

Exploring the potential of Museums and their Collections in working practices with Refugees.

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EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF MUSEUMS AND THEIR COLLECTIONS IN WORKING PRACTICES WITH REFUGEES

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the complexities, conflicts and ethical dilemmas involved in the study of refugee resettlement, arguing that museums can play a fundamental role in current debates around asylum. The study presents a cross-disciplinary theoretical examination of the work developed in the last two decades by museums in Britain with and about refugees. It explores the tension between the asylum discourses constructed by museums and refugees' personal narratives of resettlement, contributing to museological debates around human rights and person-centred methodologies in forced migration studies.

I analyse the ambiguities surrounding the human rights discourses articulated by museums, drawing from an extensive survey undertaken across the museum sector and a study of the partnerships established with refugee advocacy organisations. One of the main conclusions reached is that museums have either romanticised exiles or pathologised refugees as traumatised subjects, subjugating human rights discourses to a logic of conditional belonging.

Building on the analysis of a refugee community engagement project developed by the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in Norwich, I explore the potential of object-centred practices in providing exiles with a symbolic resource to articulate their own experience of resettlement. I argue that this analysis can help museum scholars and practitioners to move beyond notions of locality and cultural specificity in their work with diaspora groups, bringing a fresh perspective to scholarly debates around the affective potential of museum objects and the embodied experiences they can trigger.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

ACE	Arts Council of England
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
BAME	Black and Asian Minority and Ethnic
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CLMG	Campaign for Learning through Museums and Galleries
CoE	Council of Europe
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media & Sport
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
ERAS	Engaging Refugees and Asylum Seekers
EriCarts	European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research
EIN	Electronic Immigration Network
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
EU	European Union
GLLAM	Group for Large Local Authority Museums
GPP	Gateway Protection Programme
GRAMNet	Glasgow Refugee Asylum and Migration Network
ICAR	Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research
MEG	Museum Ethnographers Group
MLA	Museums Libraries and Archives Council
NASREF	Norwich Asylum Seekers and Refugee Forum
NOCA	Norfolk Congolese Association
RCMG	Research Centre for Museums and Galleries
RCO	Refugee Community Organisation
SMC	Scottish Museum Council
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UK	United Kingdom

UKBA

United Kingdom Border Agency

UKCO-ELT

UK Cultural Orientation and English Language Training

UNESCO

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
Organization

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INTRODUCTION

The difference between earlier exiles and those of our own time is, it bears stressing, scale: our age – with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers – is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, of mass migration.

Edward Said (2000) *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, London: Granta, p. 174.

The Age of the Refugee.

Migration is certainly not a new transnational process. Nevertheless, it is a central experience of modernity, calling into question the existence of political entities and their borders. Forced migration, in particular, presents a set of both political and ethical challenges which are instigating increasing debate over human rights across the globe. In 2015, more than a million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe, creating profound social divisions over how best to deal with resettling people. The sheer scale of refugee displacement and rising economic insecurity across the continent is accompanied by a resurgence in nationalist discourses, which increasingly portray refugees as the new ‘strangers’ knocking at Europe’s door.

Despite the challenges planet earth and global civilisation face, Janes (2009) argues in *Museums in a Troubled World* that museums are rarely – if ever – part of such discussions, and thus questions whether they are at all relevant as social institutions (ibid.: 26). Conversely, this dissertation argues that museums can play a fundamental role in current debates around forced migration, as well as actively participate in the political, cultural and representational challenges facing European societies.

This thesis is, arguably, the first attempt at a cross-disciplinary theoretical examination of the work developed by museums with and about refugees. This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together academic contributions from refugee studies, museology, anthropology and sociology, among others. The framework is dictated by the research questions and the ethical and methodological implications of the subject of this research.

Given the legal and political dimensions of refugee movements, as well as the multidimensional forces present in the field of study, a decision was taken to limit the research to Britain from the early 2000s onwards.

The following analysis addresses the tension between the asylum discourses of institutional actors and refugees' personal narratives of resettlement. Hence, this dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part (Chapter 1 and 2) investigates the ways in which state actors and museums have articulated the experiences of refugees in contemporary Britain. The second part (Chapter 3, 4 and 5) draws on a refugee community engagement project developed by the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in Norwich (hereafter SCVA), and explores the potential of object-centred practices in countering hegemonic interpretations of exile.

Therefore, this dissertation's three primary research questions are:

- To what extent can museums in Britain foster a better understanding of refugee resettlement?
- How can object-based practices with refugees facilitate the emergence of personal narratives of resettlement?
- What do working practices with refugees reveal about museums and their collections?

1. The Research Context.

Interdisciplinarity can be considered a defining trait of refugee studies and forced migration scholarship (Black, 2001; Zolberg and Benda, 2001; Robinson, 1990; Hein, 1993). In fact, the study of refugee resettlement has attracted the attention of a number of academic disciplines, ranging from social policy to demography and sociology. Social policy scholars have traditionally been interested in analysing asylum legislation and the economic aspects of resettlement (Sales, 2007; Bloch, 2007), while demographers and sociologists have produced a wealth of longitudinal studies on UK resettlement programmes (Robinson, Andersson and Musterd, 2003; Robinson and Coleman, 2000) and internal migratory movements (Stewart, 2012).

At the same time, analyses of how art practices might contribute to a better understanding of resettlement are still at a very early stage (Gould, 2005). However, Durham University's Maggie O'Neill is a notable exception in this regard, as her 2004 study investigates the potential of artistic media as an expressive means for refugees. Similarly, at the University of East London, Kaptani and Yuval-Davis (2009) use community theatre to explore refugees' life experiences during resettlement. In addition, there are also relevant contributions coming from within the arts sector itself, such as those emanating from 'Counterpoints Arts', a cross-arts umbrella organisation supporting and producing arts by and about migrants and refugees.

In the wider humanities, scholars are also looking increasingly at the arts as a locus for understanding forced migration; for example, the work of the 'GRAMNet' consortium in Scotland and the 'Humanities in Human Rights' network led by the University of East Anglia.¹ However, despite rising academic interest, museums are still rarely a focus of inquiry.²

¹ *GRAMNet*, funded by the University of Glasgow, brings together researchers, practitioners, NGOs and policy makers working with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland. The *Humanities in Human Rights* network gathers scholars and practitioners interested in the role of arts and humanities in understanding human rights today.

² Outside Britain, Skartveit and Goodnow (2010) attempted to investigate museums' work with refugees in Australia from a media studies perspective.

The paucity of academic articles featuring refugee work reflects museum scholars' relative lack of interest in this area.³ At the same time, museums in Europe are increasingly engaging with the challenges and opportunities presented by human mobility. The MeLA initiative (Museums in an Age of Migration, 2011-2015) – coordinated by the Milan Politecnico – is a good example in this respect. The project involved nine European partners, including universities, museums and research centres, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of how museums could respond to Europe's changing demographics. Particularly fertile debates are also emerging from within institutions holding ethnographic collections. The READ-ME project (Réseau Européen des Associations de Diasporas & Musées d'Ethnographie, 2007-2012) is of particular significance in this respect. Crucially, one of the project's remits was to position ethnographic museums as key partners and special mediators in the drive to foster dialogue between diverse cultures, and hence question the logics of difference upon which ethnographic collections are formed (Harris and O'Hanlon 2013: 1-2).⁴

More recently, a number of publications have started paying increased attention to the plight of refugees within the framework of discussions around social justice and human rights. This trend is manifested by the growing number of institutions across the world concerned with the promotion of humanitarian values (Sandell, 2012: 196).⁵

³ *Museum Practice*, the online magazine published by the Museums Association, has published two features on working practices with refugees (Nightingale, 2008; MP, 2013b). *Engage*, the national association for gallery education, featured refugee work in an article authored by Lynch (2001) and, more recently, in a special issue on resilience (Ali Chayder, 2014).

⁴ The initiative was coordinated by the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale (Tervuren) in collaboration with the Musée du Quai Branly (Paris), the Museum für Völkerkunde (Vienna), and the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini (Rome). Building on the project, the SWITCH initiative (Sharing a World of Inclusion, Creativity and Heritage, 2014-2018) is currently exploring how ethnographic museums can respond to an increasingly differentiated European society.

⁵ The 'Canadian Museum for Human Rights' and the 'Federation of International Human Rights Museums' – set up by the 'International Slavery Museum of Liverpool' – are particularly good examples in this respect.

However, as argued in Chapter 2, these contributions have focused primarily on museum work *about* refugees (Sandell, 2011; Bruce *et al.*, 2007; Lohman, 2008; Marfleet, 2008; Stevens, 2009), often neglecting theoretical reflection on engagement practices *with* refugees. An exception in this respect is the largely documented work by Bernadette Lynch at the Manchester Museum (2001, 2004, 2008, 2011a, 2014). Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 3, Lynch's approach focuses largely on trauma and psychoanalysis, which this dissertation firmly contests.

2. Conceptual Framework.

This section outlines the wider theoretical context of this dissertation's literature review by addressing relevant debates in the fields of philosophy, postcolonial and cultural studies. As such, this section highlights the two interconnecting conceptual categories this study adopts in its understanding of forced migration. On the one hand, refugeehood is addressed as a structural phenomenon defined by national and supranational forces; while, on the other hand, refugeehood is also addressed as a subjective experience, which reshapes notions of identity, community and belonging. As is argued throughout the thesis, these dimensions are interdependent: they inform and constitute each other according to specific logics of power.

The notion of universal hospitality, which emerged in the Enlightenment period, has been crucial to the development of a supranational discourse on forced migration. In his 1795 essay 'Perpetual Peace', Immanuel Kant (2013) defined hospitality as:

the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives in the land of another. One may refuse to receive him when this can be done without causing his destruction; but also, so long as he peacefully occupies his place, one might not treat him with hostility (ibid.: 105-106).

For Kant, the idea of perpetual peace resides in the legal recognition of a cosmopolitan right of resort on and communal possession of the earth's surface. According to Kant, a stranger's right to hospitality is acquired from birth. The exercise of this right not only allows the stranger to enter into contact with local inhabitants, but also bestows upon him/her the power to bring the human race closer to a cosmopolitan constitution (ibid.: 106-108).

As pointed out by Appiah (2015), the notion of cosmopolitics should be considered the theoretical foundation for both the *Declaration of the Rights of Men and of the Citizen* (1789) and the United Nations (1945), which Kant's proposal for a 'league of nations' predates.

As noted above however, hospitality also presents a tension, as it can only be attained if the stranger is not met with hostility. Derrida (2000a, 2000b), in his critique of Kant's cosmopolitics, pointed out that the word 'hospitality' is self-contradictory in nature, as it can be parasitized by its opposite, 'hostility' (2000a: 3). Departing from an etymological analysis of hospitality, Derrida noted that the Latin word *hospes* – from which the English word 'hospitality' is derived – can be translated as both 'host' and 'enemy' (ibid.: 15). The author agreed with Kant in claiming that hospitality is a duty and an obligation, but argued that this right is fundamentally exercised by the host, who 'affirms the law of hospitality as the law of his own household' (2000a: 4-10). At the same time, Derrida (2000b: 25) opened the conceptual possibility of an 'unconditional hospitality'. In other words, in the encounter between self and other, the 'stranger' is accepted on his own terms.⁶

The importance of framing hospitality within the conditions set by the host was a particular concern of Hannah Arendt's political philosophy, which drew attention to the nation state as a primary locus of analysis (2002: 344). Arendt was particularly interested in the legal, political and cultural discourses on statelessness and human rights that emerged in Europe in the aftermath of World War II. She argued that these discourses created the legal illusion of the possibility of losing human rights. Arendt claimed that, no matter how the concept is defined, there are no real circumstances under which such a loss could be claimed to have taken place (ibid.: 375).

Moreover, Malkki's anthropological study (1995) argued that post-war legal and political discourses on exile led to a generalised understanding of 'refugee identity' as a descriptive rubric encompassing 'a world of different socioeconomic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations' (496).

⁶ Derrida argued that 'absolute hospitality [can be] graciously offered beyond debt and economy, offered to the other, a hospitality invented for the singularity of the new arrival, of the unexpected visitor' (2000b: 83).

As such, this dissertation uses the notion of ‘refugee identity’ as an analytical tool to highlight the tension between the way the refugee experience is constructed by institutional actors and how it is conceptualised by refugees themselves.

The analysis of the subjective dimension of forced migration is a central aspect of Edward Said’s *Reflections on Exile* (2000), where attention is drawn to the impact of refugeehood in reshaping notions of individual and collective identities. Said noted that the condition of exile is, fundamentally, a discontinuous state of being, a solitude experienced outside the group, where a sense of deprivation is felt for not being with others in communal cohabitation (ibid.: 176-177). According to Said, this discontinuity produces an unhealable rift between a human being and a native place; and, as such, causes an exile to gain a sort of originality of vision:

Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is contrapuntal. For an exile, habit of life, expressions, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally. (ibid.: 186)

In music theory, the counterpoint is a cohabitation of two melodies that meet incidentally without ever creating a harmonic composition. Said considers this lack of accord as an opportunity to contest the singular narratives of ‘refugee identity’ constructed by nation states. On this note, Bhabha (1994: 178) signalled the importance of creating spaces where narratives of identity are open to debate, where forms of subaltern agency can emerge and flourish (see also Spivak, 1988).

Stuart Hall argued that art can provide such platforms, as art can constitute people as ‘new kinds of subjects’. Drawing a parallel with jazz improvisation, Hall showed that art can offer an opportunity at ‘diasporisation’, a process of unsettling, recombination and ‘cut-and-mix’ that arises from the diaspora experience (1990: 403).⁷

⁷ Hall explains that there are at least two separate ways of thinking about cultural identity: the first posits a oneness and a shared culture; and the second position recognises that, in addition to many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference (ibid.: 393-394).

At the same time, Hall claimed that these spaces of negotiation, although attempting to elude the politics of polarity, do not happen in a vacuum; they are always subject to the logics of power and history (see Bhabha, 1994: 173). This suggests that, even when dominant discourses of identity are challenged, hegemonic powers remain the source from which counter-discourses originate. This disarming conclusion is important to keep in mind throughout this dissertation, as it also points to the inherent limitations of this study's investigation.

3. Literature review.

This literature review is divided in two parts. The first section addresses discourses on the experience of resettlement developed in the fields of refugee and forced migration studies. The second section reviews museological debates around social justice and human rights, and locates the contribution that object-based practices can make.

3.1 Refugees' 'lived experiences'.

Refugee and forced migration scholars have traditionally analysed resettlement through the lens of psychology and psychiatry literature, with a particular emphasis on refugees' post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) (Watters, 2001). However, this approach has been widely criticised by other scholars in the field, who insist on the importance of investigating a larger array of factors that affect refugees' health during resettlement (Ahearn, Loughry and Ager, 1999). Some scholars argue that an overemphasis on the past largely overlooks the impact of current life circumstances on refugees' well-being (Silove *et al.*, 1998). This dissertation does not intend to minimise the effects of traumatic events on the present life circumstances of refugees; instead, it emphasises that other equally important factors should also be considered. These debates are discussed in Chapter 2, where the medical paradigm's impact on museum work with refugees is analysed.

Ager and Strang (2008, 2010) offered an important contribution to the field by studying refugees' well-being through an analysis of the dynamics of integration in a host society. In their 'middle level' theory of integration, Ager and Strang identified some key domains that can foster refugees' well-being.⁸ Ager and Strang's work is an important starting point for this dissertation, as it departs from their line by exploring museums' potential for eliminating barriers to social inclusion and facilitating the acquisition of new languages and cross-cultural competences (Ager and Strang 2008: 185).

⁸ These include access to employment, housing, education and health; assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights; processes of social connection within and between groups within the community; and the presence of structural barriers related to language, culture and the local environment.

At the same time, this thesis also aims to contribute to scholarly debates around the centrality of the subject in refugee research, which are taking place in the field of forced migration. Despite the subjective dimension of forced displacement, person-centred approaches have so far received little scholarly attention (Hayed, 2006). The ‘lived experience’ of refugees is clearly incredibly relevant to such analyses, as proved by the emergence of an increasing body of literature around the subject (Agger, 1994; Langer, 1997). By focusing on the lived experience of refugees, this thesis does not intend to neglect the structural dimensions of forced migration (Castle 2003), but instead to contextualise this macro-level of analysis within the micro-level of subjective experiences. As argued by Hynes (2011), this means also paying attention to how refugees’ lived experience is constructed in relation to the causes of initial flight and personal circumstances before arrival.

This area of research is largely populated by the work of diaspora scholars, due to their interest in transnationalism and the deterritorialised social networks formed by refugees (Koser, 1997; Koser and Pinkerton, 2002). The telling of one’s own experience can provide invaluable insight into the personal construction of events, as well as help to facilitate transition into a new society (Eastmond, 2007; Gemignani, 2011). Stories are part of everyday life; they constitute a means for actors to express and negotiate experience. Furthermore, first-person narratives can empower individual refugee voices and be a powerful tool in the political struggle for belonging.

For researchers, individual narratives provide a site to examine the meanings that people, individually or collectively, ascribe to their lived experience (Eastmond, 2007: 248). Chapters 4 and 5 address these concerns, analysing the potential of museum objects in facilitating the emergence of subjective narratives of resettlement.

3.2 Museums and the Human Rights Framework.

This study is located in the field of museum's work with communities (Karp and Lavine, 1991; Karp, Mullen-Kreamer and Lavine, 1992; Peers and Brown, 2003; Watson, 2007; Crooke, 2007; Golding and Modest, 2013), and builds on debates introduced to this field by the 'new museology'⁹, the 'ecomusée'¹⁰ movement and the 'museo diffuso'¹¹ movement.

These long-run developments in museum scholarship and practice have questioned the role and purpose of museums, placing emphasis on issues of democratic access, collaboration and participation with museum partners and communities. Groups whose histories and identities have been ignored or denigrated by museums have increasingly demanded representation in displays and programmes. The principles of human rights, which have inspired struggles for justice since World War II, underlie such demands (O'Neill and Silverman, 2011). Recently in the UK, these debates have been fuelled by shifts in the sector's politics and practices, which began at the start of the 2000s and are analysed extensively in Chapter 2.

Museum scholars and practitioners have increasingly engaged with the challenges of hospitality and cosmopolitanism put forward by philosophers and political theorists. Drawing on Derrida, Marstine (2013) proposed that, if 'unconditional hospitality' is used as a relational concept to drive reconciliation between museums and their communities, museums should engage their visitors in contemporary debates around hospitality (159-160). Interestingly, much of the current debates around hospitality take place in the contemporary arts sector.

