

Oral History and Collective Memory: Documenting Refugee Voices and the Challenges of Archival Representation

Ustna zgodovina in kolektiven spomin: dokumentiranje glasov beguncev in izzivi predstavitve arhivov

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Abstract:

This paper will explore the concept of preserving refugee rights in the records that we keep, and will explore how we have undertaken civic engagement and outreach work with refugees and asylum seekers in London and beyond to explore ways of documenting their stories through the use of bottom-up oral history methodologies and the use of objectives and textiles as a means of preserving collective memories and a new modes of representation beyond the traditional written word. It will also consider the role of ethics and the role of archives in documenting under-represented communities.

The Refugee Council Archive at UEL is a growing collection of archival materials documenting the refugee experience. This paper will reflect on our work exploring the very nature of what we mean by the concept of an "archive," and explore the challenges of bottom-up methodological approaches for helping to preserve the collective memory of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in way that enables their voices to be heard in a positive way and is documentation along the best methodology to achieve this.

Keywords: Refugees, collective memory, cultural heritage, oral history, representation.

Izveček:

Avtor v svojem prispevku raziskuje koncept ohranjanja pravic beguncev v evidencah, ki jih hranimo, ter kako so se v Londonu in širše angažirali, da se ozavešča javnost o delu z begunci in prosilci za azil. Prav tako raziskuje načine dokumentiranja njihovih zgodb po metodologiji ustne zgodovine od spodaj navzgor - in uporabo ciljev in tekstilij kot sredstva za ohranjanje kolektivnega spomina in novih načinov predstavitve netradicionalne pisane besede. Prispevek preučuje vlogo etike in vlogo arhivov pri dokumentiranju premalo zastopanih skupnosti.

Arhiv Sveta beguncev pri UEL je vse večja zbirka arhivskega gradiva, ki dokumentira izkušnje beguncev. V prispevku avtor raziskuje naravo tega, kar se razume pod pojmom "arhiv", kot tudi izzive metodoloških pristopov od spodaj navzgor za pomoč pri ohranjanju kolektivnega spomina beguncev, migrantov in prosilcev za azil, kar omogoča, da se njihovi lasovi slišijo na pozitiven način ter ali je dokumentiranje tega najboljši način za doseg tega?

Ključne besede: begunci, kolektivni spomin, kulturna dediščina, ustna zgodovina, zastopanje

Biography:

[Paul V. Dudman](#) is the Archivist at the [University of East London](#) responsible for the Refugee Council Archive and related migration and refugee related collections. Paul has an active interest in research and practice in how archives can be used to help document, preserve and make accessible narratives of the refugee and migrant experience. Paul is actively involved in civic engagement and outreach project including the [OLive \(Online Learning Initiative\)](#) course for refugees and asylum seekers at UEL; managing the [Living Refugee Archive](#) online portal; and on how archives can be supportive to documenting local and community histories in East London. Paul is the Lead Convenor of the [Oral History Society Migration Special Interest Group](#) and Co-Convenor of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) [Working Group on Archiving and Documenting the History of Forced Migration and Refugees](#).

Conference Theme:

b) resonances of social changes in archival theory and practice (digitisation, blockchain, artificial intelligence).

Media representation and political rhetoric on refugee and migration debates are key issues for discussion and debate within Europe. Rarely is this discussion neutral or un-biased and negative representations of the refugee are an increasingly familiar part of political and media coverage across borders. How the most recent “refugee crisis” is documented and persevered for posterity within our archival collections will reflect on how society responds to issues of nationalism; refugees; immigration and questions of belonging and collective memory. This paper will reflect upon the author’s sixteen years’ experience of work working with archival collections focused on preserving documentation on the refugee and migration experience. It will explore the challenges of documenting, and making accessible, the genuine voices of the refugee and migration experience and of how archives can ethically approach issues of representation in relation to under-documented communities.

The University of East London (UEL) has been home to the Refugee Council Archive and a growing collection of archival materials documenting the refugee experience. What began as the need to preserve; catalogue and make accessible the archives of the Refugee Council, one of the largest charities dealing with refugee integration in the UK, over time became a more in-depth piece of work exploring the very nature of what we mean by the concept of an “archive.” How do we preserve the collective memory of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in way that enables their voices to be heard in a positive way and is documentation along the best methodology to achieve this? This paper will explore the concept of preserving refugee rights in the records that we keep, and will explore how we have undertaken civic engagement and outreach work with refugees and asylum seekers in London and beyond to explore ways of documenting their stories through the use of bottom-up oral history methodologies and the use of objectives and textiles as a means of preserving collective memories and new modes of representation beyond the traditional written word. It will also consider the role of ethics and the role of archives in documenting under-represented communities.

