's (1991) *The Making of the English Working Class*, Hoggart's book is one of the founding texts of Cultural Studies. It was also a best-seller in England, and its influence particularly on the early years of *Coronation Street* is unmistakable (Dyer et al 1981). The show adopts many of the themes that Hoggart identifies as salient in working-class culture, including the emphasis on the strength of women, the ambivalent class position of pub landlords and others hovering at the boundaries of the petit-bourgeois ('aspirational Britain', David Cameron might say), and, clearly represented in the figure of Ken Barlow, the 'scholarship boy', a figure from Hoggart's text who finds himself (and it was certainly a he for Hoggart) alienated from his own culture (Dyer 1981, p.4).

The most important connection between early Cultural Studies texts like Hoggart's and the show was its subject matter. *Coronation Street* attempts to be culturally proximate to its viewers, displaying working-class life in a way that will be recognisable to those who live it. To explore the connection between media consumption, agency, and everyday experience, many scholars in the 1980s turned to reception studies, which relied on ethnography to explore how consumers responded to and negotiated media in their everyday lives. Influential studies by David Morley

(1980) of *Nationwide*, Ien Ang (1985) of the American soap *Dallas*, and Janice Radway (1991) of feminine middlebrow literary culture all relied heavily on in-depth interviews with audience members. Radway (2008) argues that reception studies valuably revealed that “‘culture’ could not be studied in isolation”, but also that ‘such studies offered readings of the readings of texts by textualising what readers said about texts and by providing second-order interpretations of those readings’ (p.335, p.334). Reception studies thus needs to avoid treating the audience as yet another text to be interpreted. Although we are not conducting a reception study, we share with reception studies an interest in the resources cultural forms supply for everyday agency. Rather than analysing cultural forms as texts with stable meanings, we examine them as discourses that accrue significance only in circulation, reception, and intersection with other discourses.

In our analysis, we examine popular culture as a contingent aspect of increasingly global social and political formations. Rather than treating the show as a stable set of representations to be decoded, we seek to situate *Coronation Street* within its sociopolitical and cultural milieu in order to examine the resources it provides for ordinary forms of agency. Although *Coronation Street* was conceived as a relatively parochial show, broadcast to a national audience but focused specifically on life in the North, the show is increasingly global in its circulation. It is broadcast across Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and in some U.S. markets. The satellite channel ITV Choice broadcasts the show daily from Monday to Friday in India, Thailand, Taiwan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Malta, and Korea. The world is watching the Manchester of *Coronation Street*, and the forces of globalisation have, in turn, reshaped the imagined world of *Coronation Street*. In this sense, the show’s historical arc once again parallels that of British cultural studies, which was initially focused primarily on the British working class and the British state, but later shifted to theorise culture as a central feature of globalisation. Paul Gilroy (1993) demonstrated how global circulation facilitates transnational, hybrid cultures, sharing with Appadurai (1996) an interest in how globalisation makes “the imagination...an organised field of social practices” and a site of political agency (p. 31). This

imagination is increasingly global. Transnational movements of people, capital, and media content have submitted even the most resolutely parochial locations into the circuits of globalisation.

The show provides unique insight into the ways in which globalisation strains local experience and (trans)national imaginaries. Indeed, part of the value of soaps is that the very structure of the show, which relies on cultural proximity, invites the audience to consider this broader context. Storylines are routinely plucked from the headlines, including not only the migration storyline under discussion here but the 2014 euthanasia storyline in *Coronation Street*, the HIV/AIDS storyline in early-2000s *EastEnders*, and a variety of domestic violence storylines in *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, and *Brookside*.