⁹ The birth of the 'new museology' is contested. Vergo (1989) places the term within a specific western European tradition. Guido (1973: 12) suggests that the new museology started in the context of the civil rights movement and minority liberation groups of the late 1960s in the America South, which coincided with the 'Round Table on the Development and the Role of Museums in the Contemporary World' held in Chile in 1972.

¹⁰ The term 'ecomusée' was coined by de Varine (1978) in an attempt to place ecology, in its wider sense, at the heart of museum practice (see also Davis, 1999; Corsane *et. al*, 2007).

¹¹ In Italy, the model of the 'museo diffuso' (Emiliani, 1974; Drugman, 1982) predicated a notion of museums reaching out from their walls to local territories, communities and partnerships. Lanz discusses the ongoing international legacy of this model (2014: 149-162).

The 2012 Liverpool Biennale is notable example, as it invited artists and thinkers to respond to the subject of ‘The Unexpected Guest’, a theme also explored in the 2005 International Exhibition of the Venice Biennale.¹² Mason (2013) utilised the notion of ‘cultural cosmopolitanism’ to claim that museums can engage in discussions on the non-hierarchical valuing of cultural difference, as collections can be used to enhance empathy and self-identification with the ‘other’ (44-45). Sandell (2012) argued that museums are now highlighting their ability to function as fora for representing the rights, differences and viewpoints of diverse communities. He noted:

socially purposeful museums very often seek to engender support for the human rights of different communities whose lived experience of disadvantage and marginalisation have often been reflected in their exclusion from, or misrepresentation, within existing museum narratives. (Sandell, 2011: 131)

Following Golding (2009), this dissertation claims that museum objects can draw attention to today's human rights debates, as such have complex biographies and contain stories of appropriation and cultural construction (ibid.: 130-1). However, Sandell also noted that little is known about the social consequences of museums’ increasing engagement with human rights, and pointed to the need for more in-depth empirical investigations of rights processes within specific settings (2012: 196). Chapter 3 explores these dynamics in more detail, focusing on the practical and political dimensions of community engagement work with refugees. In discussing museums’ commitment to human rights, Anderson (2012) posited that ‘cultural rights’ – defined by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as ‘the right to freely participate in the cultural life of a community’ – should be the primary concern of museums.

Anderson argued for an ethically-based understanding of social engagement, asserting that museums must fulfil their duty to provide access to culture, creativity, and reduce inequalities in social participation (ibid.: 217). This is particularly crucial in the context of working with refugees, whose cultural rights as non-citizens are increasingly questioned by wider sectors of British society.

¹² In particular, the German Pavilion featured a series of Tobias Zielony photographs depicting the lives of African refugees in Berlin and Hamburg. A 45-foot paper boat called ‘Lampedusa’, by Brazilian artist Vik Muniz, was one of the pieces that opened the Biennale. The ‘Lampedusa’ sailed the laguna as a reminder of the 360 people who lost their lives off the coast of the island on the 3rd of October 2013.

In this context, this study is particularly concerned with furthering the understanding of museums as creative spaces for respectful dialogical exchange and intercultural understanding (Golding, 2009: 2). In Europe, this area of practice has been explored by EU-funded projects such as ‘Museums as Places for Intercultural Dialogue’ (Bodo, Gibbs and Sani, 2009; Iervolino 2013) and working group 5 of ‘The Learning Museum’ (LEM, 2013). In Britain, projects such as the Campaign for Learning through Museums and Galleries (CLMG, 2006) have also emerged.

This study is underpinned by the belief that museums can enhance civic participation, personal growth, relationship building and well-being (Silverman, 2010: xi). Museums can act as catalysts for social regeneration, empowering communities to increase self-determination and develop the confidence and skills to take greater control over their lives (Sandell, 2003:45). This research is particularly concerned with how museums, through the provision of new knowledge and skills, can support refugees in the process of resettlement (Newman and McLean, 2005; Wavell *et al.*, 2002), including in the acquisition of new language (Lauritzen, 2000; Gill, 2007). In addition, this research aims to contribute to the visitor studies debate around the notion of museums as free-choice learning settings (Silverman, 2010), given that this learning is contextual (Falk and Dierking, 2000) and embedded in a dynamic ‘meaning-making framework’ (Silverman, 1995; 1999; 2010: 15). In this context, this study seeks to examine the process of interpretation through which meaning is attributed to museum objects, with a particular emphasis on the dialogical interactions enabled by artefacts. This area of practice has been fuelled by contributions from philosophical hermeneutics, particularly reflected in the work of Hooper-Greenhill (1994) and Golding (2000; 2009).

3.3 Objects as sites of self-reflection and complicity.

The second part of this dissertation is primarily concerned with object-centred practices, and how such might offer opportunities for refugees to articulate their own lived experiences. In fact, scholars from disciplines as far reaching as philosophy, semiotics, anthropology and material culture studies have all become interested in the amenability of museum objects to subjective intervention.

From a philosophical perspective, this understanding of subject-object interaction is built on a substantial rejection of metaphysics, which rests on the assumption that subjects cannot condition objects (Luchte, 2007). Hegel (Houlgate, 2013) suggested that there can be no fundamental separation between humanity and materiality; everything that we are and do arises from the process by which we create form and are simultaneously created by it. In a similar vein, Grosz (2009) claimed that subjective action has the purpose of stabilising matter, framing the real as objects for us instead of for itself. Bourdieu (1977) spoke of objects' ability to condition human actors, claiming that objects are the primary means by which people are socialised as social beings.

Within semiotics, Eco (1962) argued for a more fluid understanding of the object as an 'open work', as an object's meaning is dependent on the individual point of active reception. Within museology scholarship, these debates intersected with the so-called 'textualist approaches' of the early 1990s, which considered the meaning attributed to objects to be a function of the individual's social and cultural systems (Pearce, 1994: 21). As noted by Hooper-Greenhill (2000), textualist approaches have restricted the notion of subjective interpretation to merely a cognitive process, claiming that objects – unlike texts – are first encountered through the senses (*ibid.*: 116).

The work of both anthropologists and archaeologists of the so-called 'Cambridge School' (Shanks and Tilley, 1987; Hodder, 1989; Bock, 1993; Miller, 1995) has also been particularly influential. Gell (1998) observed that people continuously form social relations with things, and argued that art objects can be patients – when they suffer the causal implications of subjective agency – or agents, when they cause subjects to react to them.

Similarly, the ‘material turn’ of the last twenty years (Edwards and Hart, 2004: 3) in anthropology has brought attention to the embeddedness of objects in human social life, as well as the meaning and value of things.

This dissertation re-claims the centrality of artefacts in community engagement initiatives, arguing that objects can offer opportunities for refugees to contest hegemonic interpretations of ‘refugee identity’ and reflect critically on museums’ working practices. As discussed by Mark O’Neill (2006), museum work around social inclusion does not preclude the possibility of a return to the object as a point of departure. People’s wealth of life experiences can be brought to bear on objects, creating new forms of knowledge; knowledge the museum can learn through its task of generating meaningful experiences. Therefore, re-claiming the centrality of artefacts does not mean a return to the nineteenth-century cabinet of curiosity, where collections were exposed to detached contemplation. Instead, such a re-claiming seeks to ‘creatively enhance the twenty-first-century museum visit, keeping open visitors’ possibilities to reflect creatively, even transformatively, upon both things and themselves’ (Dudley, 2012: 12).

This dissertation is premised on the understanding that the encounter of objects in a museum is a fundamentally phenomenological experience (Dudley, 2010a; Stewart, 1993). It argues that when refugees engage with objects, the physical characteristics of the artefacts stimulate certain embodied responses. Dudley (2012: 8) argued that objects and subjects constitute each other and create a new hybrid reality; a reality where the object is as much a part of the totality of the experience as the subject. In the context of contemporary art, Bennett (2005) similarly argued that ‘this kind of affect is [...] a crucial part of the process by which the signs unfolds to the viewer as a corporeal, sensing, emotional subject’ (37). In the same way, objects, speeches and images in museums can evoke emotions connected to past events and, once generated, the original emotions can be imitated or substituted for others (Watson 2010).

This area of museum scholarship has been particularly receptive to theoretical insights from the study of objects' sensuous properties, particularly within the fields of anthropology and material culture studies. The vast majority of these studies depart from the notion that sensuous interaction with material culture is a common trait of humanity, as well as the idea that socially constructed beliefs, language and value systems are central to the development of individual emotional responses. Stimulating debates have come from analysing socio-cultural variables (Stoller, 1989; Howes, 2005) and societies' visual aesthetics (Morphy, 1992; Coote and Shelton, 1992), which shape sensory responses to objects. Two recently edited volumes from Dudley (2010a; 2012) capture these debates' wealth and influence within contemporary museum research and practice. A closer interest in artefacts' material qualities has engendered discussions on the need to overcome oculo-centric perspectives and open museums to the diverse worlds of senses (Classen, 1993; Edwards, Gosden and Phillips, 2006; Golding, 2010; Howes and Classen, 2013).¹³

This dissertation maintains that the experiential possibilities of museum objects can also be presented to refugees, even when they know nothing of the objects (Greenblatt, 1991). The initial feeling of wonder evoked when encountering an unknown object can often 'be replaced by an intensification of self-presence' (de Bolla, 2003: 143), leading to transformative experiences for the individual. Carnegie (2006) and Kavanagh (2000) both argued that museum objects can stimulate processes of symbolisation, as they can trigger emotional and cognitive associations and act as 'containers of memories' (Mack 2003). This line of inquiry follows on the reflections of Annis (1986), who associated the museum with a 'dream space', a field of subrational image formation and interaction between suggesting/affecting objects and the viewer's subrational consciousness (169). The dream space is seen as an unpredictable and subversive space, as the viewer can arrive to multiple possibilities and associations through this channel.

¹³ In this respect, looking at the gnosis of touch and object handling as a way of reflecting on how the world touches us, not vice-versa, is a growing trend (Paterson, 2007; Chatterjee, Vreeland and Noble, 2009). The handling of museum objects is an area of practice outside the scope of this dissertation.

Building on Annis, Kavanagh (2000) suggested that museum objects might evoke personal fantasies; hence, individuals can be enlivened through their personal association with objects.

[M]any things might tumble through our minds: bits of songs, half-written shopping lists, things left unsaid. The shape or shadow of something, its texture or colour, the operation of space and the people moving through it can be triggers to an endless range of personal associations. (ibid.: 3)

This dissertation argues that refugees' encounter with objects can activate forms of introspection and creative reflection on the self and other (Silverman, 2002, 2010; Dudley, 2010b). On this note, O'Neill (2006) claimed that the stories connected with objects can engage visitors' imagination, intellect, memories and emotions, and deeply resonate with people's lives. O'Neill argued for a new museum epistemology that uses storytelling to combine structure and intuition, analysis and emotion, in order to unleash more of the real power of objects. Similarly, Silverman (1995: 162) claimed that storytelling provides a means for making and sharing in the museum space, responding to the basic human need to express and communicate the meaning we create for ourselves and others.

Developing these insights, this dissertation's concluding chapters question whether the possibilities for self-reflection offered by museum objects can also trigger genuine intersubjective experiences amongst project participants. As argued by Gurian (1999), when individuals openly and spontaneously respond to objects and each other, they might use the lexicon of the object to connect with each other. In such circumstances, Froggett (2006, 2008) claimed that objects can become 'creative thirds', neither solely themselves nor exclusively part of the individual using them. This expansive sharing of mental space can lead to new communicative possibilities, and generate bonds with others (Annis, 1986; Scott, 2006; Newman and McLean, 2004). However, Golding (2009, 2010) reminds us that these moments of complicity can only be attained when dialogical exchange is akin to respectful conversation and partners are regarded as equals.

As explored in Chapters 4 and 5, conversations triggered by objects are subject to the logics of power and prejudice, the acknowledgement of which is a precondition for true dialogical exchange (Gadamer, 1981, quoted in Golding 2009: 147-9). In this context, this dissertation aims to explore the challenges and opportunities presented when museum objects are used as a means to facilitate intercultural dialogue.¹⁴ Bodo (2012) built on Bhabha's notion of the 'third space' in claiming: 'there is a pressing need for strategies and programmes aimed at creating 'third spaces' where individuals are permitted to cross the boundaries of belonging and are offered genuine opportunities for self-representation' (184).

4. Overview of Thesis Structure.

Chapter 1.

This introductory chapter analyses contemporary Britain's social policy framework and public discourses around refugees, as articulated by state actors and the media. The analysis here contributes to scholarly debates in the field of refugee studies on belonging and the politics of belonging. This section marks the historical, political and social context within which museum work with refugees starts to consolidate. This chapter argues that, since the early 2000s, discourses and practices around asylum have increasingly painted refugees as a threat to British social and cultural values. Here, the new community relations model – implemented by the New Labour administration in the early 2000s – is of particular interest. This chapter shows how the discourses and practices developed over the past fifteen years have pushed public debates on asylum towards dangerous and de-humanising terrain.

Chapter 2.

This chapter asserts that museums can play an active role in contemporary discussions on forced migration, acting as fora for competing views and opening up mainstream discourses around refugees to debate. The investigation here aims to contribute to scholarly discussions on museums' advocacy role, as well as how platforms of

¹⁴ In the UK, the 'Collective Conversation' project at the Manchester Museum (2004-2010) was an important antecedent in this respect. In this project, a wide range of people were invited to respond to objects from the collection and 'Collective Conversations' were held with diverse groups from the community, including refugees, enthusiasts, researchers and academics (EriCarts, 2008: 142). The multiple interpretations resulting from these dialogues created a shift in curatorial practice, and some of the voices were eventually integrated into the museum narrative.

contestations might be formed, articulated and disseminated. Museums' work with refugees is located within the wider context of refugee related arts practices and the social inclusion policies of the early 2000s. This chapter emphasises museum partnerships with refugee advocacy organisations, and questions the extent to which such partnerships have contributed to contesting, challenging and repositioning hegemonic interpretations of 'refugee identity'.

Chapter 3.

This chapter discusses the challenges and opportunities of community engagement with refugees, focusing on a project developed by the SCVA and a group of local refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The analysis here contributes to scholarly debates in the field of refugee studies on the social networks formed during resettlement, and questions museology's notions of community empowerment. This chapter addresses the interdependence of group dynamics and museum practices, providing context for the analysis of people's responses to museum objects, which is further expounded on in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4.

This chapter suggests that object-centred approaches can offer museums opportunities to modify, question and counter institutional discourses on 'refugee identity'. This section is particularly concerned with scholarly debates around object-led practices with diaspora groups. Here, particular emphasis is placed on the tension between the categories of belonging constructed by museums and those envisaged by individuals, arguing that refugees have used artefacts to creatively reflect on their own 'lived experience'.

Chapter 5.

This chapter further investigates the challenges and opportunities of using museum objects as tools of self-inquiry. The investigation here is particularly concerned with museological debates around embodied experiences stimulated by objects, as well as the complexities such experiences present in a cross-cultural context. It is argued that processes of embodiment are important to how refugees negotiate belonging in Britain, and that objects representing the human body are able to intersect this area of experience. Here, particular emphasis is placed on how refugees use anthropomorphic objects to discuss areas of perceived dissonance in practices of everyday embodiment.

5. Methodology and Research Ethics.

Conducting research in a landscape of past losses and present rebuilding is fraught with both methodological and ethical dilemmas, as the two aspects are often inextricably intermingled (Mackenzie, McDowell and Pittaway, 2007). Hence, this study's methodology reflects two interdependent objectives: first, to analyse British museums' work with and about refugees (Chapter 2); and second, to critically assess the SCVA case study (Chapters 3, 4 and 5).¹⁵

The first part of the dissertation is based on primary and secondary research on existing practices. The researcher consulted existing literature on relevant projects and complemented this analysis with interviews from museum professionals across the country. The wealth of practices reviewed forms the backbone of the data analysed in Chapter 2; these practices are listed in full in the Appendix. The second part of this dissertation adopts an anthropological approach, investigating the relation between research practice and the dynamics of refugee resettlement. The data used here was collected through qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews with local stakeholders and participant observations of in-gallery workshops. Far from being an essentialised treatment of exile, this micro-study demonstrates how a more detailed experience of working with exiles and objects has the potential to illuminate wider thinking and analysis on the experience of resettlement.

The following sections of this introduction pay particular attention to the methodological and ethical aspects of the case study. These are analysed in relation to the research field under investigation, issues of consent and positionality, and the dynamics recorded in workshops. Further methodological considerations relating to the case study are also discussed in Chapter 3.

¹⁵ The original intention was to undertake a comparative analysis of the Sainsbury Centre and the Manchester Museum. During a research trip to Manchester on 28 February 2011, the researcher conducted an interview with Esme Ward, Head of Education, and arranged a follow-up conversation with Ed Watts, Adult Programme Coordinator. However, due to funding constraints, the organisation opted out and the methodology had to be adjusted.

5.1 The nature of the research field.

Analysing museums' community engagement practices requires a multidimensional understanding of what constitutes the research field. One of this study's main aims is to explore the interdependent dynamics of the 'frontier' (Golding, 2009) between community settings and the museum, and demonstrate how the former can greatly influence the way people respond to objects.

The permeability between these *in* and *out* dimensions is fundamental to the analysis of the case study presented here. As discussed in Chapter 3, a research 'informant' and local stakeholders from partner organisations granted the author access to the research field. In order to identify the multiple forces gravitating around the community under analysis, the author organised a number of in-depth interviews with health professionals, social workers and refugee community representatives. Given the sensitivity of the data, some of the interviewees retain their anonymity in this dissertation.

Conducting research within a gallery setting also presents a number of peculiarities that challenge established notions of what constitutes a research field. This study has the characteristics of so-called 'real world research', as it was carried out in a relatively controlled environment (Robson, 2011: 4). As discussed by Shadish, Cook and Campbell (2002: xix), researchers in such contexts have little control over the research process, as they are typically 'guests' who have to constantly negotiate access to the field. Chapter 3 analyses these dynamics in relation to both museum professionals and gallery guides' attempts to exert agency over the project.

5.2 Informed Consent and Positionality.

In accordance with university regulations, this study underwent a UEA Research Ethics Committee assessment. All participants consented for their data to be analysed here. Although all participants signed written forms, the author's main concern was to gain 'informed consent'. For this reason, the author also held one-to-one meetings with all participants in order to obtain oral consent. In fact, it is questionable whether signing a document is the most ethical procedure in a landscape where literacy and linguistic competence can constitute a barrier.