The Refugee Council Archive at UEL is a growing collection of archival materials documenting the refugee experience. The archive consists of a series of fonds documenting the work of the Refugee Council as a working charity including traditional archival documentary evidence in the form of correspondence, minutes of minutes, financial records,

publicity and fundraising materials, and related records documenting the running of the organisation. The Refugee Council Archive also includes a much larger special collection of materials collected and collated by the Refugee Council during the course of its work. This includes materials organised by region, country and theme including research and NGO reports, press cuttings, community-based magazines and publications, multimedia and audio-visual resources including DVD's and video cassettes, conference reports and presentations, as well as flyers and activist materials. The collection alone now represents one of the largest archival collections on the theme of the refugee experience within the UK. Over the sixteen years it has been located at the University of East London, we have also added new materials to the collection, from academic and NGO reports to audio-visual resources and the outputs from student projects, (UEL hosts postgraduate courses in Refugee Studies; and Conflict, Migration and Human Security as well as undergraduate courses in International Development). We have also had the opportunity to receive new deposited archival collections from other organisations working in the refugee field, including the Council for At-Risk Academics and the Information Centre for Asylum and Refugees. In addition, the UEL Archives hosts archival collections relating to the British Olympic Association; the Hackney Empire Theatre; and a growing collection of archives relating to the history of East London, where the University is situated.

During the academic year 2015-2016, the UEL Archives began a series of collaborative civic engagement and outreach projects funded by a newly established Civic Engagement Fund at the University. From 2015 through to the present, we have undertaken projects across all our archival collections with the aim of engaging with our local communities and developing new partnerships. The focus of this paper will be on the work we have undertaken in relation to our refugee and migration holdings, but to help situate these within the context of our wider civic engagement work, we have also undertaken projects developing participatory theatre performances based on narratives found in our collections with second year undergraduate theatre studies students. An ongoing local community history project entitled "Tate Lives," which began as a project to document the now derelict Tate Institute building, initially constructed by Sir Henry Tate in 1887 as a sports and social club for workers as his sugar refining factory in Silvertown,, and part of the Royal Docks area of East London where are UEL Docklands Campus is situated, but soon enlarged to cover the wider community history and heritage of an area of East London witnessing a significant period of regeneration and change. In a similar fashion, we have also recently been awarded partnership funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund in the UK, to work with colleagues from London Stadium Learning, a community-based education provider, working out of the former Olympic Stadium in Stratford and now home to West Ham Football Club, on a one year project to document the inter-generational legacies of the London Olympic Games in 2012 and the two preceding London Olympics held in 1948 and 1908 respectively. We have also worked on a project supporting colleagues in our School of Psychology on a project to establish a [Refugee Health and Wellbeing Portal](#) for both mental health practitioners and refugees and asylum seekers based in the UK.

All our civic engagement projects to date have involved intrinsic ethical and managerial issues in relation to how these relate to traditional notions of what is meant by an "archive" and in how we document and preserve the outputs from the projects. One of the aims of this paper will be to reflect on the ethical considerations of undertaking civic engagement and

outreach projects with vulnerable communities in the form of refugees and asylum seekers and the challenges of attempting to preserve and document refugee and forced migration testimonies using a bottom-up oral history methodology (Hashem and Dudman, 2016). Traditionally archival collections, both public and private, are historically significant as evidence for documenting the individual and community histories over a period time, acting as “keepers of memories both collective and individual.” (Rupčić, 2018, p. 218). Archives are often the backbone on which historical narratives are developed and societies’ understanding of their shared pasts are constructed, helping to conceptualise community understandings around notions of belonging and otherness and the formation of both communal and individual identities. Who we are, where we come from, where we belong, which community/ies do we associate with, are all intrinsically linked to a sense of history of who we – a sense of ownership and belonging to a certain cultural heritage. Media and official discourses can often look to promote discourses based on a particular telling or retelling of history to help support a particular interpretation of current events, or to appeal to a particular community or section of the electorate. Attempts at re-interpreting historical narratives to support contemporary narrative constructions is not uncommon, the German Occupation Memorial in Budapest, constructed under the cover of darkness and under heavy armed guard on the 20 July 2014 by the right-leaning Fidesz party in Hungary. The Memorial to the Victims of the German Invasion is located in *Szabadság tér* (Freedom Square) and was designed to be a memorial to the German occupation of Hungary in 1944, however it has caused controversy within Hungary as for many it represents a “forgery of history” given Hungary’s close association with the regime in Germany at this time and their complicity in the expulsion of Hungarian Jews during the Second World War (Dudman, 2019a).