The structure of soap operas invites audiences to consider these issues, in part through judgment of the characters. Soap operas are notorious for extending storylines over commercial breaks and across episodes. On a practical level, this technique prevents excluding audience members who miss an episode or two. It also establishes thick dramatic irony. Scenes last only a few minutes and include only a small portion of the cast, giving the audience a sense of omniscience about life on *Coronation Street* without sacrificing dramatic tension, as each character might react unpredictably once he or she discovers the information the audience already knows. The routine narrative interruptions thus support the pedagogic function of the show. For example, in a recent *Coronation Street* plotline, Maddie Heath is injured in an explosion in one episode, shown lying in a hospital bed in another, and dies in yet another episode, but her death continues to resonate as community members hear the news and confront characters with accusations of contributing to her death. In each of these confrontations, the audience—armed with more knowledge than any one character about the twists and turns of the plot—is in a privileged position not only to assess the characters but to assess the very structure of the programme. Maddie Heath's death, for example, generated a flurry of reporting, as *Metro*, the *Manchester Evening News*, *Express*, the *Mirror*, and the *Guardian* covered the 'news' of the fire. Much of the coverage focused on audience reactions, with many quotes drawn from Twitter. Tabloids have regular spreads covering the soaps, and they in

turn adopt the “melodramatic style of soap operas” in their reportage (Washbourne 2010, p. 72).

Beyond the tabloids, there is the legion of *Coronation Street* blogs and user-generated archiving of the show's history on sites such as Corriepedia. *Coronation Street*, in short, is no ‘hypodermic needle’ injecting a particular vision of working-class life into the ideological veins of the British public; it is an everyday site of contestation over characters and culture, plotlines and politics.

### **Polish workers in Wetherfield**

In 10 episodes in April of 2007, *Coronation Street* told the story of the arrival of Polish workers to a Manchester garment factory. Most of the employees are welcoming, but Janice Battersby vociferously denounces them as ‘job thieves from the nightshift, after our wages’. Janice draws her criticism straight from the popular press, which was alive with discussion of migration to the UK from the 2004 expansion of the European Union at the time of the storyline's airing. Between May 2004 and June 2006, the government approved 427,095 work applications, including 264,560 from Polish workers (BBC, August 22 2006). Indeed, the population of Polish people living in the UK increased from 94,000 in 2004 to 411,000 by 2007 (Office for National Statistics 2015). As the *Express* put it, ‘They have come here in their thousands and now Polish workers will walk the cobbled streets of Britain's most popular TV show’ (Broster, 2007). Janice wins an unlikely ally in her confrontation of the Polish workers in Joanne Jackson, a young black woman who, as her colleagues say, is surprisingly comfortable with Janice's bigotry. As the tension increases in the factory, Joanne—the only ostensibly English character to ally with Janice against the Polish workers—breaks down in tears and confides to a co-worker that she had been acting negatively towards the Polish workers because she herself was ‘illegal’ – her aunt brought her to the UK from Liberia following the death of both her parents when she was eight years old. She had never acquired official documents. After an argument at the pub, Janice calls immigration, who raid the factory, discover Joanne's lack of status, and arrest her, leaving the Polish workers—who had obtained legal status—to continue their work.

A thematic content analysis of the episodes comprising this storyline revealed four dominant themes, two of which correspond to intersectional identities that mitigate the separation of local and migrant experiences, which we categorise as 'strong women' and 'race.' The other two focus on resources for agency in everyday life, which we categorise as 'fear' and 'political agency.' Rather than arguing for a final reading of the show, we explore the pedagogic function of the narrative in order to explore how a story "encoded" by writers and producers might be "decoded" by an audience facing the forces of globalisation from a similar class position to the on-screen characters (Hall 1993).

### *Strong women*

Strong women are a tradition of *Coronation Street* and indicative of its cultural proximity to working-class life. This storyline features women almost exclusively, with the exception of gay Sean Tulley and the occasional intervention of the factory's day manager. Janice continuously references national identity to attempt to build solidarity amongst the workers at the exclusion of the Polish women; however, she fails to do so. Instead, the Polish women are constructed through various interactions as sharing class and character identity traits with their local counterparts.