All names mentioned in this dissertation are pseudonyms, and in some cases personal information has been omitted to ensure anonymity. Photographic material was collected during the workshops, and participants consented to its use.

As a precursor to undertaking this doctoral thesis, the author worked as 'Museums Association Diversify Fellow'¹⁶ at the SCVA (2010-2011), developing - among other projects - a community engagement programme with local refugees.¹⁷ During this time, a reciprocal, trusting relationships with research participants was established; such relationships are widely acknowledged by forced migration scholarship as fundamental to research involving refugees. As discussed by Hynes (2003), due to their past experiences with officials and agency workers in refugee camps, refugees are likely to mistrust local community representatives. People can often misjudge a researcher's motives or have unrealistic expectations of the research's impact on their everyday lives. This dissertation fully addresses these challenges in Chapter 3.

¹⁶ The Museums Association's Diversify Scheme (1998-2011) aimed to make museum careers more accessible to ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and people from less affluent backgrounds.

¹⁷ During the first year of this research (2011-2012), the author worked one day-per-week at the Sainsbury Centre, acting as a liaison with the group. In the second year (2012-2013), Holly Sandiford, Refugee Project Coordinator, was appointed to offer logistic support in the organisation of the workshops.

5.3 Recording interactions in the workshops.

The two concluding chapters of this dissertation closely explore the subjective and intersubjective interactions enabled by objects in the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. The author did not solely record the reactions and interactions in the workshops, but was inevitably drawn into them. On some occasions, the stand of the author in the field changed from participant observation to observant participation; hence, the position of the researcher was continuously shifting between listening and speaking, between looking and participating. This fluidity can be seen as a contestation of the power dynamics embedded in research practice, highlighting the researcher's subjective intervention in the field of study. As discussed in Chapter 5, this tension enabled the researcher to gain a more reflexive approach to the data, but also presented profound ethical complexities. In 'The Art of Listening', sociologist Les Back (2007) argued that a move toward active listening and increased dialogic forms of interaction in research practice contains several ethical sleights of hand. The practice of listening to and participating in true dialogue means that one has to be open to the possibility that those involved might refuse dialogue entirely or take dialogue in directions other than those intended by the researcher (*ibid.*: 9).

At the same time, as elucidated by Golding (2009), the act of listening can also be a powerful tool in museum practice. Close listening can help practitioners become more aware of their working practices, as well as point out both a professional responsibility and a means to uncover the mechanism of oppression lodged deep in museum discourses (*ibid.*: 173-175).

CHAPTER I

On the right to belong and other narratives: 'refugee identity' in contemporary Britain

You're not from the Castle, you're not from the village, you are nothing. Unfortunately, though, you are something, a stranger, one who is superfluous and gets in the way everywhere, one who is a constant source of trouble.

Franz Kafka (1977) *The Castle*, trans. J.A. Underwood, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 44-45.

This chapter analyses contemporary Britain's social policy framework and public discourses around asylum, as constructed by state agencies and actors. The overall intention of this section is to mark the historical, political and social context within which museum work with refugees has emerged; a topic further explored in Chapter 2. Chapter 1 argues that, since the early 2000s, discourses and practices around asylum have progressively undermined refugees' right of protection, constructing asylum seekers and refugees as a threat to British social and cultural values. The analysis here aims to contribute to scholarly debates around belonging and the politics of belonging in contemporary Britain (Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2010, 2011).

The first section of this chapter investigates how an increased emphasis on border management has progressively eroded refugees' right of protection, as profound structural inequalities undermine refugees' integration after they are granted asylum in Britain. The second section analyses the impact of the new community relations model – implemented in the early 2000s by the New Labour administration – on the granting of asylum. In the third section, the legacy of these discourses is analysed in relation to the recent European 'migration crisis', arguing that public discussions around refugees are increasingly pushed towards dangerous and de-humanising terrain.

On inclusion and exclusion.

In his classic study on ‘moral panics’, Cohen (1972: 9) poignantly observed how communities are exposed, from time to time, to periods where a group of people is defined as a threat to social values. Sometimes, Cohen argues, this panic passes over and is forgotten; more often, however, it produces long-lasting repercussions that transform how a society perceives itself. The theory of moral panics accounts for how collective fears can become amplified by focusing on a symbolic ‘other’, who serves the purpose of maintaining and perpetuating the social order (Cottle, 2006: 56). Following on, Bauman (2001) argued that globalisation has dramatically accelerated this process; a process that finds its expression in a growing ‘need for vigilance and defence’. In Bauman’s view, increased human mobility has caused the death of the natural community – i.e. the community based on the idea of its members’ sameness – and, hence, escalated processes of separation and exclusion, transforming the community into ‘a besieged fortress, continuously bombarded by (often invisible) enemies outside’ (ibid.: 15).

Postcolonial scholarship has severely criticised the notion of a community as a unit bounded by instincts of self-preservation, instead claiming that notions of identity, belonging and community are ever changing and constantly in flux (Spivak, 1988; Hall, 1990). These contributions have placed particular emphasis on the power relations of domination and subordination, which are embedded in processes of inclusion and exclusion. Hall (1996) and Stolcke (1995), in particular, argued that ideas of belonging are structured by discourses of ‘cultural fundamentalism’, which tend to be mobilised as means of separation in postcolonial societies. With respect to Britain, Gilroy (2000) argued that migration policies of the postcolonial era have essentially been built on the idea that ‘ethnic differences exist and they must acquire an incontestable priority over all other dimensions of people’s social, historical experiences, cultures and identities’ (ibid.: 441).¹ It is for this reason, Stolcke (1995) pointed out, that a ‘cultural other’ – i.e. the immigrant or member of another community – is constructed as an alien, a threat to national and cultural integrity and uniqueness.

¹ Enoch Powell – in his famous ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech (1968) – was the politician who powerfully exploited the tropes of cultural integrity, calling on the ‘Englishmen to come home’ in order to reinforce and promote the ‘island race’ (Barker, 1991), and stating that ‘the West Indian does not for being born in England, become an English man’ (quoted in Gilroy, 1987: 46).

In the context of forced migration, Said (2000: 140) powerfully argued that the ‘interplay between nationalism and exile, is like Hegel’s dialectic of servant and master, opposite informing and constituting each other’. Thus, the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion are interdependent; an interdependence which the following analysis unravels by looking at both how refugees have been othered and the national community imagined (Anderson 1991). In doing so, however, we must be cognisant of the fact that national communities are far from stable, and membership criteria can be continuously adjusted to fit political agendas. Stuart Hall suggested reading this fluidity in the context of a broader ‘multicultural question’ concerned with the ways societies establish the ‘terms for groups of people from different cultural, religious, linguistic, historical backgrounds, who have applied to occupy the same social space, (...) to live together in difference’ (Hall and Yuval-Davis, 2004).

However, in the context of forced migration, this chapter also argues that the dynamics of exclusion put in place to other refugees cannot be exclusively explained through the lens of culture. Drawing on Arendt and Foucault, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998) – from the field of critical refugee studies – argued that it is in fact refugees’ humanity, not their culture, that contemporary asylum discourses question. Agamben invites us to consider refugees as the ultimate bio-political subjects: a form of ‘bare life’ whose humanity has been stripped and reduced to its mere biological existence, creating ‘the species and the individual as a simple living body’ (ibid.: 3).

Refugees and the politics of belonging.

Many contemporary debates about people’s right to enter a political community are focused on the legislative measures that grant membership to that particular community. What it means to belong and how such identifications are translated into a set of normative values are important markers for the framework adopted in this chapter. In addition to being imagined, national communities rely on processes of labelling that establish narratives of the ‘self’ and ‘other’ (Waite, 2012; Mccrone and Bechhofer, 2010; Jenkins, 2006).

Nira Yuval-Davis's distinction (2006, 2010, 2011) between 'belonging' and the 'politics of belonging' provides an interesting analytical tool in this respect. In this dissertation, the author maintains that belonging be understood as an emotional dimension of identification, an attachment that makes the individual feel part of a community (Anthias, 2009; Byrne, 2007; Jenkins, 2006). On the other hand, Yuval-Davis argues that

the politics of belonging comprise specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectivity/ies which are themselves being constructed in these projects in very specific ways and in very specific boundaries. (2011: 10)

However, as Antonsich (2010) pointed out, these boundaries are often spatial and relate to a locality/territoriality, not just to the construction of social collectivities. Territorial borders are 'one major way in which collectivity boundaries are imagined, dividing people into those who belong to the nation and those who do not' (Yuval-Davis, 2004: 218). The analysis of this "'dirty work" of boundaries maintenance' (Crowley, 1999: 30) is particularly relevant to contemporary discussions around refugee identity in Britain.

How borders are drawn is crucial to any political project of belonging. Our current understanding of borders is inextricably linked to the emergence of modern nation states, which have, since their dawn, enforced unprecedented legislation to discipline entry into political communities. In the context of forced displacement, the legal creation of borders and their management is particularly significant, as becoming a refugee – beyond discourses of humanitarianism and compassion – is primarily a legalistic experience. Bourdieu (1994) considered the nation state to be 'the *culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital*: capital of physical force or instrument of coercion (army, police), economic capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital' (ibid.: 4, italics in original). According to Bourdieu symbolic capital can have juridical manifestations, which are enforced by bureaucratic apparatuses. Bourdieu considered this capital:

a quasi divine power whereby it does not only objectify in a juridical reality, but more importantly inculcates common forms and categories of perception and appreciation, considered by the author as 'state forms of classification. (ibid.: 13)

In this respect, Fanon (1985) powerfully argued that processes of both individual and collective identity construction may be internalised by those who are subject to subordination; hence, the subordinated may end up internalising their oppressors' devaluation of themselves.

This chapter argues that the state, as a defining agent of the politics of belonging, should be the primary focus when analysing notions and articulations of refugee identity. In exerting their power to name, identify and categorise individuals, state bureaucracies generate hegemonic interpretations of social collectivities, influencing the ways such collectivities are perceived by society at large.

1. From the duty of protection to the securitisation of borders.

1.1 Rise and fall of the international refugee regime.

The experience of exile is at the core of world religions and the founding myths of modern nations.² Forced displacement also finds correspondences in pre-modern history, where the English word *refuge* emerges from the French Huguenots *réfugiés*, who found sanctuary in England in the 17th century (Meeres, 2012).

However, it was in the aftermath of World War II that 'the refugee' became a legal category of global dimension (Malkki, 1995; Black, 2001; Zetter, 1991; Hein, 1993). The newly born refugee regime established an international juridical framework to address the large number of displaced people who were unable to return to their country of origin as a consequence of the conflict (Barnett, 2002; Zolberg and Benda, 2001). To reflect the nuances of post-war Europe, Article 1 of the 1951 Refugee Convention defined the refugee as a person who:

owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

² Exile, flight and sanctuary are themes in the narratives of the three Abrahamic religions, from the stories of Jewish and Christian persecution (contained in the Old and New Testaments) to Prophet Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina (contained in the Quran). The founding myths of modern nations also draw on the experience of exile; for example, the founding of the United States of America is attributed to the Pilgrim Fathers who fled religious persecution in England (Arbabzadah, 2007).

Following World War II, the Convention was adopted as a supranational framework for overseeing refugee movements around the globe, adjusting to the ever evolving interpretation of exiles' right to be granted protection. Thus far no substantial changes have been made to the general implant of the Refugee Convention, although some commentators have argued that the complex nature of 21st century refugee relationships requires a new treaty; one that recognises the transformation of both nation-states and modern warfare (see Schoenholtz, 2015). Although the Convention sets the principles of refugee protection, each of the 147 signatories have their own distinct asylum systems, outlining the various ways claims must be lodged and refugee status obtained.

During the decolonisation period of the 1960s and '70s, the Convention was largely invoked to oversee refugee movements in the global south (Harrell-Bond, 1990). In the early 1980s, due to the rising number of Eastern European asylum seekers in Western Europe, the Convention was used as an ideological weapon: Western democracies used the Convention to oppose totalitarianism and show the superiority of the model of civil liberties.³ In this context, refugees were considered heroic individuals deserving international protection and its associated civil, political and economic rights. However, over the last 30 years, there has been a radical shift in public perceptions of and political reactions to asylum seekers and refugees across the world. As the number of refugees has risen, dramatically at times, governments of all political persuasions have implemented measures designed to deter individuals from seeking asylum. European nations, in particular, have adopted changes to their national asylum models in order to discourage applications. The Dublin Regulation, which came into force in the late 1990s, is a cornerstone of this tendency, as it is a framework for overseeing asylum applications within all European Union member states.⁴

³ The total number of asylum applications in Western Europe in 1985 reached 170,000; in 1992, that number jumped to 690,000. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, along with the Balkan wars of the 1990s, pushed the number to over five million Europeans seeking asylum in Western Europe (see Gibney, 2001).

⁴ The Dublin Regulation is part of the Dublin System, which also includes a Europe-wide fingerprinting database for unauthorised entrants to the EU. According to the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE, 2009), the Dublin System has significantly narrowed asylum seekers' access to a fair examination of their claims.

1.2 Shifting notions of protection in Britain.

The vast majority of refugees find asylum in regions neighbouring their country of origin, where they can spend several years living in refugee camps.⁵ Contrary to popular perception, only a small minority of refugees reach Europe and even fewer claim asylum in Britain.⁶ Once in Europe, the likelihood that individuals are granted refugee status depends entirely on the country where the asylum application is lodged.⁷ For example, over the past 30 years in Britain, governments of both the Conservative and Labour persuasions have passed legislation that – through increased visa controls and limitations on the rights to appeal and access welfare – have progressively restricted the right to asylum. Arguably, the measures put forward by successive British governments has made the UK one of Europe’s most inhospitable asylum systems.⁸

Britain’s current asylum provision is the result of measures that progressively redefined both refugee status and human rights legislation. In this respect, the gradual ‘bureaucratic fractioning of the label refugee’ (Zetter, 1998: 1) was a milestone, as such fractioning has jeopardised the success of asylum applications. As early as 1996, the Asylum and Immigration Act set a distinction between ‘refugees’ and ‘asylum seekers’; prior to this, these were defined as ‘quota refugees’ and ‘spontaneous refugees’ respectively (Carey-Wood *et al.*, 1995). In 2007, the New Asylum Model (NAM) introduced further segmentation by breaking asylum seekers down into seven subcategories, each with their own assessment criteria (Refugee Council, 2007). As argued by Zetter (2007), these laws made it more difficult for asylum seekers to obtain refugee status, as the outcome of their applications was, *de facto*, predetermined.

⁵ About 86% of the world’s refugee population live in refugee camps in developing countries. Turkey is the biggest refugee hosting country in the world, currently giving sanctuary to 2.5 million Syrian refugees, while Jordan and Lebanon together host 1.7 million (UNHCR Global Trends, 2015).

⁶ The UK is home to less than 1% of the world’s refugee population, out of the more than 59.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide (UNHCR Mid-Year Trends, 2015).

⁷ In the UK in 2015, 41% of people were granted asylum at initial decision. In some countries, such as Switzerland and Finland, over 70% of applications succeed (UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, 2015).

⁸ In 2015, 14,832 asylum seekers were held in detention centres. Around half of all asylum seekers find themselves detained during the asylum process. Despite the government’s pledge to end child detention in immigration cases, over 150 children were also imprisoned in the same year. Furthermore, it can take several years for asylum applications to be assessed, but asylum seekers are not allowed to work during this time. Hence, they are forced to rely on state support throughout the asylum process, which amounts to as little as five pounds a day (Refugee Council, 2015).

Complimenting these measures, the 2008 creation of the UKBA – centralising border management, internal migration and external controls, including the management of asylum applications – showed the growing emphasis on border controls.⁹ In section 2.3, the author explores how the securitisation of borders also found expression in stricter anti-terrorism legislation, which further undermined the likelihood of individuals obtaining refugee status.

These increasingly hostile measures were also coupled with unprecedented attacks on European human rights legislation. Due to the 2012 rotating presidency of the Council of Europe, David Cameron's coalition government pushed a reformulation of the European Convention on Human Rights, which governs, among other fundamental freedoms, the right to seek asylum in member states. The Conservative Manifesto for the 2015 general election also contained an explicit commitment in this regard. At the time of writing, a new Bill of Rights is currently under discussion, which is likely to enforce further restrictions on the asylum system.

The 2016 Immigration Act introduced significant steps in this direction, as it granted immigration officials expanded powers to detain individuals, seize their property, and interfere in their everyday activities on the mere suspicion of an infringing migration law. This law also significantly restricts support for asylum seekers whose first claim was rejected, denying them access to mainstream welfare provisions. Advocacy organisations argue that, in the medium term, these measures risk leaving asylum seekers with no means of support or avenues to earn money (Patel, 2015). Beyond its legal implications, the 2016 Immigration Act has shifted the moral and legal responsibility of managing migration onto civil society, introducing a culture of suspicion towards migrants, refugees in particular.

Since the mid-2000s, UK asylum legislation has increasingly discouraged applications through a legal redefinition of the refugee 'label', a renewed emphasis on border management and attempts to remodel European human rights legislation.

⁹ Allegedly, the concentration of responsibilities was intended to generate a fairer and more efficient asylum system. However, in 2010 the UKBA admitted that 30,000 asylum cases had not been processed within the six month timeframe, leaving claimants with little or no government support (BBC, 2010). In 2013, the UKBA was superseded by the UK Visa and Immigration Agency.

1.3 Granting protection, creating exclusion.

In the UK, asylum is granted through two main provisions: a dispersal system for asylum seekers and the Gateway Protection Programme for refugees (henceforth GPP), distinct from and in addition to the ordinary asylum provision. This section pays particular attention to GPP, as the programme was implemented in, among other places, Norwich.¹⁰ The intention here is to contextualise the local art and museum sectors' work with refugees, setting the stage for the more detailed analysis in Chapter 3. Studying how resettlement operates across the country provides some initial insight into the challenges and opportunities encountered when engaging with asylum seekers and refugees.

Dispersal is a key element of UK asylum policy, as it determines the geographical distribution of asylum seekers across the country while their claims are assessed. Implemented in 1999, the rationale behind the dispersal programme is to 'spread the burden' (Robinson *et al.*, 2003), discouraging settlement in the Southeast, particularly London, where the majority of new arrivals are concentrated.¹¹ The dispersal policy is compulsory, meaning that asylum seekers cannot choose where to settle and might move several times while their claims are assessed.¹² A study of the national dispersal policy identified the factors important to determining the suitability of resettlement areas (Audit Commission, 2000). These factors included: the ethnic composition of locations; existing community support networks; language support and employment opportunities. As argued by Stewart (2011: 26), these recommendations have been systematically ignored; instead, destinations have largely been chosen on the basis of housing costs and, hence, concentrated asylum seekers in the country's most socially deprived areas (see also Anie *et. al*, 2005).