The response was the creation of a counter-memorial directly opposite the official memorial offering a counter-narrative, the *Eleven Emlékű*, which quickly developed into a collection of personal materials documenting an ever-changing and developing narrative of real people and real lives, for many of whom their voices were lost to history. The debate surrounding this monument and Hungary’s involvement in the Second World War reflect debates on how governments and institutions can wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory and national identity, and how we know ourselves as individuals, groups and societies. The post-colonial heritage theory suggests that individuals belonging to a national community have different experiences to a shared past and do not share identical relationships to the same spaces, places and events and therefore conceive their heritage through multiple forms of reference (Dudman, 2019, p. 26). This can represent the potential for these type of formal monuments to be inevitably associated to concepts of nationalism and the development of public history in support of a nationalist approach to remembrance (Eröss, 2016, p. 239).

It is within this context that this paper would like to focus on the work we have been undertaking in relation to archives associated with refugee and migration issues. Whilst the United Kingdom has a long history of immigration and emigration to and from our shores, “the common understanding of this history as passed down by the education system as well as by museums, archives and heritage sites, has often glossed over or ignored this crucial aspect of our island history.” (Stevens, 2009, p. 5). This reflects a complex historiography of a long history of migration to the UK and the integration of diverse ethnic communities into British society, but which seems to have been overlooked and under-documented in favour of

more dominant notions of national history. A former academic colleague here at the University of East London, Professor Philip Marfleet has written extensively on the dangers of refugees being silenced from the historical record whilst being overlooked by historians (Marfleet, 2007), a notion implied in work exploring official records in The UK National Archives, when describing migration records as being “scattered across archives in the United Kingdom and overseas as there is not a dedicated archives for immigration or emigration within the United Kingdom.” (Kershaw and Pearsall, 2009, p. 11).

For this paper, the author will use as a case study the work that has been undertaken with the Refugee Council Archive at the University of East London, one of the largest thematic collections in the UK focusing on documenting and preserving materials on the refugee experience, reflecting on the use of a range of archival objects to undertake community outreach and engagement in relation to wider discussions within the discipline of archival science relating to the nature and contest of archives. To place the Archive in context, The Refugee Council is the largest charity in the United Kingdom working directly to support the lives of refugees in this country. The Refugee Council in its current guise was formed in 1981 by the merger of two older organisations, the British Council for Aid to Refugees (BCAR) and the Standing Conference on Refugees (SCOR), founded in 1951 as a response to the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees to help respond to the refugee and displacement crisis in Europe following the Second World War. In November 2002, the Archive was deposited at the University of East London, one of the earliest universities in the UK to establish a postgraduate programme in Refugee Studies, due to no longer being able to effectively manage and develop the Archive. This was also an example of an academic institution offering to support and preserve the archival collection of a voluntary sector institution. The archives of voluntary sector organisations in the United Kingdom is an area of concern which has resulted in the creation of the Campaign for Voluntary Sector Archives ‘supporting good governance and regulatory compliance within third sector organisations; supporting the preservation of institutional memory and identity.’ (Dudman, 2019b). The archives of voluntary sector organisations like the Refugee Council are extremely valuable both for ensuring their own institutional corporate memory is persevered, but also for ensuring that the records of those who they support and assist or also preserved securely both for the human and citizen rights of the individual, but also for the good of the wider cultural heritage. “Getting my records has filled in blanks as I had lived a life of non-existence, I had nothing of my past, nothing was there, it was empty.’ (Brewis, 2012). This quote highlights in itself the invaluable nature of voluntary sector archives in helping to support a sense of self-identity, especially for those who may exist outside the more established societal structure, and indicates the dangers for our own collective memory if we do not strive to document and preserve a cross section of our cultural heritage both historically and also right here, right now in the present.