The Polish women are not portrayed as meek and passive workers in the face of Janice's bullying. Wiki asserts their right to be there, responding directly to Janice's bullying and refusing to be cowed. That the characteristics of strong northern women are mirrored in the Polish characters creates proximity between the Polish and the local workers. The proximity and similarity between the immigrant workers locals is reiterated when Wiki reminds Janice that her boyfriend and daughter work abroad, and when she pointedly buys Janice a pint of bitter in the pub, prompting the barmaid to tell Janice, 'I think she's trying to tell you something'. These actions construct the Polish women as equals with the local characters. As Wiki repeatedly insists to Janice, they do not want to

take the locals' jobs; like the locals, they are simply performing agency and making do in a similar everyday context. The script in this case displays the pedagogic function of the soap opera: immigrants and citizens have complex identities that often intersect along class lines. The needs of everyday life generate similarly constrained circumstances, and classed identities can permit empathy and understanding in these circumstances. Facets of working-class female identity transcend state borders in these characters, foregrounding commonalities between migrants and locals.

### *Race*

Race is produced in the storyline as an identity that intersects with local and national identities. Racial identities are referenced both explicitly and implicitly throughout the story. For example, Joanne defends Janice's position, saying, 'and don't call it racism, because, hello!' while pointing to herself. Kelly Crabtree, another black worker, challenges Joanne. Kelley's racial identity allows her to question Joanne on the theme of race, something that the other (white) workers do not do. Thus shared black identity is established as separate from white identities. Race is explicitly referenced again when the immigration officers call the workers in to interview. When Joanne is called the other workers protest—Janice, once again, most vociferously—claiming that Joanne is summoned only because she's black. This articulation of state-based racism in immigration practice draws attention to racialised bordering as it is experienced in the everyday and as it perceived and understood in the everyday. The script explicitly recognises Joanne's summons as a form of racism.

The intersection of racial identities with national and local identities is particularly revelatory in this storyline, allowing for a theorisation of intersectional identities as they operate in everyday life. Ultimately Joanne is exposed as the undocumented migrant, one of only two black workers in the factory. Joanne was not constructed as a character 'of convenience,' having been in the soap since January 2005, yet the decision to mark her as an illegal immigrant reproduces to some degree the notion that Britishness and blackness are not readily articulated. When Hayley questions Joanne

about bullying the Polish workers she appeals to her empathy by asserting that Joanne's parents or grandparents must have done the same thing – presumably referring to the postcolonial migration of the 1960s and 1970s while disregarding the history of black migration to the UK from as early as the mid-eighteenth century. The assumption at the level of the character, at the level of the writers and reflecting the expectations of viewers is that Joanne is less British and has more in common with the Polish workers than the other workers. British identity, racial identity and immigrant identity intersect at this moment, where Joanne experiences Britishness but is read as an immigrant because of her race.

When immigration officials escort Joanne away from the factory, the other workers protest loudly, with Janice shouting 'she's more of a Manc than you are' to the police officer and invoking the importance of local identity, articulating it as separate from national identity: Joanne might not be a citizen, but she is a 'Manc', she has a Mancunian accent and has grown up within the culture of the working-class North. Yet Janice and her colleagues have to articulate the connection, giving vocal expression to Joanne's Mancunian identity and joining blackness up with Britishness. The factory workers argue that Joanne's everyday performance of (Mancunian) identity outstrips any state-based or legal identity. The scene dramatises a confrontation with the state's power to remove immigrants and to police its borders (even intangible internal borders). The characters assert agency here by making identity-claims on everyday life. Identity is experienced in a locality rather than made by a state-sanctioned leave to remain.

### *Fear*

Janice's fear for her job is the driving force of this storyline, tapping into the fear of economic insecurity that is constitutive of anti-immigrant attitudes in working-class areas and consequent bordering processes (Skey 2010). Janice makes this fear overwhelmingly explicitly by constantly using language like 'job thieves'; telling her colleagues 'don't come mithering me when you're all out of a job', and 'we could lose ours jobs'; and responding to Wiki asking 'what have I ever done?' with