¹⁰ At the time of writing, Norwich is no longer a GPP destination. Frontline services for asylum seekers still operate, as the city receives an intake of 60 asylum seekers per year. (Ann Webb, GPP public health practitioner, Private Communication, 20 June 2012)

¹¹ For an analysis of the UK's pre-1999 dispersal programmes, please see Robinson (2003).

¹² Over two thirds of asylum claims are rejected at the first instance. In case of rejection, asylum seekers are allowed to appeal once, but might have to endure relocation. If their appeal is unsuccessful, they are removed from the UK and returned to their country of origin. If their appeal is successful, applicants are granted refugee status and, by gaining access to mainstream welfare provisions, are likely to move to another location (Home Office, 2016).

Seven local authorities that serve as major dispersal areas outside London feature in the UK's top 20 deprived areas (Phillimore and Goodson, 2006; quoted in Stewart, 2011: 26). Dispersal policies have therefore deprived asylum seekers of kinship ties, social networks and community organisations, leaving them to social exclusion and isolation (Spicer, 2008). Asylum seekers are also exposed to environments in which they face prejudice (Zetter *et al.*, 2002), poor community relations and hostile receptions (Dawson, 2002).

The Gateway Protection Programme for refugees presents a similar set of concerns. GPP was established in 2004 by the Home Office, in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (henceforth UNHCR). The programme, co-funded by the European Union, offers resettlement to up to 750 people per year from refugee camps across the world.¹³ GPP's fundamental difference is that refugee status is granted to individuals before their arrival to the UK.¹⁴ According to Darling (2009: 659), this selection process has created a moral division between 'exceptional cases' and those unworthy of protection in the same refugee camp. Darling further argued that GPP should be considered a form of 'compassionate repression' exerted by the state, as the scheme co-exists alongside the ordinary, and more coercive, asylum system. However, it could be argued that this compassion is still very conditional. Under GPP, refugees are granted Indefinite Leave to Remain, which – despite its promising name – is reviewed after five years and can be withdrawn at any time.

So far, over 18 local authorities have offered sanctuary to refugees, mainly in the north of England and Greater Manchester Area (Sim and Laughlin, 2014: 7).¹⁵

¹³ There have been criticisms of the total number of refugees resettled (see Cooley and Rutter, 2007). Under a similar agreement, countries such as the United States and Canada resettle 80,000 and 11,000 respectively (Refugee Council, 2004). In September 2015, in response to the Syrian conflict, David Cameron announced that the UK would resettle 20,000 refugees under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme by 2020 (BBC, 2015b).

¹⁴ UK Visa and Immigration Agency caseworkers travel abroad to interview candidates referred by the UNHCR. The Immigration Agency coordinates the programme and GPP pre-arrival services are arranged by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Refugee Action and the Refugee Council provide reception and post-arrival integration support services, in cooperation with relevant local authorities. GPP offers a 12-month integration programme including housing, healthcare, education, language classes and casework support services (Refugee Council, 2008).

¹⁵ Sheffield was the first UK Gateway destination. Resettlement areas also include: Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Stockport and Tameside, Salford, Bradford, Brighton and Hove, Bromley, Hull, Middlesbrough, Motherwell, Colchester and Norwich (Evans and Murray, 2009).

From 2004 to 2009, over 350 refugees were resettled in Norwich from camps in Zambia, Tanzania and Uganda.¹⁶ Norwich has a historical legacy as a place of sanctuary dating back to the 16th century. The first recorded group of refugees arrived in Norwich in the mid-16th century, when the city granted protection to refugees fleeing religious persecution in the Low Countries. During this period, over a third of the city's population were 'strangers'; it was the largest concentration of refugees in Britain (Meeres, 2012: 35-57). Refugees continued to resettle in the city throughout the 18th and 19th centuries with the arrival of Jewish communities from mainland Europe. During World War I, Norwich also offered asylum to a conspicuous number of Belgian nationals following the German invasion of Belgium in 1914 (ibid.: 101). More recently, the city was one of the first UK councils to respond to the government's call for the dispersal of asylum seekers.¹⁷ In comparison to other GPP destinations, the dynamics of refugee resettlement in Norwich has received little attention, making it an optimum research field in this respect.¹⁸

In terms of how refugees have been resettled, Sim and Laughlin (2014) noted that little attention has been paid to whether Gateway groups (in terms of nationality, language, education, employment, gender, age and family structure) match well with receiving areas (see also Collier and de Guerre, 2007: 19).

¹⁶ The vast majority of refugees dispersed in Norwich, around 90%, originated from the DRC. In 2005 and 2006, Congolese nationals resettled in Norwich numbered 63 and 78 respectively. In 2007 and 2008, 69 and 72 people arrived in Norwich, among them a Roma family from Ethiopia and two Iraqi families. In 2009, among the 70 people resettled in Norwich, there was a family from Kenya and a family from Iraq. (Sue Gee, former 'County Manager-Specialist Social Work Services for Diverse Communities in Norfolk', Private Communication, 31 May 2013)

¹⁷ The Norwich Asylum Seekers and Refugees Forum (NASREF) was one of the first partnerships formed in 1999 to implement local dispersals. NASREF is still very active at the local level, holding bi-monthly meetings for non-governmental organisations, charities and local authorities. Participating organisations include: Norwich Social Services, Norwich Health Services, JobCentre Plus, Norwich Mind, British Red-Cross, Norwich Amnesty International, and The Bridge Plus+.

¹⁸ The Home Office has published two national GPP evaluation reports (Evans and Murray, 2009; Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2011). Collier and de Guerre (2007) analysed the experiences of refugees resettled in Brighton and Hove. Sim and Laughlin (2014) studied the dynamics of resettlement in North Lanarkshire, Scotland.

GPP literature also emphasises a chronic lack of support in the provision of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) services, which has exacerbated refugees' disadvantaged position in their new localities (Evans and Murray, 2009: 6-7; Platts-Fowler and Robinson, 2011: 13-14; Collier and de Guerre, 2007: 42-44; Sim and Laughlin, 2014: 25-28).¹⁹

The above mentioned reports stress how the lack of ESOL training has created considerable employment barriers for refugees, jeopardising their successful integration into the labour market. Under British asylum laws, refugees are allowed to work in the UK while asylum seekers must depend on social welfare until their case is assessed. However, a number of studies have also shown that refugees have lower employment levels than other minority groups; furthermore, those in employment are more likely to be in temporary and part-time work, under poorer conditions and with lower wages (see Bloch, 2007). More recently, the Institute for Research into Superdiversity in Britain published a compelling account of the poverty endured by refugees and asylum seekers as a consequence of asylum dispersal policies, claiming that improvements to the asylum system could generate a long-lasting, positive impact on the national economy (Allsopp, Sigona and Phillimore, 2014: 35-36).

In addition to the lack of ESOL support, some researchers have also highlighted the lack of social and cultural orientation services (Evans and Murray, 2009; Collier and de Guerre, 2007).²⁰ As highlighted by the Cultural Orientation Department – which is responsible for delivering pre-departure training for GPP refugees on behalf of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) – people have little or no exposure to the social and cultural context they are about to enter.²¹

¹⁹ GPP does not offer *ad hoc* ESOL support, meaning that refugees compete with other groups for access to mainstream ESOL provisions. These circumstances must be understood in the context of the 2010 government decision to introduce 50% cuts on ESOL. More recently, the issue was highlighted again in 2016, when the government proposed an extra £20 million to support ESOL services, a measure that some commentators consider anachronistic (Bryers, 2016).

²⁰ In Bolton and Hull, refugees were asked about the sources they used to find out about life in the UK, with most citing newspapers, magazines, television and radio (Evans and Murray, 2009: 5). Commenting on the social and cultural barriers they encountered, refugees cited the manner of social interactions and eating habits as determining factors (*ibid.*: 16).

²¹ Until 2011, the IOM organised four orientation sessions focusing on both the cultural and language barriers that refugees might encounter in Britain. Despite their little impact, the cuts introduced by the first Cameron government in 2010 meant that such trainings could no longer run (UKCO-ELT, 2011). (Brian Quaiife, IOM 'Cultural Orientation Department' in London, Phone interview, 23 March 2012)

Collier and de Guerre (2007) spoke of the need to address the cultural circumstances of resettlement, arguing that familiarity with local cultural knowledge prior to departure can reduce refugees' sense of social isolation in the UK.²²

The UK asylum system engenders profound structural inequalities and barriers to social inclusion for refugees and asylum seekers. The lack of access to adequate ESOL, employment and cultural orientation support services has significantly undermined the integration of newcomers.

2. Multiculturalism and the refugee-*other*.

The previous section outlined how the right of protection, as delineated in the Refugee Convention, has been substantially altered by measures intent on deterring asylum applications in Britain, as well as how profound structural inequalities undermine refugees' integration when protection is granted. The following section carries on this line, arguing that these shifts must be understood in the context of the social policy changes of the early 2000s in response to the alleged crisis of multiculturalism. Here, the historical framework of the second New Labour government (2001-2005) is emphasised, as this is also the time when museum work with refugees starts to consolidate (see Chapter 2).

2.1 From *Multiculturalism* to *Monoculturalism*.

Since the 1960s, multiculturalism has been the official policy of the Labour Party with regard to internal community relations. The multiculturalist political project of belonging was essentially designed as a non-assimilatory practice aimed at citizens who came to live and work in Britain from the former colonies (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 210). Multiculturalism espouses that social groups have the right to exercise their cultural, religious and ethnic differences within the sovereign British state.

²² In this particular instance, refugees were told of the Brighton's significance as a centre for gay culture, which included an explanation of public acts of homosexuality such as kissing and hugging in the streets, prior to their arrival (Collier and de Guerre, 2007: 32).

Multicultural projects are criticised the world over for their tendency to create a ‘social mosaic’, whereby groups are intentionally kept apart in reciprocal recognition and respect of their differences.²³

In Britain, the multicultural project has been criticised for neglecting power imbalances between and within minority ethnic communities, as well as for reifying and essentialising boundaries of difference within society. Recently, scholars have argued that British society can no longer be understood in multicultural terms. In particular, Vertovec (2006) coined the term ‘superdiversity’ to argue that the new conjunction and interaction of variables, which have arisen over the past decades, ‘surpass the ways in which diversity should be understood’ (ibid.: 1). Vertovec sees these changes as the product of two converging factors: the increased movement of people from more places, through more places, to more places (Vertovec 2010: 86) and technological developments – including new social media – which have made communication more accessible. Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah (2010) take the discussion further, arguing that protected strands at the core of multicultural policies – such as gender, race, disability, sexuality, faith and age – can no longer be upheld in the effort to eliminate discrimination and inequality.

In the early 2000s, there was a profound reformulation of British multiculturalism, which prompted unprecedented changes to both internal community relations and external migration policies. The 2001 riots, which broke out in the northern English, multi-ethnic towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, precipitated the perception that multiculturalism was not working. The New Labour government appointed Ted Cante to chair the Community Cohesion Review Team, which investigated the cause of the disturbances. The ‘Cante report’ (Home Office, 2001) gave a national overview of community relations in the country and put forward a number of recommendations. The study identified poor ‘community cohesion’ as a root cause of the riots, claiming that communities lead segregated lives, each divorced from the other in schooling, work, accommodation and social activities (ibid.: 9).

²³ In recent years, there has been an increasing critique of multicultural policies across Europe. The *gastarbeiter* approach in Germany has been under attack by Angela Merkel who has announced that *multikulti* utterly failed. In France, in 2005 President Chirac spoke of a ‘crisis of identity’ (Simon and Sala Pala 2010), which also became a central theme in Sarkozy’s critique of the *laïcité* (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010).

This reformulation of the multicultural model presented ‘cultural diversity’ as a problem – a source of tension for living parallel lives – and a ‘shared sense of British national identity’ as a solution for society’s ills. The language of community cohesion was quickly embedded in government policies, shifting public discourse towards the need for shared cultural values capable of uniting the increasingly fragmented parts of British society (Warmington, 2012: 38). Chapter 2 analyses the language of community cohesion in more detail, specifically looking at the impact of this language on the museum sector’s working practices with and about refugees.

If the move towards community cohesion changed the landscape of community relations, it also significantly altered policy approaches to migration. In 2002, the Home Office (2002) produced a White Paper underlining the need to ‘strengthen both our sense of community belonging and the civic and political dimensions of British citizenship’ (11). Migration held a rather ambivalent position in this enterprise, as it was presented as both a problem and a solution. The Home Office described migratory movements as already having led to positive ‘changes in national culture and identity’ (2002: 9), as Britain has been ‘multi-ethnic for centuries’ (ibid.: 10). The 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act reformulated migration’s positive impact on contemporary Britain through a stricter redefinition of citizenship criteria.²⁴

According to Schuster and Solomos (2004: 268), this ambiguous approach to migration generated the impression that ‘Britain’s *internal* ethnic diversity should be protected from outsiders and that *external* cultural or ethnic diversity was a threat to community stability’ (my emphasis). Some read this ambivalent attitude through the lens of racial politics, recalling the legislation adopted in the late 1960s to manage non-white migrants from the former colonies (Schuster and Solomos, 2004).²⁵ As argued by Squire (2005), the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act introduced the assimilationist model of a ‘cohesive nation’, supplanting the idea of the nation as an integrative ‘community of communities’.

²⁴ Migrants applying for citizenship now have to demonstrate a considerable command of English, perform citizenship ceremonies and pledge loyalty to the UK. Similar policies have been enforced by governments throughout Europe at both national and regional levels. Countries such as the Netherlands and France, as well as some German States, introduced citizenship tests requiring a basic knowledge of the country’s values, history and culture. It is important to note that many ordinary citizens and even politicians could not correctly answer such questions (EriCarts, 2008).

²⁵ The 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act contained explicit racial provisions, as it distinguished between British citizens descended from British-born parents and grandparents – so-called ‘partials’ – and those who gained citizenship from a connection with a former or existing British colony (Flynn, 2012).

Furthermore, this shift drove multiculturalism towards a '*monocultural* model of society, subjugated to a nation-building project' (ibid.: 56, my emphasis). Unsurprisingly, successive Conservative governments exploited the seductive myth of the nation. In a February 2011 speech delivered at the 47th Munich Security Conference, David Cameron declared state-sponsored multiculturalism dead (EIN, 2011). As an alternative, Cameron proposed the short-lived notion of 'The Big Society', which aimed to empower local communities through a devolution of state responsibilities to the people. However, as noted by Modood (2012), this vision did not represent a true break with the multicultural model; in fact, group differences were reinforced rather than minimised. As Cameron's idea relied on civil society to take over some of the responsibilities of state agencies, his policy remained in line with New Labour's multicultural and community cohesion models, where 'group-relations are determined by a specific politics of difference within members of British society' (Modood, 2012: 42).

The community cohesion model of the early 2000s led to a profound reformulation of multiculturalism, as it introduced a renewed emphasis on shared national values with knock-on effects for both community relations and migration policies.

2.2 The refugee as non-contributor.

The language of community cohesion, which pointed to the changing attitude towards migration, created a profound shift in the way asylum seekers and refugees were represented. In this respect, a rhetorical analysis of Tony Blair's parliamentary contributions to the House of Commons sheds light on some interesting insights.

According to Maughan (2010), Blair presented Britain as a homogenous community, arguing that its internal diversity is coupled with the essential trait of being formed of decent, hardworking people who positively contribute to society (ibid.: 26). Blair's narrative presented an interesting variation on Stuart Hall's notion of 'cultural fundamentalism'. Blair was very careful not to expand on the nature of British people's common values, as this would risk exposing social groups' differing views. British culture was narrated through the tropes of 'positive contribution', which connected members of an otherwise diverse community.

The sense of homogeneity was not derived from ethnicity or culture, but from the social contract that binds the state to its citizens. The shift to citizenship as a practice of inclusion has had profound implications for those, such as migrants and refugees, who cannot exercise citizenship rights. Therefore, resorting to the notion of ‘fairness’ as a narrative strategy created a parallel process of exclusion. According to Blair, asylum seekers violate the civic contract that unites the British community by enjoying benefits they did not help generate:

fairness is therefore about the government exercising strict controls to make sure that those who seek to abuse the system are excluded. (...). People want to know that the rules and systems we have in place are fair; fair to hard working taxpayers who deserve to know that others are playing by the rules; fair to those who genuinely need asylum and who use the correct channels; fair to those legitimate migrants who make such a major contribution to our economy. (Maughan, 2010: 25)

Interestingly, Blair also used the notion of ‘fairness’ to justify stricter border controls and identify those who abuse the system. This rhetoric was reminiscent of the semantic distinction made in the 2002 White Paper between ‘genuine’ asylum seekers, whose human rights are effectively violated, and ‘abusive’ or ‘bogus’ ones, who are merely disguised economic migrants (Home Office, 2002: 13). The argument underpinning this distinction corresponds to the notion of the ‘migration-asylum nexus’ (Castle, 2007) in the field of forced migration studies, which outlines how changing patterns of global displacement made it increasingly difficult to draw a clear differentiation between refugees and economic migrants.

Blair’s articulation of the public discourse around asylum speaks to the symbolic power exerted by the state in generating ‘forms of classification’. As the sections below outline, the asylum narratives that emerged under the second New Labour government have cast a long shadow on the public perception of refugees. The state’s asylum narratives were used as instruments of both inclusion and exclusion, strengthening the sense of internal diversity by painting asylum seekers as a threat to the civic contract.

2.3 The refugee and the terrorist ‘threat’.

Government policies and pronouncements legitimised hostility and created momentum for further restrictions on asylum seekers, particularly in the context of anti-terrorist legislation. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York (2001), Madrid (2004) and London (2005), the pressure to secure borders culminated in policies that significantly altered the right to asylum. In 2001, the government passed a law legitimising the indefinite detention of refugees and asylum seekers on the mere suspicion of involvement in a terrorist plot (Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 – section 33). In the same parliamentary act, the deportation of failed asylum seekers was described as conducive to the public good. A culture of suspicion towards refugees was even further exacerbated by the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, which presumed that refugees constituted a danger to the community if they had a previously served a prison sentence of at least two years (Sales, 2007).