In terms of the Refugee Archive itself, it contains a range of archival materials recording the institutional history of the organisation, incorporating traditional archival records of the minutes of meetings; administrative and financial records; records of correspondence; annual reports; photographs; publicity and outreach materials; and interactions with other refugee supporting organisations and policy and advocacy work in relation to challenging the harsh conditions imposed on refugees and asylum seekers by the UK Home Office. The Archive also contained a substantive special collection of materials, including secondary

documentation which had been collected by the Refugee Council in the course of informing its daily work. This special collection incorporates published and semi-published materials relating to all aspects of their work with refugees, covering both the UK and wider international perspectives. Estimated to be in excess of 35,000 items, the special collection includes reports and journals; audio-visual materials; press cuttings and a substantive array of grey literature including working papers; conference papers; leaflets; newsletters; case studies; field reports; statistical data and bibliographies.

Our work initially with the archive was to stabilise the collection within its new environment at the University of East London and to begin a process of cataloguing the collection to improve accessibility as the original catalogue had been lost. This was the very first archival collection that the UEL had taken on and the author was the very first archivist, so there was the added challenge of introducing archival methodologies to the existing academic library service and introducing the concept of the archive to our students. The objective right from the outset was to make the archival collections that we hold as accessible as possible to both students and academics at the University combined with academics, students, researchers and practitioners beyond the gates of academia. We were focused on the archive not becoming just a collection of dusty boxes locked away on a shelf in the archive with the occasional intrepid researcher braving the archives to see what is there, but for our collections to be a living archive open and engaged with the communities that it serves.

As the collection developed, we become increasingly aware of the power dynamics of the archive in relation to both individual identity and community memory. As Schwartz and Cook have succinctly argued, 'Archives – as records – wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies.' (2002, p. 2). This was of particular concern especially in relation to the refugee voice within the archive, and the ethics of how we should ensure these voices be heard in a genuine form, without prejudice or censor. This raised important questions on how both ethnic and refugee communities, as well as the individual refugee or asylum seeker, are represented within the archival record and the impact this may have on theories around the formation of individual and community identity, which can be very problematic given the transitory nature of the refugee experience. Questions of belonging and otherness had to be considered and whether those whose stories we were looking to document and preserve, would identify as being a 'refugee' as opposed to being a member of a political, religious, cultural or political community. We needed to develop a methodology for responding to how refugees would self-define themselves and the disparities this may create between oral and written records. Whilst being predominantly paper-based, the existing Refugee Council Archive and the smaller collections that had been deposited over subsequent years, including the Council for At-Risk Academics, Northern Refugee Centre and Cambridge Refugee Support Group, contained valuable resources for the study of refugees and forced migration, the materials predominantly talked about refugees or reported on research with refugees, as opposed to including the direct narratives from the refugees and asylum seekers themselves, and those who worked with them. We felt this archival silence, the missing voices of the refugees and asylum seekers themselves, needed to be addressed if the archival was too be truly representative of the refugee experience, and to help provide a counter-narrative to the negative 'hostile environment' within the political and media discourses in the United Kingdom which sought to demonise refugees in a very negative

light. It was also an opportunity to reflect and challenge the author's own role as an archivist responsible for the collection, and to reconsider my own professional responsibility as an archivist in responding to the need of under-represented voices within our archive collections.

During 2015-2016, the author undertook a civic engagement project with Dr. Rumana Hashem, a colleague from the UEL Centre for Migration, Refugees and Belonging entitled *Democratic Access or Privileged Exclusion: Civic Engagement through the Preservation of and Access to Refugee Archives* with the aim of undertaking a pilot study focusing on the collection and preservation of refugees' and migrants' lived experiences in London. This was an initial attempt to challenge some of the silences and hidden voices within the Refugee Council Archive by undertaking an intersectional approach (Hashem, 2014) 'to illustrate how the diverse voices of refugees and migrants of different ethnicities and 'race' are often marginalised or left un-heard within the refugee archive and migration research, and even deliberately overlooked in favour of the [more] dominant narratives of the nation.' (Dudman and Hashem, 2019). The project had three core objects to establish a Living Refugee Archive online platform to help facilitate and promote access and engagement with our existing archival collections on refugees and forced migration at UEL; to undertake a pilot UEL Oral History Project to collect life history narratives from displaced persons* in East London and to consider how best to document and preserve the refugee experience (Hashem and Dudman, 2016, p. 192). (*In this context, we use the term displaced persons as a generic term for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers.)