'you've come here and stolen our jobs, we never asked you to come'. Janice bullies the Polish women, mocking them, calling them 'suck-ups' and even throwing things at them. The pedagogic function of the soap opera format is evident in these scenes: Janice perceives the Polish workers as a threat, and therefore finds herself with a moral dilemma requiring her to take action to secure her work, the source of her day-to-day stability. She attempts to galvanise support for her position by leveraging her social network with gossip, and she supplements this strategy with direct displays of aggression against the Polish women. Janice thus draws on the resources for agency available in her everyday life. The other characters mostly admonish Janice, inviting the audience to weigh Janice's actions in light of the critical response from her co-workers, who—unlike Janice—seem to recognise that the Polish women are seeking to make do from a similarly constrained economic position. Janice's drunken decision to call immigration brings state power to bear directly on her friend Joanne, who turns out to have no legal status. Although this is the plotline's most direct staging of sovereign state power, the entire plotline dramatises how a nation-state's participation in a global labour market resonates in everyday life. Like her co-workers at the factory—both Polish and British—Janice faces uncertain economic terrain in which local ties sometimes fray under global forces. Indeed, Wiki highlights, Janice also has family living and working abroad. The plotline, then, dramatises how the economic forces of globalisation shape and constrain everyday life, inserting possibilities for political action into ordinary routines of work and social life.

Joanne's story further dramatises the connection between insecurity, uncertainty, and anti-immigrant attitudes. When Joanne joins Janice's bullying, Hayley, Sally and Kelley all question her, claiming that she is acting out of character. Viewers learn via Hayley that Joanne fears the Polish workers will draw attention to the factory and expose her lack of immigration status. Thus her hostility stems from her fears about her security as a British factory worker. The pedagogic function is once again clear: Joanne confronts a perceived threat to her day-to-day stability, so she joins Janice in leveraging her social network against the threat. She receives more sympathy from other characters—and possibly from viewers—than Janice does, but the show commits to the pedagogic

function by dramatising multiple responses to Joanne's actions. When Hayley asks her husband Roy's advice about extricating Joanne from immigration detention he, in typically pedantic tone, emphasises that Joanne broke the law, adding, 'surely even you can see that'. Thus Joanne is not presented as pure victim, and Janice—who later confesses to calling immigration and takes action to help her friend—is not an unredeemable reactionary.

Despite the apparent simplicity of the plots, the show stages everyday life as a complex constellation of forces, including those of globalisation and migration. Soaps thus foreground the complexity of navigating everyday life without forcing simplistic evaluative conclusions about any action or event. In this storyline, 'Mancs' and migrants engage in a mutual performance of everyday life that negotiates bordering practices.

#### *Politics and political agency*

The most overt discussion of political agency occurs in a single scene: Sally, Hayley, Sean, and Janice share a table at the Rovers Return, where they lament the fate of Joanne, who remains in custody. Although the immigration raid is a dramatic scene, what is key to *Coronation Street* is not so much the intensity of that scene as how characters live on after it, rebuilding an ordinary sense of stability after the disruption. They discuss what they might do to assist their friend. Janice, in her typically emphatic tone, insists that they ought to 'take action' and call their M.P. in order to 'make a stink' and 'start some campaign like.' Sally, Hayley, and Sean are less convinced; Hayley suggests, 'we could send her a care package'. Sally elaborates Hayley's idea, saying, 'maybe one of those little aromatherapy pillows with lavender in it to soothe her nerves'. Sally, Hayley, and Sean nod in agreement, but Janice is unconvinced: 'Oh, right yeah, some poncy pillowcase stinking of some old biddy's perfume—I mean that's really gonna sort her out isn't it'. They never decide on either solution, but the significance of the scene is to sketch competing responses to Joanne's detainment: on the one hand, a politics of care that seeks to restore her sense of security by providing her the

comforts of everyday life; on the other hand, a traditional politics of direct action aimed at mobilising recognised institutions, in this case parliament.