The link between refugees and terrorism became even more defined by the 2006 Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act, where those people ‘committing, preparing or instigating terrorism’ (section 54a) or ‘encouraging or inducing others to commit, prepare or instigate terrorism’ (section 54b) were excluded from refugee status. Rudiger’s longitudinal study (2007: 27-29) demonstrated that refugees felt largely criminalised by anti-terrorism measures, and revealed a high level of anxiety and insecurity caused by the fear of deportation. National news reporting on asylum is also one of the biggest problems affecting refugees’ quality of life in the UK (ICAR, 2004). ‘Press myths’ are particularly relevant at a local level, where the media plays an important role in framing the asylum debate, with major implications for the refugees and asylum seekers’ integration in dispersal areas (Finney and Robinson 2008).²⁶

A number of studies in the early 2000s demonstrated the impact of terrorist attacks on public perception of asylum seekers (Finney, 2005: 23; Atfield, Brahmabhatt and O’Toole, 2007).

²⁶ In a research study conducted by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR, 2005), most people overestimated the number of asylum seekers and refugees living in their local area. For example, in Norwich, nearly one third of respondents estimated that between 2,000 and 5,000 asylum seekers and refugees lived in the city. The actual figure was less than 150 dispersed asylum seekers.

A study of the media coverage of the terrorist attack in New York found that many tabloid editorial and letters pages were quick to link terrorism and asylum (Finney, 2005: 23). IPPR (2005: 39) found that increased global insecurity had impacted attitudes towards Muslim asylum seekers in particular, who were more likely to be associated with terrorism. In this context, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh (2010) proposed that Muslim asylum seekers and refugees' identities were 'transformed by the public imagination, moving from an emphasis on their "refugee-ness" and categorization as either "bogus" or "genuine", to a primary concern with their Muslim identity, which was considered to pose a stronger threat' (ibid.: 295). More recently, the terrorist attacks in Paris (2015), Brussels (2016), and the emergence of the so-called Islamic State in the Middle-East has heightened the criminalisation of Muslim asylum seekers. Although there was no empirical evidence, the media established links between Muslim refugees and the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris (Dearden, 2015).

The anti-terrorist measures passed under the New Labour administration conflated conversations on asylum with concerns around national security. This shift in public perception has impacted Muslim refugees in particular, who have been heavily criminalised by mainstream media.

3. Refugees and the European 'migration crisis'.

The previous section argued that asylum policies in Britain became powerfully entangled in debates about internal community relations, and discussed how a renewed emphasis on shared cultural values reconfigured refugees as a threat to community cohesion. Following on, this section analyses the on-going legacy of these discourses in the context of the recent European 'migration crisis' and its alleged impact on the economy and national sovereignty. This section argues that the legislative framework and rhetorical strategies adopted over the last 15 years have driven debates around asylum toward perilous and dehumanising terrain.

3.1 Refugees and national sovereignty.

In 2015 more than one million migrants and refugees crossed into Europe, sparking the biggest humanitarian crisis and mass movement of people on the continent since World War II. Germany's decision to accept up to one million Syrian refugees has been very controversial across the continent, and fuelled large anti-asylum sentiments among right-wing politicians of the so-called 'Balkan route', in particular.

These events escalated into an EU-wide political crisis, which questioned the ability of member states to effectively deal with asylum applications.²⁷ Important questions are being raised by the divergent views on how refugee movements should be addressed; questions about the actualisation of the principle of solidarity among member states, a cornerstone of the Treaty of Lisbon.²⁸

More importantly, however, refugee movements are being increasingly instrumentalised, both legally and symbolically, by states either negotiating or questioning their membership in the European Union. For example, in March 2016 the EU signed a divisive agreement with Turkey in exchange for speeding up Turkey's EU accession. A report published by the Council of Europe listed a number of the deal's concerning elements, which included fundamental violations of the Refugee Convention. One such violation is how the deal applies a blanket policy to the asylum claims of Syrian nationals, while the Convention requires that refugee cases are assessed individually. Moreover, the EU-Turkey agreement suggests that applicants can be returned to their country of origin before their case is assessed, further undermining the application of the Refugee Convention (CoE, 2016).

In Britain, asylum discourses have come to dominate public debates on the 'Brexit' referendum of 23 June 2016. The *Observer's* nationwide survey of British attitudes and beliefs about Europe found that recent migration movements were a decisive factor for voters (Colman, 2016).

²⁷ In an emergency summit in Brussels in September 2015, EU politicians discussed a plan to proportionally resettle refugees currently waiting in Greece, Italy and Hungary. At the time of writing, an agreement has yet to be reached. Remarkably, the UK opted out of any quota resettlement schemes (BBC, 2016b).

²⁸ The Treaty of Lisbon, which came into force in 2009, is a binding legal agreement for EU member states. According to the Treaty, immigration policies must be governed by a fair sharing of financial and humanitarian responsibilities among member states (TFEU, Article 80).

However, the instrumentalisation of asylum discourses during political contests is certainly not new. As Gibney (2001) argued, discourses around asylum have, since the mid-1990s, gradually become a matter of ‘low politics’; a central argument in political elections (see Gibney and Hansen, 2003). In Britain, anti-asylum sentiment has become so inextricably linked with political platforms that the Conservative Party’s Manifesto for the 2005 general election went as far as proposing the country’s withdrawal from the Refugee Convention.

Similarly, in 2015 the Conservatives promised to scrap the Human Rights Act and introduce a ‘deport first, appeal later’ policy for asylum claims (Conservatives, 2015). During the ‘Brexit’ referendum, David Cameron, lead supporter of the Remain campaign, was accused of scaremongering for claiming that migrant camps – like ‘The Jungle’ in Calais – could move to Britain if the UK left the European Union (BBC, 2016a). From the Leave campaign, former UKIP leader Nigel Farage argued that the migration crisis exemplified EU border chaos, pledging that less people would be able to seek asylum in Britain if the UK left the EU.²⁹ Remarkably, Farage also came under fire for a poster showing a queue of non-white migrants and refugees under the slogan ‘Breaking point: the EU has failed us all’. This mobilisation of skin-colour politics seems to reproduce the ethnic absolutism that, according to Gilroy (2000), has shaped postcolonial British society. The message is clear: ethnic differences exist and must take priority over other dimensions of people’s experience. In the light of these comments it is unsurprising that some analysts accused the poster of not only inciting racial hatred, but also of breaching UK race law (Stewart and Mason, 2016).

The recent European ‘migration crisis’ put unprecedented pressure on EU member states. In Britain, the event intersected with debates over border control in the context of the ‘Brexit’ referendum. The “‘dirty work’ of boundaries maintenance’ (Crowley, 1999: 30), which characterised the referendum campaign, affected public perceptions of refugees, who were now considered a threat to national sovereignty.

²⁹ If anything, the opposite could be true. The Dublin Convention established that the EU country of entry is responsible for processing asylum claims. This means that if an asylum seeker whose claim was initially registered in Italy is later found in the UK, Britain can return the applicant to Italy. As a non EU member state, the UK would no longer be protected by the Dublin Convention, making the number of asylum claims more unpredictable.

3.2 Refugees as a burden to the national economy.

Section 2.2 argued that the ‘genuine’ or ‘bogus’ asylum seekers narrative generated the suspicion that most arrivals were disguised economic migrants who came to Britain to take advantage of the welfare system. The emphasis on ‘fairness’ and ‘positive contribution’ also fed this ill-informed debate, pushing the idea that asylum seekers strain the UK economy by receiving more than they contribute.

The context of the European ‘migration crisis’ set the stage for political actors, in particular, to exploit the idea of economic burden in order to refuse entry to refugees. Former Prime Minister David Cameron insisted on several occasions that the overwhelming majority of those trying to cross the Mediterranean were not fleeing war, but instead economic migrants seeking a better life (Travis, 2015). The misleading association between refugees and economic migrants was used to strengthen the perception that supporting refugees involves financial outlays, due to their precarious position in the job market. However, as noted in Section 1.3, refugees and asylum seekers’ minimal participation in the labour market is directly tied to the restrictions imposed by asylum legislation. In this respect, Betts *et. al* (2014) – in a study carried out in Uganda – found that refugees can actually boost local economies, as they positively contribute to state economies through purchasing power, the creation of employment and the provision of human capital (*ibid.*: 5). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently endorsed this view in a longitudinal study of the long-term economic impact of recent refugee movements (2016).³⁰

The IMF proposed, in addition to other measures, that ‘temporary exceptions to minimum or entry level wages’ be made in order to integrate refugees into the workforce (*ibid.*: 4). This approach has been widely criticised by progressive think-tanks across Europe, who claim the measure will create a second class of workers set against the existing low wage workforce, and risks fuelling an anti-refugee backlash (Prupis, 2016). In fact, such a measure could feed the widespread myth, propagated by the mainstream media, that refugees lower wages for everyone by competing for jobs with citizens (*The Telegraph*, 2016).

³⁰ The report estimated that European countries are likely, in the short term, to experience a modest increase in welfare provisions. However, if refugees are effectively integrated in national labour markets, they are expected to boost EU economies by 0.1% in the medium and long term (*ibid.*: 14-15).

However, contrary to this misnomer, it has been shown that refugees have no significant impact on national wages, lowering them only by as little as 2% (Nickell and Saleheen, 2015: 24).

In the context of the European ‘migration crisis’, refugees’ alleged economic impact has been instrumentalised to deter asylum applications. However, despite popular perception, evidence shows that refugees can significantly boost local economies if they are allowed to actively participate in the labour market.

3.3 The dehumanisation of the refugee.

As discussed in Section 2, the language, images, categories and metaphors used to describe forced migrants are not innocent; they are part of how we interpret and, therefore, act towards displaced people (Turton, 2003). The linguistic constructs used in public discourses in response to the 2015 ‘migration crisis’ presented a fundamental shift from how refugee identity had thus far been articulated.

The construction of refugees as non-contributing and a threat to national security has acquired unprecedented nuance in current asylum debates, which configure refugees as moral deviants and a disturbance to society. Media coverage of the mass sexual harassment during Cologne’s 2016 New Year’s Eve celebration is a paradigmatic example. The media blatantly attributed the attacks to Germany’s open door policy, claiming that cities across the country had been put under pressure as a result (Connolly, 2016). Since the attacks, far-right groups have capitalised on this mistrust of refugees by staging mass anti-immigration marches across Europe. The increased animosity forced Chancellor Angela Merkel to scale back her welcome policy, agree to speed up deportations of failed asylum seekers and restrict family reunification procedures. However, as investigations unfolded, it became increasingly clear that asylum seekers represented only a small minority of the men responsible (Mortimer, 2016). As argued by Judge (2010), male asylum seekers occupy a particularly precarious position in refugee discourses, as the media often uses them as a metaphor for danger. Judge traces this attitude to a gendered and racialised image of displaced people, which constructs the male body as potent, sexually violent and morally deviant (ibid.: 14-15).

Turning refugees into a foil of the law-abiding citizen has paved the way for more insidious articulations of refugee identity. In the past, metaphors of influx were used to refer to refugee movements as “floods”, “waves” and “streams” to create images of deluge’ (Bleich, 2002: 1064). However, while the use of such descriptions is not new in the context of forced displacement (Hargreaves, 1996), the rhetoric used in current discussions of asylum in Britain has gone ever further, pushing the discourse towards dangerous and dehumanising terrain. David Cameron, when asked to comment on the possibility of the UK granting protection to refugees in Calais, spoke of ‘a swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean’ (BBC, 2015a).

Cameron employed a similar construct in parliamentary debates, where he referred to refugees as a ‘bunch of migrants’ (Withnall, 2016). This brutalising language not only displays a lack of empathy for the humanitarian crisis but also, more importantly, generates a deeply xenophobic reading of refugee displacement. Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, High Commissioner for Human Rights, warned that this dehumanising language echoes the rhetoric of the pre-World War II era. In that instance, countries such as the US, UK and Australia refused to take Jewish refugees fleeing Hitler’s annexation of Austria on similar grounds, and helped to pave the way for the Holocaust (Jones, 2015).

In the context of the European ‘migration crisis’, asylum debates have constructed refugees as dangerous moral deviants. The linguistic constructs used by politicians and the media has pushed the discourse towards dangerous and dehumanising terrain.

Conclusion.

This chapter aimed to contribute to scholarly debates around belonging and the politics of belonging in contemporary Britain. Through analysing the social policies and discourses of asylum over the last 15 years, this chapter demonstrated that refugees have been progressively configured as a threat to community cohesion, a menace to the labour market and a danger to national security.

Section 1 noted how discourses and practices around asylum have reshaped the duty of protection outlined in the Refugee Convention, challenging people's universal right to hospitality. The analysis demonstrated that the state should be seen as a defining agent in the contemporary politics of belonging. More importantly, this section showed how state forms of classification, enforced by bureaucratic apparatuses, have a profound impact on how refugee collectivities are perceived by society at large. In legalistic terms, refugees have largely been defined as a homogenous social group, disregarding people's diverse identities and histories. However, as argued by Malkki (1996), being a refugee is not an intrinsic quality; it is something that happens *to* people as a consequence of supra-national circumstances.

Section 2 explored the mechanisms of exclusion mobilised against asylum seekers and refugees, and pointed to how such mechanisms complement the practices of inclusion fabricated in the imagining of the national community. This interdependence was particularly noticeable in the context of the policy shift of the early 2000s, where the rhetoric of community cohesion configured refugees as 'non-contributors' to society. The politics of belonging around asylum have intentionally kept refugees outside the national community, separating them from diaspora networks.

Section 3 outlined how the cultural fundamentalism of the early 2000s opened the door for dangerous, anti-humanist rhetoric towards asylum. Following Agamben's line, it could be argued that hegemonic discourses of 'refugee identity' have progressively stripped asylum seekers and refugees of their fundamental humanity, moving beyond 'bare life' as a biopolitical condition.

At the same time, however dominant state and supranational apparatuses may be, they are not the only agents in the field of refugee identity politics. As Tilly (1998) argued, even the most powerful institutions cannot monopolise the production and reproduction of categories, as categories can also be contested. Similarly, Yuval-Davis (2006: 205) claimed that the politics of belonging involves not only the hegemonic political powers' maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries of the community of belonging, but also the involvement of other agents, who might contest, challenge or resist the state's classification.

The following chapter looks closely at these dynamics, analysing how museums in Britain have articulated counterhegemonic discourses of refugee identity by establishing partnerships with relevant advocacy organisations.

CHAPTER II

Museums' discourses and practices around asylum in Britain

The tendency to write society as if it were populated by Manichaeian camps of either good or bad people, angels or devils, is a strong temptation. When one is writing about stigmatized and excluded social groups, this temptation is particularly keen.

Les Back (2007) *The Art of Listening*, London: Berg Publishers, pp.157-8.

Over the last two decades, museums across Britain have engaged increasingly with asylum seekers and refugees, organising targeted exhibitions, public programmes and relevant community engagement initiatives. However, despite its breadth, this work has not been adequately documented or critiqued. This chapter aims to fill this gap by providing a systematic analysis of museums' work in this area. The data presented here is largely drawn from an extensive survey carried out across the country from October to May 2011 (see Appendix).

This chapter claims that museums can play an active role in contemporary discussions on forced migration, acting as fora for the representation of competing views and mainstream discourses around refugees. The investigation here contributes to current scholarly debates around museums' advocacy role and how platforms of contestations might be formed, articulated and disseminated.

The discussion here begins by outlining debates around museums as sites of activism and their responsibility to engage with contentious social issues. Following on, Section 1 locates museums' work with refugees within the wider context of refugee related art practices and the social inclusion policies of the early 2000s. Then, Section 2 analyses museums' partnerships with refugee advocacy organisations. Finally, Section 3 discusses museums' discourses and practices around asylum, and questions the extent to which these have contributed to contesting, challenging and repositioning hegemonic interpretations of refugee identity.

Forced migration in museums: a silenced story.

In the last three decades, the increase in the movement of people has challenged how museums articulate fundamental questions of identity, community and sense of belonging. In fact, migration histories have become an increasingly noticeable feature in the international museum landscape, resulting in a fast-growing body of research stemming from, primarily, postcolonial studies (Chambers *et al.*, 2014; Whitehead *et al.*, 2015; Kreps, 2011). UNESCO has also advocated the importance of embedding migration stories in museums; in 2006, UNESCO established a global network of migration museums, highlighting their potential ‘to achieve a more cohesive and peaceful society and to protect migrants rights’ (Gouriévidis, 2014: 1). Ohliger (2010) observed that the trend in museological research and practice has been felt particularly in settler countries – such as Canada, Australia, the United States and New Zealand – who first recognised the impact of migration in shaping national identities (Ashely, 2005; Williams, 2006; Ang, 2009).¹ In Europe, museums have attempted to reposition themselves as ‘transcultural’ rather than ‘bounded and coherent’ (Macdonald, 2003) by incorporating migration stories into national mainstream narratives.

However, despite this increasing interest, museums over the world have paid comparatively less attention to forced displacement as a distinct social phenomenon. Investigating the root causes of this omission is particularly important in the context of Britain, where discussions of establishing a national museum of migration are still underway.² British historian Tony Kushner considers the omission of refugee stories to be a product of a longstanding scholarly tradition that makes refugees ‘forgotten by history’ (2006: 15-18). Kushner is particularly critical of the heritage industry and its focus on mainstream narratives of migration. Hein (2011: 118) claims that museums have an inherent responsibility to represent, arguing that by not addressing particular topics, by intention or not, museums generate mechanisms of exclusion from the public consciousness.

¹ In the US, Ellis Island – the port of entry for many migrants throughout history – was turned into a heritage site in 1990; a few years prior, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum was also established. In 1999, Canada opened Pier 21, its Ellis Island equivalent. In Australia, the Migration Museum opened in Adelaide in 1986, followed by the Immigration Museum in Melbourne in 1998.

² The Migration Museum Project is currently campaigning to create the UK’s first museum dedicated to migration. See migrationmuseum.org [accessed 20 June 2016].

Museums and other media help articulate public perceptions of certain subjects and worldviews. Although visitors actively construct meaning in response to exhibitions (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000), the narratives museums put forward are very influential in shaping public debates. In the context of forced displacement these reflections are particularly important, as they question not only whether museums have the objective duty to represent refugee histories but also, more importantly, what narratives they choose to deploy.

Museums and activism.

Smith (2006) claimed that heritage is not a static phenomenon; instead, it is a constitutive cultural process involved in the moulding and negotiating of social, cultural and moral values. If this is true, it is also important to recognise that heritage has more potential than simply shaping socio-cultural identities in support of particular ideologies (Ashworth, 1994); social actors can also draw on heritage to contest, challenge and reposition dominant views. Heritage literature has framed these multiple dimensions as a form of dissonance (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996), a multi-layering and fragmentation (Macdonald, 2003: 1) or a ‘museum friction’ (Karp *et al.*, 2006).