The project sought to establish the Living Refugee Archive online portal, available at <http://www.livingrefugeearchive.org/>, in as a response to challenges we had identified in accessing physical archive collections. Whilst we have always sought to make our archival collections at the University of East London as accessible as possible, a number of potential boundaries to access still remain. Service level restrictions can act as a barrier to access with a sole Archivist required to manage multiple archival collections across two university campuses. This can result in limitations on staff time and archive opening times being dependent on staff availability. Limitations can also be evident in terms of collection management with existing cataloguing backlogs meaning delays to the cataloguing of materials and delays in effective finding aids being available to researchers. Barriers to user engagement may also exist in terms of the location of the physical archive, it may be too far away for the researcher to reach of the cost of travel too prohibitive. We were also aware of that with the archive being located within a university library, this could act as a site of contestation for some user groups, especially when working with displaced persons. With these factors in mind, we were looking to establish a safe and independent space in which could explore some of these issues surrounding the preservation and documentation of the refugee experience beyond the restrictions imposed by these boundaries. We also wanted this to be a 'living' archive in the sense that it would act as an online free to access repository of materials documenting refugee testimonies in multiple formats that would help to enable a positive discourse on the refugee and migration experience, both historically and in the present, to enable discussion and interaction with the narratives held on the site.

The project also sought to undertake the collection of oral histories undertaken with displaced persons in London. Five semi-structured and qualitative oral histories were collected in the initial phase of the project with refugees and undocumented migrants. The project followed an anti-oppressive methodology (Dominquez, 2008) facilitating the use of a bottom-up oral

history methodology which enabled participants 'to speak about anything they liked, for as long as they liked, and could withdraw when/as they needed too' (Hashem and Dudman, 2016, p. 194) which enabled no power imbalances between the participant and the interviewer. These oral histories would follow the 'knowledge from below' approach which would facilitate the voices of the participants to be heard unfiltered from any interpretation by the researchers on the project, and to avoid any reshaping of the data to fit any pre-existing research paradigms.

This engagement with oral history in relation to the preservation and documentation of refugee and migrant experiences has continued through the deposit of new oral history collections at the University of East London, including collections documenting the Gujarati experience in the London Borough of Croydon with the Gujarati Yatra collection and the Voices of Kosovo in Manchester (VOKIM) collection. The author has also established the Migration Special Interest Group with the UK Oral History Society as a means of bringing together oral history practitioners, community groups, academia and the displaced persons themselves to work together to consider the ethical challenges involved with undertaking oral history with refugees and looking at how projects in this area can be supported and developed. For Refugee Week 2019, UEL hosted a launch event for the Migration Special Interest Group with a number of speakers from the UK and Europe talking the importance of oral history for supporting the documentation of the life history narratives of the refugee experience.

For Refugee Week 2019, we also hosted an exhibition from our archival collections throughout the week and this included a selection of embroidered handkerchiefs produced by the Stitched Voices Embroidery Group located within the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth University. The Group had just completed a project entitled 'Documenting the Refugee Crisis: Remembering through Embroidery' which aimed to develop and create embroidered handkerchiefs documenting the refugee crisis in Europe utilising different approaches to embroidery. Drawing upon the list of all reported deaths of those seeking to reach Europe produced by UNITED for Intercultural Action (Dudman, 2019b), the Stitched Voices drew on information from this list to produce a visual narrative of these reported deaths through embroidery. The result was a very powerful collection of handkerchiefs which were able to display within the Archive combined with oral histories; documents from our archives and an exhibition of individual narratives of displacement.