These two responses attempt to reconcile Joanne's contradictory position as an insider and a migrant either by providing domestic comforts or actually returning her home. Both responses seek to restore her security and shield her from the global circuits of mobility she negotiated as a child and that have invaded the factory. In an important analysis of *Coronation Street*, Richard Paterson claims, 'The pre-existing pressure of the serial concept toward an ideology of "family and community" life in a northern street...cannot easily be changed to deal, for example, with the central social and economic contradictions of capital and labour in the workplace' (Paterson et al 64). Perhaps this claim held true in the early decades of *Coronation Street*, when the soap focused primarily on the domestic 'sphere of women's "intimate oppression"' (Brundson 1981), but the claim that *Coronation Street* cannot stage the central economic and social conditions of capital is no longer tenable, if indeed it ever was. These contradictions resonate, on the one hand, in the politics of care Sally, Hayley, and Sean adumbrate, which emanates from coping mechanisms developed in the sphere of 'intimate oppression' as a response to that oppression, and, on the other hand, in Janice's more traditionally political response aimed at lobbying institutionalised political forces. Despite their differences, both of these responses engage directly with 'the central social and economic contradictions of capital and labour in the workplace': in a scene of neoliberal global mobility, the factory workers find themselves at once stuck in place on *Coronation Street* with only a tenuous grip on their jobs *and* threatened by the manifestation of those forces of mobility—in the form of the Polish workers—in the very site where they find themselves stuck (on getting stuck, see Ahmed 2004).

Yet those manifestations of mobility are not so mobile after all—Wiki, Kasia, and Judy are bound to their chairs in the factory, working night and day, and eventually, in Kasia's case, dying on the factory floor in a workplace accident. Moreover, Janice the reactionary in fact relies on the same contradictory form of mobility as the Polish workers through her boyfriend and daughter, both of

whom work abroad. And Joanne is the invisible migrant, 'more of a Manc' than most yet vulnerable to the coercive force of the UK state because of her origins amid violence in the Liberian civil war. The contradictions, in short, abound. This storyline thus stages the tenuous balance between the benefits of globalisation and the threat it poses to traditional structures, the strained relations between domesticity and labour, the rise of mobility along with the resurgence of fixity, the strong identity of the 'Manc' and the ambivalent one of the migrant. These contradictions flow precisely from the 'sphere of "intimate oppression"', a sphere that is not confined to the domestic but instead permeates leisure time, work life, love life, and friendship—the contradictions, in short, saturate the sphere of everyday life. Due to the structure of the soap opera, these contradictions never foreclose into a final message, sealing the cultural object within a closed discursive field. Instead, *Coronation Street* dramatises—and, as Davies suggests, theorises—these contradictions, but it also provides resources for its viewers in Britain, India, South Korea and elsewhere to construct imaginaries capable of reckoning with the infusion of globalisation into the most ordinary routines (Appadurai 1996). As Hall argues, popular culture is a site of political contestation because it makes it possible to reimagine and rearticulate the forms of common sense—what Appadurai (ibid) would call the "imaginaries"—that structure and sustain hegemonic political formations. Soap operas in general and *Coronation Street* in particular negotiate culture as a relation, a site of political contestation, and a scene where hegemonic notions of 'common sense'—about what defines the political and who or what belongs in Manchester, on the factory floor, or at the Rovers Return—are tested, consolidated, and, indeed, resisted.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated that popular culture stages and supplies resources for agency in everyday life, which in turn intersects with multiple identities and informs global politics. The soap remains culturally proximate, reproducing and producing politics - local and global. Agency emerges

in this everyday negotiation of politics, rather than in heroic or exceptional confrontations with state power.

Attending to *Coronation Street* as a site of international politics can reiterate the everydayness of politics and agency by offering a grasp on how global politics permeate the domestic, the private, and the everyday. *Coronation Street* also offers insight into the ways in which global politics, migrant experiences, and local experiences intersect, ultimately producing and considering bordering processes from both sides of the border and from a multiplicity of intersectional identities. When is broadcast in homes around the world, the global politics of the narratives enter the lived domestic and private space. The imagined world of *Coronation Street* thus supplies resources for reimagining the everyday spaces the show's viewers occupy. There is no clear line of separation amongst storylines and the narratives are never decisively and satisfactorily finite. As the fictional lives of the characters on *Coronation Street* unfold, the soap is a space where contesting views and perspectives – politics – are aired, inviting the audience into on-going political contestation.

### **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the Cultural Politics, Communication and Media research group at the University of East Anglia for their insightful comments on an early draft of this article. We are also grateful to Michael Strange, Vicki Squire and Anna Lundberg for coordinating the panels at the British International Studies Association conference, for their comments on earlier drafts of the article, and for creating such an engaging environment for the development of this research.