In recent decades, museology scholars have paid increasing attention to the shapes this contestation takes and how practices of dissent might be articulated. The new social movements of the later 20th century and the global influence of human rights discourses have given rise to increasing calls for museums to represent the rights of marginalised groups in a more equitable and fair manner (Sandell, 2011: 131). Message’s (2013) documenting of the African American and American Indian civil rights-related social and reform movements’ activities on the Smithsonian Mall throughout the 1960s and 1970s is a good example.³ This has led to questions of whether museums should contribute to social justice issues, extend government policy priorities, or participate in protesting human rights abuses (Sandell and Nightingale, 2012). The importance of locating refugee work within the human rights debate responds to the overarching aim, outlined in this dissertation’s Introduction, of placing museological practice within wider discussions on ‘hospitality’.

³ The forthcoming publication of the book *Museums and Activism* (2018), edited by Janes and Sandell, shows the increased interest in this area of practice.

With respect to debates over contemporary moral and social issues, Sandell (2011, 2007) argued that museums can be particularly effective in countering prejudice by reframing, informing and enabling society's conversations about marginalised groups (2007: 173). At the same time, while museums can play a constitutive, generative role in reconfiguring certain debates, they are also fundamentally constrained by normative consensus (Sandell, 2007). The double-binding nature of museums, as platforms where both consensus and divergence can be articulated, poses certain ethical challenges to reconfiguring museums as sites of activism. As Sandell argued (2011: 136), museums accept their role as moral agents when they step into advocacy territory, urging scholars and practitioners to more closely investigate the ethical frameworks that promote principles of equity and fairness.

In this context, Mastine (2011) urged a move towards a more contingent, adaptive and improvisational model of museum ethics, where the ethical frameworks adopted are not in the service of corporate agendas but are, instead, a social practice constantly negotiated through debate with stakeholders. Considering the ethical ambiguity and contestation which characterise asylum debates in Britain, the question of whether museums should or could adopt a particular moral standpoint on the subject is important. One of this chapter's main aims is to critically assess museums' ethical stances on asylum and explore how these were formed in partnership with relevant stakeholders.

1. Locating museums' work with refugees.

1.1 Legacy of the national arts sector.

In Jon McGregor's 2006 novel *So Many Ways to Begin*, the central character David Carter, a curator at Coventry Museum, puts together an exhibition entitled 'Refugees, Migrants, New Arrivals'. The year is 1975, and while Carter's museum director is reluctant to support the project, he recognises that it is a 'fashionable' subject. In the fictional world the exhibition takes an interesting turn; but, had it happened in real life, David Carter would have been a very early pioneer (Stevens, 2009: 13).

The art sector's interest in asylum has a long legacy, tracing as far back as the aftermath of World War I.⁴ However, it was in the late 1970s that the national art sector began organising initiatives specifically aimed at refugees, such as Dartington College of Arts' work with newly arrived Ugandan Asian migrants in Devon. During this time, the cultural sector was fraught with debates about the 'arts that Britain ignores' (Khan, 1976), and tried to mainstream the work of Asian, African and Caribbean artists (Young, 2005). Within the museum sector, these discussions emerged through the pioneering work of local authority museums, such as the Hackney Museum in London, Bruce Castle in Haringey and Leicester Museums, which largely served Asian and African audiences (Fussell, 1991).

In the late 1970s, British museums also became increasingly interested in a more socially engaged model of the museum, the framework that came to be known as 'new museology'. Throughout the 1980s, following the outbreak of tensions in the Balkans, some British arts organisations – such as B Arts in North Staffordshire – began hosting activities for incoming refugees (Kidd, Zahir and Kahn, 2008: 18). During this time, the national museum sector was still anchored in debates of 'minority arts' (Crooke, 2007), as manifested in exhibitions such as 'Reflections of the Black Experience' at Brixton Art Gallery (1986) and 'The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain' at The Hayward Gallery (1989). It was during this time in 1983 that the Spitalfields Centre for the Study of Minorities purchased 19 Princelet Street in East London, which had housed many refugee migrants throughout history. The building originally served as a shelter for Huguenot refugees; then it became a refuge for Polish Jews in the 19th century; and, from the 1930s, housed political exiles who held anti-fascist meetings in the basement.⁵

The beginning of the 1990s also witnessed significant shifts in museum scholarship and practice, particularly regarding ethnographic museums' work with First Nations and Native Americans (Karp and Lavine, 1991; Karp, Mullen-Kreamer and Lavine, 1992).

⁴ PEN International, established in 1921, is arguably the first organisation to use literature to advocate for refugee rights.

⁵ The building is currently run by a group of volunteers, but is only open to the public a few days per year due to funding constraints. 19 Princelet Street is a founding member of the migration museum network and part of the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience.

In Britain, according to Stevens (2009: 16-19), museums were instrumental in strengthening social debates around the multicultural nature of British society, which found expression in the government policies of the late 1990s. In 1990, the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery launched the refurbishment of Gallery 33, where the museum's ethnographic collection was rearranged to reflect the city's cultural diversity. In 1993, the Museum of London opened 'The Peopling of London' project, a groundbreaking exhibition complemented by a large-scale community engagement initiative exploring London's rich migration history.⁶ Nick Merriman, the exhibition's curator, explained that the project sought to challenge racist rhetoric against migrants by mainstreaming migration stories (Selwood, Schwarz and Merriman, 1996: 121; Merriman, 1997). This initiative was instrumental in establishing a particular curatorial approach to Britain's migration history; however, it still failed to integrate contemporary refugee movements within the exhibition narrative (Marfleet, 2008).

The museum sector's rising interest in refugees must be seen in the context of work done in the national art sector from the 1970s onwards.

1.2 Museums, social inclusion and its discontents.

The previous section discussed British museums' development of an asylum sensibility. Following on, this section argues that a recognisable body of refugee-related practices began to emerge in museums across the country in the late 1990s, in conjunction with New Labour's social inclusion policies.

In 1997, the Deputy Prime Minister's Office established the Social Exclusion Unit in order to identify the barriers to inclusion in British society. A year later, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) outlined the role of the arts sector: 'Arts and sport, cultural and recreational activity, can contribute to neighbourhood renewal and make a real difference to health, crime, employment and education in deprived communities' (1999: 8). At the beginning of the 2000s, the DCMS released a policy guidance document entitled 'Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All' (2000).

⁶ 'The Peopling of London: Fifteen Thousand Years of Settlement from Overseas' addressed the various migratory movements to London since 15,000 BCE, and mapped the demographics of London since 1945.

Crucially, the report identified that museums, galleries and archives should address the four indicators linked to social exclusion: health, crime, unemployment and education. As Sandell explained, the new policy formulation outlined ‘an *obligation*, as opposed to just the potential, for museums to tackle the causes of social exclusion’ (2003: 57, italics in original). This document marked a profound organisational shift in the museum sector, and impacted the practices developed thereafter.

The government established the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) with the mandate to use the DCMS core budget to fund a range of programmes in museums, archives and libraries.⁷ The museum sector’s new policy orientation also involved the creation of diversity fellowships to fast track individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds into management and junior positions, in addition to new schemes aimed at improving the diversity of museum and gallery curators – such as the ‘Inspire’ and ‘Diversify’ programmes set up by the Museums Association.

Following the new policy guidance, the Group for Large Local Authority Museums (GLLAM) commissioned the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at the University of Leicester to undertake further research into social exclusion. The report, published at the end of 2000, strengthened the findings of the DCMS, showing that museums not only impact the indicators singled out by the government but could also play a wider, and unique, role in tackling disadvantage, inequality and discrimination (GLLAM, 2000).

However, despite the evidence and increasing governmental support, the sector did not unanimously welcome the notion that museums could (or should) fight social exclusion. As Fleming (2001: 17) discussed, there were questions about museums stepping into a territory that largely concerned social work. On this note, Tucker argued that the idea that museums ‘really make a difference to their subjects is a delusion, and moreover, an insult to real social workers, police officers, teachers and housing officers who strive to make a material contribution to the quality of people’s lives’ (1993: 7).

⁷ In 2010 the MLA was abolished by the coalition government and its responsibility transferred to the Arts Council of England and the National Archives.

On the other hand, a number of scholars argued that seeing museums as catalysts for social change carries the false assumption that museums are somehow neutral institutions. Building on Bourdieu's reflections on cultural capital, Ames posited:

[M]useums are products of the establishment and authenticate the established or official values and image of a society in several ways: directly by promoting and affirming the dominant values, and indirectly, by subordinating or rejecting alternate values. (Ames, quoted in Dodd and Sandell, 1998: 408-409)

In other words, Ames argued that the social, economic, political and cultural dimensions of exclusion, which museums were being asked to fight, are embedded in museums' own practices. On a similar note, Bennett believed that 'museums, and especially art galleries, have often been effectively appropriated by social elites so that, rather than functioning as institutions of homogenisation, (...) they have continued to play a significant role in differentiating elite from popular classes' (1995: 28).

In this respect, some commentators echoed 19th century interpretations of museums as civilising instruments of the state, questioning whether British museums had been turned into a means of governmentality (Newman and McLean, 2005, 2006; see also Sandell, 2003: 45). This argument is reflected in the diverging political interests that played out through the museum sector. For example, in 2000 the Scottish Museum Council produced a document that, while aligning itself with the wider national strategy to fight social exclusion, also asserted that in the Scottish context 'social justice is preferred as a term, as we maintain that an individual's ability to participate fully in and have an access to his or her cultural heritage, is a matter of basic human right, not welfare' (SMC, 2000: 4). Alongside formal concerns regarding museums' social engagement, some commentators also raised questions about the role and purpose of museum collections.

As reported by Dodd and Sandell (2001), some felt this as an attack on culture, as if museums and galleries were being asked to turn their collections into children's playgrounds (14). In a similar vein, Moore (1997: 22) noted that social inclusion critically altered museums' core role and responsibilities. Josie Appleton (2001) echoed this position, arguing that the focus on tackling exclusion takes museums away from managing collections, which should be the central element of their practice.

In response, O'Neill (2006) claimed that promoting access to museums also raised the value of their collections, as objects gain more relevance to people's lives. He argued that the development of more socially engaged institutions requires a profound epistemological shift in museological practice, as social engagement allows people's relationship with objects to overshadow the value of objects per se.

An instrumental reading of social inclusion practices in museums risks overlooking the process of institutional reflexivity discussed in the previous section. The instrumental model of a museum serving a political agenda should be juxtaposed with a more generative one, where museums, rather than simply adjusting to political interests, anticipate and inspire policy developments.

1.3 Impact of policy discourses on working practises with refugees.

The more favourable funding regime triggered by social inclusion policies had a defining impact on the development of museum work with refugees. Since the beginning of the 2000s, a wealth of initiatives around asylum began to appear in the UK museum sector. National, local authority and university museums began to organise refugee-themed exhibitions, develop community engagement initiatives with targeted groups and deliver programmes in partnership with other national and regional museums. This dissertation argues that these practices should be seen within the context of the community cohesion initiatives of the early 2000s, which introduced performance measures that substantially shaped museums' work with refugees.

Arguably, the 'Moving Here' project (2005-2007) – led by the National Archives with the support of Big Lottery and the Heritage Lottery Fund – was the initiative that contributed most to mobilising cross-sectoral interest in refugees.⁸

⁸ The project involved a consortium of 30 archives, libraries and museums, including: MLA Yorkshire, West Midlands Museums Hub, East Midlands Museums Hub, London Museums Hub, NML, the Royal Geographical Society, the Museum of London, West Yorkshire Archives Service, the Jewish Museum and the National Archives. Moving Here built on the Welcome To Your Library project (2003-2007), a national network of five public libraries that worked with refugees. Welcome To Your Library was established through a £250,000 grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

‘Moving Here’ partially funded the Refugee Heritage Programme (2004-2008), a partnership of five London museums, which also received financial support from Renaissance London and MLA/London Museums Hub.⁹

National Museums Liverpool led the DCMS/DfES Strategic Commissioning fund ERAS (Engaging with Refugees and Asylum Seekers) (2003-2011).¹⁰ The Refugee Communities History Project (2004-2007) in London received the financial support of the Heritage Lottery Fund.¹¹ However, alongside these large-scale initiatives, the vast majority of projects were established by smaller grants awarded by the MLA, the Heritage Lottery Fund and prominent charitable organisations. The MLA’s Your Past, Their Future initiative was particularly instrumental in this respect. The programme was launched in 2004 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end World War II. In its second phase (2007-2010), the MLA awarded over £1 million to 120 projects, enabling almost 5,000 people from England’s diverse communities to explore the impact and ongoing legacy of 20th and 21st century conflicts (Dodd *et al.*, 2011).

The MLA was particularly instrumental in establishing the parameters within which refugee practices began consolidating. In 2004, after piloting a project involving over forty museums, the MLA launched Inspiring Learning for All (see Hooper-Greenhill, 2002), a methodology aimed at capturing evidence of people’s learning experience (Generic Learning Outcomes, GLO) and the impact of museums’ activities on social and community life (Generic Social Outcomes, GSO).¹²

⁹ Participating institutions included: the Croydon Museum Service, Hackney Museum, Ragged School Museum and Redbridge Museum Service (Morris, Orchard and Davison, 2007; Davison and Orchard, 2008).

¹⁰ The project also received the financial support of the Baring Foundation and other smaller grants, securing a budget of over £830,000. The initiative aimed to strengthen museums’ national and regional partnerships in order to share best practices of work with refugees and asylum seekers. National Museums Liverpool led the project, which included: Salford Museum and Art Gallery, Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens (TWAM) and Leicester City Museums Service (see RCMG, 2004; Gould, 2005; ACE, 2006; Rodenhurst, 2007; Ainsley, 2009; Eida and Conway, 2011; NML, 2011).

¹¹ The project secured over £740,000, with additional support from Trust for London. The initiative was coordinated by the Evelyn Oldfield Unit, a refugee-led charitable organisation, in partnership with the Museum of London, London Metropolitan University and 15 refugee community organisations. A major exhibition about refugees was produced as one of the project’s outputs.

¹² Although designed primarily for organisations within the MLA footprint, the ILfA framework has also been used by the wider art and cultural sectors, including the BBC and English Heritage. Interestingly, despite the abolition of the MLA, the framework is still widely employed across the sector.

The evaluation reports of the ERAS project (Rodenhurst, 2007; Eida and Conway, 2011) and The Refugee Heritage Programme (Morris, Orchard and Davison, 2007; Davison and Orchard, 2008) used the MLA discourse of ‘building stronger and safer communities’ and ‘strengthening public life’, particularly in relation to the impact of museums’ work with refugees in enhancing community cohesion.

In this context, a primary limitation of the ILfA framework concerned how notions of community and social capital were indiscriminately applied to refugee populations. As argued by Davison and Orchard (2008: 22), the framework did not consider the internal heterogeneity of refugee groups, so it became unclear how social capital should be generated and measured. This observation strikes at the very heart of how museums have approached refugee work, largely overlooking the internal diversity of the groups they engage. Chapter 3 explores this tension in more detail through a case study analysis, claiming that essentialising refugee identity is closely linked to how the new community cohesion model corralled ethnic and cultural diversity.

Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh (2012) commented on the impact of the BAME category (Black and Asian Minority and Ethnic), a classification for cultural minorities and ethnic groups that came into being around the same time. The authors noted how this process of classification segmented individuals according to stereotypical affiliations with a specific social group. They argued that the BAME category introduced a typological reckoning of cultural diversity based on its most epidemic forms (Fanon in Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh, 2012: 116). The authors concluded that these practices of segmentation effectively emphasised ethnic differences, reinforcing rather than attenuating mechanisms of exclusion. The DCMS (2006: 13) also acknowledged the potential risks of such policy approaches to cultural difference, arguing that the museum sector – through the social inclusion framework of the early 2000s – risked pigeonholing people; the DCMS stated that there was a need for cross-cutting stories, so that different historical traditions could meet.

Refugee populations are particularly interesting in this respect, as the characteristics ascribed to BAME groups – such as ethnicity and cultural diversity – are rarely employed as conceptual criteria in museums’ working practices with refugees.

Refugees are instead considered to be a social category with a set of traits distinct and apart from cultural minorities and ethnic groups, despite the fact that refugee populations might belong to the same BAME diaspora networks and share similar identity markers. The following sections analyse the specific characteristics ascribed to refugees. Here it is important to understand why such division was created. In order to answer this question, it is important to refer back to the analysis of Chapter 1, which outlined how restrictive asylum policies were used as leverage to secure internal diversity from the outside. The identity markers applied to existing cultural and ethnic minority groups cannot be extended to refugees, as they do not form part of the community cohesion model. In this sense, the BAME category not only reveals a racialised understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity, but also acts as a further othering strategy for refugees.

Museums have largely disregarded the heterogeneity of the refugee groups they engage. The essentialisation of refugee identity goes hand in hand with fixed notions of cultural and ethnic diversity endorsed by the community cohesion model, which located refugees outside British social and cultural values.

2. Partnerships with refugee advocacy organisations.

The previous section explored the structural circumstances that facilitated the emergence of museum work with refugees. Following on, this section locates the development of working practices with and about refugees within refugee advocacy organisations' attempts to counter hegemonic discourses of refugee identity. This section argues that the consolidation of refugee arts in the early 2000s had a defining impact on the discourses and practices around asylum developed in the arts and cultural sector thereafter.

2.1 The impact of Refugee Week.

In the late 1990s, refugee advocacy organisations became increasingly interested in the arts as a platform to counter negative stereotypes of asylum (see Refugee Action, 2008). It is within this framework that, on the impetus of the Refugee Council, the arts sector began gathering under the Refugee Week umbrella.

Since 1998, Refugee Week has aimed to create a welcoming culture for refugees through art-based activities held across the country. The annual event takes place in the third week of June, coinciding with the United Nations' World Refugee Day. The formation of the consortium was an important step in counteracting the hegemonic discourses of refugee identity outlined in Chapter 1. During Refugee Week, operational groups in different regions, areas and towns across Britain manage and coordinate local events. A plethora of associations – ranging from national institutions to regional umbrella networks, local charities, refugee community organisations and student-led initiatives – promote Refugee Week's initiatives every year.¹³ In 2006, Australia attempted to replicate a similar model; however, Refugee Week remains the only worldwide initiative of its kind.