The use of textiles as an alternative means of documenting the migration and human rights narratives as an interesting one. This was first brought to the author's attention in January 2018 when the Refugee Council Archive hosted an exhibition co-ordinated by the Chilean diaspora in London and entitled, *Crafting Reliance: The Art of Chilean Political Prisoners*. This exhibition brought together over 150 handcrafted artworks of various types created by Chilean political prisoners whilst in detention. Many of these prisoners subsequently fled Chile to become refugees ensuring the survival of their art and craft works. The Crafting Resistance exhibition challenged the idea of political prisoners as being 'passive victims' which fails to recognise the degree of agency many prisoners retained despite the terrible conditions endured during the military dictatorship of General Pinochet in Chile (1973-1990) when hundreds of political prisoners were held in concentration camps throughout the country. In several of these detention camps, prisoners organised themselves and crafted items from the very limited materials and improvised tools available to them. The exhibition

brings together a collection of these artefacts and reflects on their importance in relation to sustaining the mental health and wellbeing of those incarcerated.

The story of the military dictatorship in Chile under General Augusto Pinochet between 1973 and 1990 is a history of detention without trial, forced disappearances, torture, enforced exile and numerous human rights violations. Chile during these years became a country governed by fear and repression. However, whilst those in detention often produced the delicate objects included in the exhibition as both a passive form of resistance to the military junta but also as a means of documenting their experiences. Outside of the detentions, a different form of representation and documentation had taken shape in the form of *Arpilleras*, an embroidered wall hanging or tapestry used to depict daily life in Chile under the dictatorship and to document the human rights violations undertaken by the regime. (Agosin, 1987; Eshet and Agosin, 2008). These *Arpilleras* were originally produced by a group of Chilean women who came together in the Chilean capital Santiago, with the help of the Vicariate of Solidarity, an organisation established by the Catholic Church in Chile, that was particularly concerned with the human rights abuses being perpetrated in the country following the overthrow of the socialist government in Chile. Initially these tapestries were created as a means of the women being able to sell them in order to raise the extra money needed to take care of their families, as for many, their male relatives have either been imprisoned or disappeared. However, the *Arpilleras* were soon to develop a new role as descriptors of the oppression within the country that could then be smuggled out of Chile as a means of documenting the abuses of the military regime to an international audience. We were fortunate to be able to include a number of *Arpilleras* within our archive exhibition, and together with the objects created by Chileans in detention, combined with documentary evidence from the Refugee Council Archive exploring the international response to the Chilean dictatorship, the exhibition was able to provide a powerful combination of narrative methodologies and to explore creative voices of expression beyond the traditional report or news story.

Running in conjunction with the exhibition, it was also possible to run a series of embroidery workshops run by second-generation Chileans based in London looking at how embroidery and craft work can be utilised as a tool of resistance to both human rights violations today but also as a means of reflecting on the past and presenting an opportunity for engagement with different modes of expression. The inclusion of textiles, whether in the form of handkerchiefs or *Arpilleras*, signifies that if we are to move beyond the established criteria of the document or oral history as a means of documenting life history experiences, we need to approach alternative creative modes of expression that participants feel comfortable with. Innovative and creative methodologies have a great potential to reach out to people beyond the academia and to engage emotionally with people on different levels, and to illicit a more engaged response to the stories we are trying to tell. However, 'if we are to undertake creative approaches, we should use the methods that participants themselves would use if they wanted to disseminate information that they think is important.' (Ozkul, 2019).

This has been our goal with the Living Refugee Archive portal. to develop a resource to include contributions from refugees and communities, archives and related groups in order to become an important space to learn, share and exchange memories and narratives of the refugee experience. This reflects the importance of encouraging participants to 'share personal experiences, insights and 'counter-narratives' that may not yet be included [with]in 'mainstream history', [encouraging] a far more inclusive and accurate history of the United

Kingdom.’ (*Refugee Week 2013 Evaluation Report*, 2013). Through the website it is hoped there will be engagement with both traditional and creative forms of representation, but new creative methods of presenting the testimonies of migration is vitally important, to ‘help disrupt stereotypical representations of refugees and asylum-seekers , [and] emphasising the extent to which historical processes inform current ideas.’ (Sunga, 2019). Issues of how we collect, preserve and make accessible the testimonies of under-represented communities whether online or in the archive continues to be a key issue that needs to be addressed, both practically and theoretically within archival science.