### **About the Authors**

Alexandria Innes <a.innes@uea.ac.uk> is a lecturer in International Relations at the University of East Anglia. She has published variously in migration studies, border studies and critical security studies. She is the author of *Migration, Citizenship and the Challenge for Security* (Palgrave 2015). Robert Topinka <r.topinka@sussex.ac.uk> is a lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex. He has published a variety of articles addressing themes of race, transnationalism, cities, cultural studies and media.

## References

- Ahmed, Sara. (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. London: Routledge.
- Ang, Ien. (1985) *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Appadurai, Arjun. (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Arnold, Matthew. (2003) *Culture and Anarchy*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4212>.
- BBC (2006) *Nearly 600,000' new EU migrants*, 22 August 2006, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/5273356.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5273356.stm) Last accessed 9 June 2015
- Berlant, Lauren. (2011) *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bhandar, Davina. (2008) "Resistance, Detainment, Asylum: The Onto-Political Limits of Border Crossing in North America." In *War, Citizenship, Territory*, edited by Deborah Cowen and Emily Gilbert. London: Routledge.
- Bousquet, Antoine. (2006) "Time Zero: Hiroshima, September 11 and Apocalyptic Revelations in Historical Consciousness." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 34 (3): 739–64.
- Broster, Paul (2007) 'Now Poles Arrive in Coronation Street' *The Express* 1 March 2007, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2033/Now-Poles-arrive-in-Coronation-Street> Last accessed 9 June 2015
- Buckingham, David. (1996) "EastEnders: Creating the Audience." In Marris, Paul and Sue Thornham, eds. *Media Studies: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). 574-583.
- Carruthers, S. (2003) "Bringing It All Back Home: Hollywood Returns to War." *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 14: 167–82.
- Castello, E. (2010) "Dramatizing Proximity: Cultural and Social Discourses in Soap Operas from Production to Reception." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 13 (2): 207–23.
- Champagne, John. (2013) *Aesthetic Modernism and Masculinity in Fascist Italy*. London: Routledge.
- Das, Veena. (2007) *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Davies, Matt. (2010) "'You Can't Charge Innocent People for Saving Their Lives!' Work in Buffy the Vampire Slayer." *International Political Sociology* 4 (2): 178–95.
- Der Derian, James. (1990) "The (S)pace of International Relations: Simulation, Surveillance, and Speed." *International Studies Quarterly* 34 (3): 295–310.
- Dixit, Priya. (2012) "Relating to Difference: Aliens and Alienness in Doctor Who and International Relations." *International Studies Perspectives* 13 (3): 289–306.
- Dodds, Klaus. (2008) "Screening Terror: Hollywood, the United States and the Construction of Danger." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1 (2): 227–43.
- Dunleavy, T. (2005) "Coronation Street, Neighbours, Shortlands Street: Localness and Universality in the Primetime Soap." *Television and New Media* 6 (4): 370–82.
- Dyer, Richard. (1981) "Introduction." In Dyer, Richard, Christine Geraghty, Marion Jordan, Terry Lovell, Richard Paterson, and John Stewart, eds. *Coronation Street*. London: The British Film Institute. 1-9.
- Giroux, Henry. (2004) "War on Terror: The Militarizing of Public Space and Culture in the United States." *Third Text* 18 (4): 211–21.
- Gramsci, Antonio. (1985) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* [New York: International Publishers, c. 1971, 1985].