Refugee Week has been particularly fertile ground for the development of museum work with refugees.¹⁴ The accompanying Refugee Week conference – attended by professionals across the sector – also further strengthened links with museums. The first Refugee Week conference was held at the Victoria and Albert museum on 20 January 2012. Refugee Week was also central to the development of a funding regime specifically focused on supporting refugee arts in the UK. The London branch of the Arts Council of England (ACE) was a particularly active supporter, implementing the 'Refugees and the Arts' initiative in partnership with the Refugee Council, the UNHCR and the British Council.¹⁵

¹³ At the time of writing, Counterpoints Arts is responsible for coordinating Refugee Week, in collaboration with The British Red-Cross, The UNHCR, Refugee Action, Refugee Council, Scottish Refugee Council, Welsh Refugee Council, Amnesty International, Freedom from Torture, British Future, City of Sanctuary, Student Action for Refugees, Migrant Help and IOM.

¹⁴ During the week, talks and gallery tours frequently feature in public programming, such as the *Made by Refugees* project at the V&A in 2011, a model subsequently replicated at the British Museum. In 2011, the V&A also organised *Asylum Dialogues*, in collaboration with Actors for Human Rights. Food and music events are also a common feature, such as the Food Festival held in 2010 at the Salford Museum and Art Gallery in collaboration with local refugee groups (Eida and Conway, 2011: 6). Site-specific installations were similarly devised, such as the *House Container Project*, a prototype of a home recreated in 2012 at the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea. During Refugee Week 2005, Leicester Museums developed a school programme aimed at challenging common myths about refugees and asylum seekers (Rodenhurst, 2007: 9). A similar project, linked to the Citizenship curriculum, was also implemented by Tyne and Wear Museums across four primary schools in Sunderland.

¹⁵ ACE does not have a dedicated funding stream for refugee arts, however its Grants for the Arts programme invested over £1 million in this area of practice between 2003 and 2006. In Scotland and the Southeast, refugee development posts were jointly funded by regional Arts Council offices and the Scottish Refugee Council and Refugee Action respectively. The British Council also contributed significantly to raising awareness of refugee-related arts practice through the organisation of two conferences in Brussels (2002) and Cardiff (2004).

The charitable sector and prominent organisations – such as the Baring Foundation and Paul Hamlyn Foundation – have also provided much financial support to refugee-related arts practices.¹⁶

At the regional level, local authorities have supported cultural and refugee community organisations in planning targeted initiatives. For example, Community Arts North West (CAN) sponsored the ‘Exodus’ programme in the Greater Manchester Area, while ACE and Midlands Refugee Council sponsored the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Arts Agency in the West Midlands.¹⁷ In the mid-2000s, the Arts Council of England, the Baring Foundation and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation commissioned a national survey to document the wealth of practices in the sector (Kidd, Zahir and Kahn, 2008). Crucially, the report endorsed partnerships between arts organisations and refugee advocacy groups, recommending that the Arts Council support a central network of refugee art practices (Kidd, Zahir and Kahn, 2008: 8-9). Platforma was born from this framework, a national network that brings together refugee groups, non-refugee groups and artists whose work examines people’s experiences both before and after they arrive and settle in the UK.¹⁸

In the late 1990s, the consolidation of refugee arts under the umbrella of Refugee Week triggered a nationwide strategy to counteract negative stereotypes of refugees. Since the Refugee Week’s inception, museums have actively participated by hosting targeted programmes and networking events.

¹⁶ The Baring Foundation has invested up to £2.5 million in refugee art practice through its Foundation Arts Programme. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation has invested over £1 million into arts projects with young asylum seekers and refugees.

¹⁷ From 2004 to 2007, CAN worked with refugees and host communities across a range of traditional and contemporary art forms. The programme included an annual festival called the ‘Exodus’ Festival, which included live music performances, digital arts and theatre productions (CAN, 2016).

¹⁸ Since 2012, Platforma has worked with over 140 artists across the country, held over 50 network meetings and reached over 700 organisations.

2.2 A critique of the partnership model.

The previous section framed museums' work with refugees within the advocacy context that enabled such projects to emerge. Following on, this section takes a closer look at the types of initiatives implemented, with particular attention paid to museums' partnerships with refugee advocacy and grassroots organisations, a common feature of this area of practice.

A critique of the 'Sanctuary' project, developed by the Glasgow Museum Service in 2002, provides interesting insights in this respect. As discussed in Chapter 1, the dispersal policies of the early 2000s sought to house asylum seekers and refugees outside London and the southeast. In 2000, Glasgow faced a major demographic shift due to the City Council's agreement to accept up to 10,000 asylum seekers. In 2001, the extensive media coverage of Firsat Yildiz's story – a young Turkish refugee murdered in the Sighthill area of Glasgow – indicated that the situation had reached critical mass. Glasgow Museums Services and the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) responded by proposing to coordinate a large-scale project, which included a six-month exhibition and an 18-month outreach and learning programme.¹⁹ This was the context within which 'Sanctuary', one of the earliest asylum initiatives in the UK museum sector, was conceived.²⁰ 'Sanctuary' not only constituted a national benchmark for museum refugee initiatives, but was also instrumental in shaping the social justice programme of Glasgow's museum services.

The project led to a programme of activities known as the 'Contemporary Art and Human Rights Programme', a series of three biennial exhibitions on human rights themes accompanied by citywide community engagement initiatives: after 'Sanctuary' (2003), 'Rule of Thumb' (2005) explored violence against women and 'Blind Faith' (2007) discussed the risks of sectarianism. 'Sanctuary' was instrumental in embedding issues of social justice within Glasgow Museums' museological practice, modelling the international reputation the local museum sector enjoys in terms of learning, access and outreach projects.

¹⁹ The author conducted interviews with Kate Bruce (Sanctuary Project Coordinator), Elaine Addington (Curator, Open Museum) and Aileen Strachan (Education Officer, St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art) at GoMA on 11 June 2012.

²⁰ 'Sanctuary' (2002-2004) was supported by the Scottish Arts Council, the Scottish National Government, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Hugh Fraser Foundation (Bruce *et al.*, 2007: 8).

‘Sanctuary’ was heavily shaped by partnerships with local refugee advocacy and grassroots organisations. This close collaboration with non-governmental agencies was particularly present in the community engagement initiative that complemented the ‘Sanctuary’ exhibition, which is explored in more depth in Section 3.1. In the course of the project, a network of local agencies and drop-in centres linked to Amnesty International and the Scottish Refugee Council provided access to over 300 asylum seekers and refugees.²¹ A number of scholars have discussed the advantages of collaborating with non-museum agencies, positing how partnerships can facilitate access to otherwise hard to reach audiences. Sandell (2007: 100) observed that partnerships can offer opportunities for overcoming museum staff’s reticence and resistance, as staff often feel ill-equipped to participate in particular projects or unable to work directly with communities.

Moreover, David Anderson (1997) noted that partnerships formed with external agencies can be instrumental to fulfilling museums’ social responsibilities, if museums and their partners share a similar set of objectives and concerns. In relation to museum work with refugees, this dissertation argues that partnerships with external organisations should be more carefully considered with regards to the projects and types of collaborations. On some occasions, the connection with refugee advocacy organisations was strengthened by the bespoke training and support offered to museum practitioners. For instance, the Community Engagement Network of the ERAS project commissioned the Refugee Council to deliver a training programme on ‘Cultural awareness and engaging with refugee audiences’ (NML, 2011: 2), which supported museum staff in their development of targeted initiatives. Refugee Action and other advocacy organisations also delivered similar programmes (*ibid.*: 3). The collaboration with the Refugee Council and Refugee Action effectively homogenised working practices across the four museums of the ERAS network, leading to the dissemination of resources, information packs and best practice guides for engaging with asylum seekers and refugees (NML, 2006).

²¹ From October 2002 to February 2004, over 14 local organisations worked in collaboration with 18 contemporary artists to produce a range of exhibitions, art performances and storytelling. A two-day conference was also organised for refugee artists and council representatives to discuss next steps. As an outcome, an independent network for asylum seeker, refugee and existing Glasgow-based artists was established, inspiring the formation of ‘Artists in Exile’, a registered charity still active in the city (Bruce *et al.*, 2007).

GoMA's model of working with refugee advocacy and grassroots organisations was replicated across the country, leading to the emergence of strikingly similar projects in terms of approach and methodology.

2.3 Tackling the structural barriers of resettlement.

Refugee advocacy organisations were interested in addressing the barriers to social inclusion engendered by the UK asylum system, particularly in relation to the lack of ESOL and employment support services (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3). Hence, projects tackling these issues became a defining feature of museum work with refugees.

The demands of refugee advocacy organisations intersected with debates in museological scholarship; debates related to museums as free-choice learning settings and sites of contextual learning. Concerns around refugees' adaptation to new occupational circumstances led museums, in collaboration with partner organisations, to develop training programmes, volunteering schemes and social enterprise projects.²² The delivery of ESOL programmes was an area of intervention where the impact of partnerships was particularly felt; such partnerships were replicated across the country. ESOL programmes were not a new phenomenon in UK museums (Clarke, 2010: 165). However museums' work with refugees considerably boosted the ESOL on offer, as the development of ad hoc, object-based learning projects,²³ conversation clubs²⁴ and

²² The Salford Museum and Art Gallery pioneered a volunteering scheme for refugees and asylum seekers, which led a number of employment opportunities for refugees (Rodenhurst, 2007: 23). On other occasions, museums partnered with social enterprises to promote items made by refugees, such as the collaboration between the sales department of the Herbert Art Gallery in Coventry and Shelanu, a Birmingham-based jewellery design collective composed of women migrants and refugees. Outside Britain, the Museum of World Culture in Göteborg, Sweden adopted an interesting approach (Lagerkvist, 2006; Golding, 2009: 96-99). The museum acted as a coordinating institution, bringing together local and regional authorities and entrepreneur groups in order to facilitate refugees' access to training, internships and employment.

²³ The Salford Museum and Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool, Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens (TWAM) and Leicester City Museums Service produced ESOL learning packs for different skill levels and abilities (NML, 2011: 1-4). Object-handling has been a core practice of work with migrants and refugees sponsored by the Renaissance Learning Group across five London museums (MLA, 2011).

²⁴ TWAM and NML developed a drop-in, volunteer-run conversation club for ESOL students, and NML piloted a 'Young ESOL Saturday Club' for teenagers. The City of Edinburgh Council's Museums and Galleries service framed ESOL classes around the visitor experience and in-gallery conversations (Clarke, 2010: 138-167).

arts and craft workshops enhanced the learning environment.²⁵

Despite their positive impact on refugee communities, these projects largely replicated the interests and agenda of refugee advocacy groups, discouraging museums from adopting more risk-taking approaches. Although both language and occupational skills are fundamental to fighting social exclusion, museums failed to explore other potential areas of intervention, such as the dynamics of socio-cultural adjustment that equally impact refugees' lives during resettlement. Questions concerning the cultural barriers refugees could encounter were widely disregarded, despite the role that museums and their collections could play in this area. So this begs the question: should museums, as cultural institutions, bear responsibility for tackling these concerns, and what are the potential risks of such projects?

3. Countering hegemonic discourses around refugees.

The previous section discussed how partnerships between museums and refugee advocacy organisations substantially shaped the types of projects implemented. Following on, this section takes an in-depth look at how these collaborations impacted the asylum narratives developed through refugee-themed exhibitions. This dissertation argues that the curatorial angles adopted consistently spoke to the counter discourses propagated by refugee advocacy organisations.

3.1 Contesting refugee identity.

This section follows the path of Pupavac (2008: 271), who argued that most analyses within the field of refugee studies have understandably focused on negative representations of refugees, while relatively little attention has been paid to how refugees have been portrayed in more liberal and progressive contexts. The 'Sanctuary' exhibition was a milestone for these debates within the UK museum sector.

²⁵ In Sunderland, the museum worked with a group of refugee women to produce a modern version of the 'railway alphabet', where letters were illustrated through textile art. The Yorkshire Sculpture Park (2009) took a similar approach in its work with young, unaccompanied asylum seekers, using photography as a medium to improve language skills (Ainsley, 2009: 18). At the Geffrye museum (2011), ESOL programmes were part of a larger befriending scheme delivered in partnership with the Red Cross. In these programmes, young people engaged with a range of artistic practices. (Laura Bedford, Education Officer: Access and Public Programmes, Private Communication, 15 October 2012)

‘Sanctuary’ began with the artist-in-residence Patricia MacKinnon-Day, who collaborated with residents of Glasgow’s Sighthill area to produce ‘indelible’, a work consisting of 76 panels, each one portraying the names and occupations of asylum seekers living in the neighbourhood.

The intention, in the artist’s words, was ‘to stand in direct contrast to the popular stereotype of refugees as parasites’. This narrative was more explicitly articulated in the exhibition, which intended ‘to redress negative media portrayal and local public perception against refugees’ (Bruce *et al.*, 2007: 10-11). The work explored issues of forced migration, displacement, torture, oppression, identity and the concept of ‘home’ through paintings, photographs and mixed-media sculptures by artists from over 15 countries. Some very highly-regarded artists also participated, such as Bill Viola, Louise Bourgeois, Gonkar Gyatso and Saadi Hirri. However, both desk research and in-depth interviews with the project team revealed that not all museum staff were comfortable with the overtly political stance taken by ‘Sanctuary’. Many in the institution felt the museum should have explored other angles to the story.

Similar concerns were voiced about the ‘Belonging: Voices of London’s Refugees’ exhibition, which opened at the Museum of London in October 2006. ‘Belonging’ was the final output of the Refugee Communities History Project (RCHP), which collected stories of refugees living in London through life testimonies conducted by university-trained community researchers (Day, Harding and Mullen, 2010). These interviews formed the backbone of the exhibition, and were accompanied by portraits of the interviewees and refugees’ personal possessions (Fig. 2a).²⁶ In addition, facts and statistics on refugee movements to the UK were also included, together with a timeline of major events that led people to seek asylum in Britain.²⁷

²⁶ In addition to ‘Belonging’, refugee partner organisations hosted 15 smaller exhibitions featuring photographs and quotes from the oral history archive. Over 160 life stories were collected and stored in an online repository (RCHP, 2007: 18-20).

²⁷ A similar approach was adopted by ‘Closing the doors? Immigration to Britain 1905-2005’, an exhibition hosted by the Jewish Museum in London. Outside of London, the ‘What would you do if..’ 2006 exhibition at the Salford Museum also documented the experience of refugees in the Northwest by including a timeline of migration to Salford since the 14th century (Rodenhurst, 2007).



Figure 2a: A snapshot of the ‘Belonging’ exhibition.
(RCHP - Evaluation Report, pp. 25).

In the reviews of ‘Belonging’, commentators were quite confident of the exhibition’s impact in shifting refugee narratives. ‘Belonging’, it was claimed, played a key role in reframing issues of asylum by encouraging a focus on what refugees add to British society (Jones, 2010: xxiv). As Lohman, then director of the Museum of London, argued: ‘the exhibition attempted to bring some balanced perspectives to the issue of asylum, encouraging people to appreciate the rich contribution of refugees to making Great Britain “great”’ (2008: 11).

The project evaluation report commented more extensively on the exhibition’s curatorial approach, observing that ‘it was felt important (...) to include some information on why refugees had to leave their homes, although we did not want this to dominate the atmosphere of the exhibition as a whole, which everyone felt should be a *positive one*’ (RCHP, 2007: 25, my emphasis). This curatorial approach was also emphasised by the project report (*ibid.*) and the summative evaluation (Johnsson, 2007) and it was also reflected on visitors’ feedback to the exhibition:

The main thing that I came away with was the section where achievements of refugees in London were celebrated... It left me feeling so heartened and so sad and frustrated at the same time... These people have done so much for us and achieved such amazing things... So why are we ignoring the potential of thousands who never get the opportunity?

This emphasis on the ‘positive experience’ was also consistently pushed by the sample of interviews included on the exhibition’s website. The stories presented talented artists, political activists and successful businessmen who, despite their ‘unfavourable’ circumstances, all contributed to the life of the capital. They all smile at the camera, caught by the photographer while playing a musical instrument or working at their desk (Fig. 2b). A transcript of the interviews also complemented the pictures. For example:

Gao Peiqi was born in China in 1949 and arrived in Britain in 1992 and (...) since coming to Britain, he has dedicated his life to promoting the democratic movement in China

Mohamed Jama came to London in 1989 and (...) initially serving the Somali community, became a mainstream service provider.



Figure 2b: ‘Belonging’: screen-capture. <<http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk>> [22 July 2014].

At the same time, by looking more closely at the discourse articulated by ‘Belonging’, some interesting insights on the genealogy and risks of its asylum narrative are revealed. As this exhibition was extremely influential in terms of inspiring similar initiatives across the country, it is even more imperative to analyse its discursive practices. Following ‘Belonging’, countless smaller scale exhibitions on refugees’ ‘positive contribution’ were organised.²⁸ It was argued that ‘Belonging’ echoed *and* actively reproduced refugee advocacy organisations’ rhetorical framework to counter mainstream representations of asylum.

Since its inception, Refugee Week has emphasised the ‘positive contributions made by refugees in Britain, promoting every year a different angle to the story’ (Refugee Week, 2014: 3). This rhetorical emphasis on refugee’s positive contribution was employed as a counter to hegemonic discourses around asylum, which portrayed the refugee as a non-contributor (see Chapter 1, Section 2.2). The 2011 Refugee Week campaign is an interesting example in this respect, as it objectified the nature of refugees’ contribution by pointing to a number of ‘typically British’ items that were, in fact, created by refugees (Fig. 2c).²⁹



Figure 2c: *100% British, created by refugees*. <<http://refugeeweek.org.uk>> [06 July 2016].

²⁸ A similar emphasis also appears in a 2007 photography exhibition at the Bolton Museum, in partnership with Refugee Action, which highlighted refugees’ achievements in their first year in the city. In 2012, the exhibition connected to ‘World Cities Refugee Stories’ at the Jewish Museum in London similarly celebrated the contribution of nine refugees from 1930s onwards.

²⁹ The *100% British, created by refugees* campaign featured posters depicting ‘the mini’, ‘fish and chips’ and ‘a marks and spencer’s shopping bag’. In the accompanying text, we learn that fish and chips would never have become Britain’s most cherished national dish without the contribution of a 17th century Jewish refugee from Portugal, and that the mini was created by Sir Alec Issigonis, a Greek refugee who fled Turkey in 1922.