In a panel for the Archives and Records Association annual conference in 2016, entitled ‘Inclusivity meets ‘History of the Present’: Living history, ethics and the role of archivists in documenting under-represented communities,’ Dr. Anne Irfan utilised a case study of her doctoral work on the Palestinian refugee which ‘typifies many of the problems surrounding the collection of testimonies and records of marginalised communities.’ (Irfan, 2016). This presentation highlighted several juxtapositions within the Palestinian refugee situation. Their statelessness has resulted in serious repercussions in how their individual and collective narratives are documented, and with the absence of a national archive institution to document their narratives, Irfan argues they are dependent on others to speak on their behalf and to showcase their stories, meaning ‘that the risks of silencing and misrepresentation can be great.’ Irfan also argues that here is a clear structural disparity centred around how the testimonies and experiences of the Palestinian refugees located with the refugee camps are gathered, whereby the researchers in question are often privileged Western citizens pursuing careers of choice, while those being researched are marginalised, stateless and formally powerless (Irfan, 2016).

The oral history work we have undertaken through our civic engagement project at UEL entitled *Democratic Access or Privileged Exclusion* also touched upon very similar issues in relation to both the ethics of researcher engagement with refugee and displaced communities and how the role of such fieldwork can respect and promote the agency of refugee communities, whether based in refugee camps or as displaced persons within a host community. It was an important part of the ethical process that we undertook as part of our project that we wanted to engage the participants we interviewed in the actual research process, so they felt they had an actual investment in the project, and that they would be able to see and influence the outcomes of the research. For many research projects and fieldwork activities with marginalised groups, it is sadly often the case that the results of the research are never shared with the participants who contributed, which can lead participants [Imad reference]. It also helps to encourage an examination of the relationship between refugees and archival collections and how the nature and form of record-collecting can better represent the voices of refugees (Irfan, 2016).

We as archivists, must continue to be aware that we ‘wield power over those very records central to memory and identity formation through active management of records before they come to archives, their appraisal and selection as archives, and afterwards, their constantly evolving description, preservation, and use.’ (Schwartz and Cook, 2002, p. 2). The epistemological framework, especially within the UK, can be traced back to the work of Sir Hilary Jenkinson and his seminal work on archival theory, *A Manual of Archival*

Administration. Jenkinson employed a positivist ideology to develop what were to become the core facets of archival theory that dominated the nature of archival science throughout the Twentieth Century. The notions of provenance and original order helped to establish the archive as being the bastion of impartial truth, where the archivist could aspire to the physical and moral defence of the core attributes of the archive, namely impartiality, authenticity, reliability, evidentiality, integrity, truth and trustworthiness. The archivist would become the passive custodian of the archives within their care, which would accrue naturally over time reflecting the functions of the institutions to which the archive belonged. It was the role of the archive's creator to define the archive, and not the role of the archivist to actively engage with the development of the collection, and an interference could be seen to endanger to the integrity of the archive.

Archivists need to understand and accept that in the course of their work, they are the instruments of power within their archive. Consequently, archivists should be open to listening out for the voice of the marginalised at every stage of the archive, and to be open to embrace the concept of 'otherness' within the archive. From the process of appraisal, to through cataloguing and description and the writing of finding aids, archivists should listen out for these hidden voices, are can be marginalised by the prevailing relations of power. However, we must also be aware of the dangers of wielding our power as archivists to talk for the marginalised, 'how to avoid the danger of speaking for those other voices? How to avoid reinforcing marginalisation by naming the 'marginalised' as such?' (Harris, 2002, p. 86). The archivist must consider both these approaches to effectively manage the cultural heritage within their care and the multitude of mainstream and marginalised voices archival collections contain. We need to be aware of the needs of our communities, and the opportunities that archives offer to them.

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Summary

This article reflects on the civic engagement and outreach work undertaken in support of the Refugee Archives held at the University of East London. It explores the development of the archive over a sixteen-year period and the work undertaken to support the under-documented voices of a marginalised group to have their narratives both heard and preserved within a dedicated archival collection. It challenges traditional notions of the archival space and how, through outreach projects and community engagement, the archive has sought to undertake bottom-up participative methodologies to document the refugee experience utilising non-traditional records including oral histories and textiles. The narratives provided through ethical oral history approaches and the narratives that can be drawn through different methods of documentation, from embroidered handkerchiefs to *Arpilleras* in Chile, to showcase how archivists need to reflect on their own practice as custodians who wield power over the archives under their care, to explore new ways of engagement with their collections

and the communities which they serve. Archivists should be prepared to listen to the voices of the other within their collections, and to consider how our archives can be more representative of the collective memory and heritage within our communities.