- Grayson, Kyle, Matt Davies, and Simon Philpott. (2009) "Pop Goes IR? Research the Popular-Culture-World Politics Continuum." *Politics* 29 (3): 155–63.
- Hall, Stuart. (1993) "Encoding, Decoding," in S. During (ed.) *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London: Routledge), 90-98.
- Hall, Stuart. (1981) "Notes on Deconstructing "the popular,"" in R. Samuel (ed.) *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge), 227-40.
- Hall, Stuart. (1980) "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, edited by Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 16-60
- Hoggart, Richard. (1998) *The Uses of Literacy*. London: Transaction Publishers.
- Innes, Alexandria J. (2013) "International Migration as Criminal Behaviour: Shifting Responsibility to the Migrant in Mexico-US Border Crossings." *Global Society* 27 (2): 237–60.
- Johnson, Corey, Reece Jones, Anssi Paasi, Louise Amoore, Alison Mountz, Mark Salter, and Chris Rumford. (2011) "Interventions on Rethinking 'the Border' in Border Studies." *Political Geography* 30: 61–69.
- Kaklamanidou, Betty. 2013. *Genre, Gender and the Effects of Neoliberalism: The New Millennium Hollywood Rom Com*. London: Routledge.
- Kangas, Anni. (2009) "From Interfaces to Interpretants." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 38 (2): 317–43.
- Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.
- Lisle, D, and A Pepper. (2005) "The New Face of Global Politics: Black Hawk Down and the Politics of MacCabe, Colin. (2008) "An Interview with Stuart Hall, December 2007." *Critical Quarterly* 50 (1-2): 12-42.
- Meta-Sovereignty." *Cultural Politics* 1: 165–92.
- Morley, David and Charlotte Brundson. (1980) *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding* (London: British Film Institute)
- Mountz, Alison. (2011) "The Enforcement Archipelago: Detention, Haunting and Asylum on Islands." *Political Geography* 20: 118–28.
- Neumann, Iver B, and Daniel H Nexon. (2006) *Harry Potter and International Relations*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Nyers, Peter, and Kim Rygiel. (2012) *Citizenship, Migrant Activism, and the Politics of Movement*. London: Routledge.
- Office of National Statistics (2015) *Population Country of Birth and Nationality*.
- Paterson, Richard. (1981) "The Production Context of *Coronation Street*." In Dyer, Richard, Christine Geraghty, Marion Jordan, Terry Lovell, Richard Paterson, and John Stewart, eds. *Coronation Street*. (London: The British Film Institute) 53-67.
- Power, Marcus. (2007) "Digitized Virtuosity: Video War Games and Post 9/11 Cyber-Deterrence." *Security Dialogue* 38 (2): 271–88.
- Pusca, Anca. (2015) "Representing Romani Gypsies and Travelers: Performing Identity from Early Photography to Reality Television." *International Studies Perspectives* Online First. doi:10.1111/insp.12052.
- Radway, Janice. (1991) *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*. 2nd edition. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

- . (2008) "What's the Matter with Reception Study: Some Thoughts on the Disciplinary Origins, Conceptual Constraints, and Persistent Viability of a Paradigm." In *New Directions in American Reception Study*, 327–51. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rumford, Chris. (2007) "Does Europe Have Cosmopolitan Borders?" *Globalisations* 4 (3): 327–39.
- . 2013. *The Globalisation of Strangeness*. London: Palgrave.
- Shepherd, Laura. (2013) *Gender, Violence and Popular Culture: Telling Stories*. London: Routledge.
- Skey, Michael. (2010) "'A Sense of Where You Belong in the World': National Belonging, Ontological Security and the Status of the Ethnic Majority in England." *Nations and Nationalism* 16 (4): 715–33.
- Squire, Vicki. (2011) *The Contested Politics of Mobility*. London: Routledge.
- Straubhaar, J. (1991) "Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8 (1): 39–59.
- Stuesse, Angela, and Mathew Coleman. (2014) "Automobility, Immobility, Altermobility: Surviving and Resisting the Intensification of Immigrant Policing." *City and Society* 26 (1): 51–72.  
doi:10.1111/ciso.12034.
- Thompson, E. P. (1991) *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Penguin.
- Walters, William. (2008) "Bordering the Sea: Shipping Industries and the Policing of Stowaways." *Borderlands E-Journal* 7 (3): 1–25.
- . (2009) "Secure Borders, Safe Haven, Domopolitics." In *Securitizations of Citizenship*, edited by Peter Nyers. London: Routledge.
- Washbourne, Neil. (2010) *Mediating Politics: Newspapers, Radio, Television and the Internet*. New York: Open University Press.
- Weber, Cynthia. (2006) *Imagining America At War: Morality, Politics and Film*. London: Routledge.
- Williams, Raymond. (1983) *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press.