Almir Koldzic, former Refugee Week coordinator, exemplified the similarity between the curatorial narrative of ‘Belonging’ and the rhetoric of Refugee Week by remarking: ‘most people do not realise the invaluable contribution that refugees have made and continue to make to this country.’³⁰

A number of limitations are presented by the conditions of ‘exceptionality’ upon which ‘Belonging’ – and indeed refugee advocacy organisations – constructed the refugee experience, particularly in relation to the type of human rights discourse it endorsed. Hannah Arendt, the Jewish philosopher who fled Nazi Germany, was well aware of the risks presented by a ‘heroic reading’ of exile. Reflecting on her own experience as a refugee, Arendt (1951: 287) sardonically stated:

Only fame will eventually answer the repeated complaints of refugees of all social strata that “nobody here knows who I am”; and it is true that the chances of the famous refugee are improved just as a dog with a name has a better chance to survive than a stray dog who is just a dog in general.

Arendt invited us to recognise that claims of exceptionality generate a sense that human rights must be earned (by making a positive contribution to society), rather than being inherent. From her point of view, this kind of humanitarianism introduces a moral economy that does justice to neither the people it is supposed to protect nor the rights it aims to uphold. In this respect, Pupavac (2008) ironically stated: ‘if asylum rights are made conditional on qualifying as nice, talented, sensitive individuals, where does this leave any unappealing, untalented, unskilled asylum seekers with culturally repellent views and habits?’ (ibid.: 285).

Museums have represented the ‘refugee experience’ largely through the lens of refugee advocacy organisations. The rhetorical strategies and curatorial angles that museums adopted effectively endorsed a reading of exile that, despite the best of intentions, risks overlooking the fundamental notion of human rights as inherent to the human condition.

³⁰ Except from the researcher’s personal interview with Almir Koldzic (London, 21 June 2012).

3.2 The use of refugee testimony.

Museum exhibitions tackling the plight of exile have frequently relied on refugee testimonies and oral histories as tools to empower refugee voices and counter negative representations of asylum. This approach is considered a reparatory strategy, a reintegration of previously marginalised refugee histories. According to some commentators, the use of refugee testimony enables personal narratives to emerge directly, ‘not lost in the translation of proxy or vicarious curatorship, but through the undiluted telling of the stories which have shaped them’ (Lohman, 2008: 11).

However, despite the importance of incorporating autobiographical tools as a counter to mainstream asylum discourses, this dissertation argues that the approach also presents a number of ethical and methodological complexities that need more careful consideration. A first and most obvious limitation concerns the pretence of empowering refugee communities by presenting, as Lohman would have it, ‘undiluted stories’ of migration. Here, the analysis of ‘Belonging’ has in fact demonstrated how these stories are often subject to curatorial agendas that contextualise refugee voices within specific frameworks. Nightingale (2014) takes a much more confident approach to the use of refugee testimony in her study on the making of the ‘World in the East End’ gallery, now a permanent feature of the ‘Home’ section at the V&A Museum of Childhood in London. The project aimed to collect both tangible heritage (i.e. objects sourced from diverse East End communities) and intangible heritage (i.e. oral histories and storytelling). The project involved nine women from diverse backgrounds – e.g. Somali, Turkish, Bengali, African and Caribbean – who received training from the Oral History Society. The work ultimately resulted in a display where people’s personal accounts of migration to London’s East End are weaved together with objects collected by community representatives or drawn from the V&A’s own collection. Nightingale, in her study, focuses on the methodological issues related to using biographical interpretative methods in work with migrants and refugees.

She highlights the importance of framing questions so as to enable people to become the agents of their own stories, as well as the opportunity to have uninterrupted conversations about their experiences.

Nightingale (2014: 109) argues that the project successfully enabled empathic listening, as the stories were collected with the knowledge that if one talks about the trauma without being truly heard, that telling might turn into a reliving of the trauma itself. However, while Ricoeur and Avtar Brah (quoted in Nightingale 2014: 110) make important assertions about the usefulness of the autobiographical model in the forming and reshaping of people's identities, trauma literature has also demonstrated how the telling and re-telling of past experiences can actually have a re-traumatising effect on refugees.³¹

As is argued in the following section, the use of testimony as a therapeutic tool to help 'suffering refugees' move on with their lives is framed by the assumption that past trauma is the only story refugees are able to tell (ibid.: 103). This assumption taps into a larger tradition in the use of contemporary refugee testimony, a tradition that expects refugees to always have a fearful, suffering voice (Stonebridge, 2013). It could be argued that pathos is almost a legal requirement for asylum seekers and refugees (Szörényi, 2009). An ethos of sufferance is embedded in Article 1 of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which defines the refugee not as a person who is entitled to rights denied to her, but as someone who is seeking protection out of fear for her life (Malkki, 1996).

Moreover, alongside ethical concerns related to the use of autobiographical methods, there are also fundamental conceptual problems with this approach. This dissertation argues that the temporal framework adopted in refugee testimony creates a division that is both chronological and spatial: an emphasis on the past reinforces a politics of belonging, whereby testimony acts as a reminder that refugees belong elsewhere. This approach not only has the effect of othering refugees, but also romanticises the experience of exile by attributing suffering and tribulations to past experiences rather than present life circumstances. As a consequence, the refugee experience is disconnected from the strains and structural inequalities people encounter in the present. In fact, it is interesting to note that refugees' present life experiences are only deemed relevant when the ethos of positive contribution is mobilised.

³¹ In a study on the impact of post-migration stress on Tamil asylum seekers in Australia, Silove *et al.* (1998) demonstrated how the remembering of traumatic events, prompted by government officials, can further augment post-traumatic stress disorders; a point also argued by Laban *et al.* (2004) in relation to Iraqi asylum seekers in the Netherlands.

We are, therefore, presented with yet another limitation of the human rights discourse articulated by museums; one where an emphasis on nostalgia risks overshadowing the lived dimension of human rights. This begs the question: Is it possible for museums to use autobiographical tools to reflect on how rights are exercised after people are granted protection? And if so, how willing are museums to use testimony to emphasise political struggles, welfare inequalities and lack of integration policies, which equally shape the refugee experience?

Museums have used refugee testimony to empower previously marginalised refugee voices. However, while autobiographical tools are useful in this respect, they can also be a means of oppression by anchoring the refugee experience to a romanticised past and potentially de-politicising human rights discourses.

3.3 Engaging with ‘vulnerable refugees’.

Refugee testimony’s emphasis on the past finds correspondence in community engagement practices with refugees, which were fuelled by a growing interest in the impact of the arts on mental health (Dokter, 1998; White, 2004; Angus, 2002; Jermyn, 2001; Cave and Coult, 2002). Museums’ networks with medical schools and health practitioners were instrumental in this respect, as they formed an intersection for the rising interest in the healing potential of museum visits (Pye, 2008; Chatterjee, 2008; Chatterjee and Noble, 2013)³² and object-handling in particular (Chatterjee, Vreeland and Noble, 2009; Noble and Chatterjee, 2008; O’Sullivan, 2008; Phillips 2008, Arigho, 2008).

‘Telling Our Lives’ (Lynch 2001, 2008), a community engagement project with refugees held at the Manchester Museum in 2000, offers interesting insight into such initiatives. As Lynch (2001: 3; 2008: 264) discussed, the project grew out of a need for emotional health support in the community. The School of Medicine’s Primary Care Unit at the University of Manchester approached Manchester Museum about devising a programme for a group of Somali and Sudanese refugee women.³³

³² In the museum sector, ‘Health and Well-being’ was one of MLA’s Generic Social Outcomes (see Section 2.3). Two special features of the Museum Association’s online journal document the wealth of initiatives that have emerged in the sector over the last decade (MP, 2009, 2013a).

³³ The researcher conducted an interview with Bernadette Lynch in Manchester on 6 February 2012.

The project's aim was to reduce the sense of isolation derived from the women's lack of English proficiency and increasing inability to relate to their English-speaking children. According to Lynch, the museum was able to alleviate these conditions by enabling a cathartic experience through having the women speak about themselves using museum objects. Chapter 4 will return to the case study analysing how material culture was used in the project.

Lynch (2004) has reflected on the ethnographic process of recording women's stories, assembling over the weeks of the project the raw material for comparison, generalisation and theory (ibid: 130). She has extensively investigated the process of objectification that has reduced the women to mere subjects of ethnographic inquiry. Lynch looked back at this approach arguing that the stories of the women were treated as a metaphor of exile, as if 'the experience of the women could stand for the experience of all refugee women and the whole experience of refugeehood' (ibid:135). Lynch attributes this act of simplification to the complexities involved in the process of cultural translation, which the museum contributed to exacerbating.

'Telling Our Lives' is a benchmark for engagement practices with refugees, as institutions have consistently borrowed the project's methodology and conceptual framework since, even outside the museum sector. A psychiatrist at the University of Manchester adopted the 'Telling Our Lives' methodology to work, on behalf of the World Health Organisation, with a group of refugees at the Peshawar refugee camp in Pakistan in 2002 (Romanek and Lynch, 2008: 285).

The 'Telling Our Lives' legacy was particularly felt in the 'Who cares?' cultural programme of 2011, which was held at the Whitworth Art Gallery. The cultural programme was part of the 'Who Cares?' initiative, a programme that the Psychosocial Research Unit at the University of Central Lancashire coordinated across six museums (Froggett, Farrier and Poursanidou 2011). The programme offered refugees mentoring and befriending support, using art-therapy as a means to connect with clients.

This dissertation argues that Lynch's framework located the refugee experience within a health paradigm largely informed by the partners involved. In the literature, the women participating in Lynch's project are addressed as individuals suffering from a pathological condition and state of anxiety and depression (2001: 3), determined by the terrifyingly dramatic, life-altering situations they have endured (2008: 264). Lynch noticed that in circumstances when 'regular life' has been clearly severed and blown apart, recounting one's own story can offer opportunities to overcome past trauma (2008: 264-265). In this context it is worth highlighting how the tropes of sufferance and vulnerability have been another dominant theme of refugee charitable and advocacy organisations. Pervasive images of refugee trauma have painted a picture of the horror of refugee-hood, juxtaposing negative media representations. As argued by Judge (2010), campaigners use these rhetorical devices particularly in relation to women and children, who are often represented as helpless and distressed. Malkki (1995) claimed that such an approach should be contextualised within the female and child helplessness imaginary of Western culture.

At the same time, as Summerfield (1999) argued, the posttraumatic stress disorders category (PTSD) is often ascribed indiscriminately to refugee populations; scarce attention is paid to people's own perceptions and interpretations of distress. Therapeutic contexts tend to overlook refugees' cultural beliefs and attitudes pertaining to concepts of 'health', 'illness' and the effect of social and cultural dislocation on the way such constructs are experienced (Derges and Henderson, 2003). Moreover, Pupavac (2008), borrowing from sociologist Talcott Parson, argued that when refugees are cast in a 'sick role' (Parson in Pupavac, 2008: 272), subjects are defined by a relation of dependency that questions their capacity for self-determination.

Under the logic of 'permissive empathy', individuals are expected to surrender their autonomy and allow professionals to access their lives and relationships. These dynamics also have consequences for refugees' own self-perception, as 'in adopting the sick role, individuals might accept that they have no ability to exercise individual agency and their capacity to function is impaired' (Furedi in Pupavac, 2008: 280).

Lynch seemed to acknowledge the limitations of ‘Telling Our Lives’ in a later review of the project. As she put it:

Despite its undoubted wish to be of service, it [the museum] displayed an almost nineteenth-century view of a passive subject, awaiting improvement. The rhetoric of service within the policy documents of the organisations in the study (as in the case of the Somali women) too often places the subject (community member) in the role of ‘supplicant’ or ‘beneficiary’ and the museum and its staff in the role of ‘carer’. (Lynch, 2014: 94)

The exploitation of the tropes of refugee vulnerability finds correspondence in the rhetorical strategies museums adopted to engage with other marginalised groups. Sandell (2011: 129-143) extensively analysed museums’ disability-related narratives, highlighting how the dominant (discriminatory, oppressive, stereotypical) representation of disabled people is often counteracted using medicalised, tragic and de-humanising interpretative frameworks.

As working practices with refugees adopted trauma-focused approaches, such practices have only marginally addressed the array of factors that can affect wellbeing during resettlement. Refugees have effectively been othered by the tropes of passivity mobilised by projects of this nature, as they promoted the notion that refugees need to be ‘fixed’ to become full members of society.

Conclusion.

This chapter contributes to scholarly debates around the advocacy role of museums and museums as sites of activism. This chapter argued that the discourses and practices museums developed with and about refugees are a product of the interdependence of governmental social inclusion policies and partnerships with the advocacy sector.

The first part of this chapter outlined how both sets of influences had a defining impact on the types of projects that emerged, bringing refugees to the very heart of museum debates around multiculturalism and community cohesion. After the radical transformations of the early 2000s, evidence suggests that museums have largely reassessed their social responsibilities, supporting the critiques of Ames and Bennett who viewed museums as institutions inherently incapable of guiding change. In the mid-2000s, the change in political climate led to a sharp decline in museums' social inclusion work. These shifts pose certain questions about the sustainability of museum work with refugees. At the time of writing, refugee projects are mostly pursued by a handful of institutions across the country. Financial sustainability can only partially explain the drastic reduction in these projects; ultimately, the question must be asked as to whether social inclusion work has effectively moved from the margins to the core of institutional practice.

The second part of this chapter used the collaborations between museums and refugee advocacy organisations to analyse the limitations of the counter discourses of asylum developed in more liberal and well-intentioned contexts. In addition, this part of the chapter discussed the partnership model adopted in refugee work, analysing the common methodological approaches and conceptual assumptions replicated throughout the country. Here, it was claimed that, despite the advantages offered by partnership work, museums have failed to fulfil their full potential when engaging with refugees.

The third part of this chapter argued that museums have participated in the construction of an ambivalent moral economy around asylum: on the one hand romanticising the 'heroic' nature of refugee displacement, and on the other pathologising refugees as 'traumatised' subjects.

This extreme formulation has effectively placed refugees ‘outside the ordinary’, subjugating human rights discourses to a form of conditional belonging whereby refugees may exert their right to protection so long as they are mentally fit and can positively contribute to British society. One could question the extent to which these discourses have worked outside the hegemony or within it. In other words, by placing refugee identity outside the ordinary, museums arguably proposed tropes similar to those exploited by state actors (see Chapter 1).

A move towards refugees’ everyday lived experience can present an opportunity for museums, and society at large, to demystify the misrepresentation introduced by extreme case formulations. An emphasis on the everyday can also provide powerful insights into a person’s sources of resilience, resistance and approaches to healing. At the same time, this dissertation argues that a focus on refugees’ lived experience requires prolonged periods of engagement and profound organisational shifts in museum working practices.

The following chapter draws on these considerations to explore the complexities of museums stepping into this territory, through a case study of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts’ work with local refugees.

Chapter III

Politics and practices of engagement work with refugees

Networks involve (almost by definition) mutual obligations [...]. Networks of community engagement foster sturdy norms of reciprocity: I will do this for you now, in the expectation that you (or perhaps someone else) will return the favour.

Robert D. Putnam (2000) *Bowling Alone*, New York and London: Touchstone, p.20.

This chapter discusses the challenges and opportunities of community engagement work with refugees. It focuses on the development of a long-term partnership between the Sainsbury Centre at the University of East Anglia in Norwich and a group of local refugees from DRC, highlighting the ethical and methodological complexities of community engagement practice. The chapter addresses the interdependence between local group dynamics and museum practice, contextualising the analysis of people's responses to museum objects, which are explored at greater length in the following two chapters.

The analysis here contributes to scholarly debates in the field of refugee studies around the social networks formed in resettlement, as well as critically questions museology's notions of community empowerment. This chapter argues that if museums wish to develop meaningful community engagement initiatives with refugees, they must be more receptive to insights from forced migration studies and adopt a more reflexive approach in their practice. In contextualising this argument, the chapter addresses refugee group dynamics by focusing on the function of diasporic social networks. These discussions are then framed within a critical review of the 'contact zone' notion in museum studies.

The first section of this chapter analyses the local arts sector and refugee frontline services' impact in providing the SCVA access to refugees. The second section discusses local refugee identity politics' influence on research practice through a look at 'Intercultural Encounters', a project with Congolese refugees that the author studied during a PhD programme. The third section analyses the project's methodology, with a particular focus on how engagement with museum objects unfolded.

Refugee communities and their social networks.

The notion of community has been frequently used, overused even, in all areas of public policy and discourse relating to migration and asylum (Amin, 2002). In both the policies and practices of integration, the ‘community’ label has been applied as a defining trait of refugee groups, with scant attention paid to its validity as an analytical category.

Uprooted and forced to flee their homes, refugees find themselves separated from the social ties and connections that define community membership. These circumstances are emphasised by the various stages of refugee flight, making affiliation to a community of belonging particularly problematic. When refugees finally reach a host country, the dynamics are further complicated by the resettlement policies of those societies. As argued in Chapter 1, UK dispersal policies intentionally disconnect individuals from kinship ties, relevant groups and social networks, leaving refugees to social exclusion and isolation.

This landscape presents an opportunity for social analysis of the spaces and processes through which people question, reinvent and negotiate ideas of community and belonging in new localities. The study of these dynamics can help to understand the specific challenges refugees face in the process of resettlement, as well as identify their coping strategies. Analysing these processes can also yield important information for practitioners who implement community engagement projects with refugees.

In this respect, studying the social networks refugees form in resettlement countries, such as Britain, is an important area of research. A number of studies have demonstrated how migrant networks play an important role in the resettlement process, both in terms of membership and services (Tillie, 2004). Migration researchers have emphasised the function of diaspora networks in the life of ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees (see Carey-Wood *et al.*, 1995). Whether or not these networks are formally or informally established, it is important to note that social networks can be a resource of social capital for individuals (Rex and Josephides, 1987; Kitching, Smallbone and Athayde, 2009). In this context, social capital should be understood as a resource available to people by virtue of their membership in a particular group (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 1993), which is used to realise their own interests (Coleman, 1990).

Existing research has concentrated on the formation of Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), recognising the importance of sites for rebuilding a sense of community (Rex and Josephides, 1987; Wahlbeck, 1998). RCOs offer pre-arrival assistance (Phillimore *et al.*, 2009), support initial reception through translation, interpretation and provision of cultural knowledge (Challenor Walters and Dunstan, 2005), and facilitate access to volunteering opportunities (Hun, 2008).

Despite refugee scholars' relative lack of interest in faith-based organisations, such associations also play an important role in the resettlement process (Ferris, 2011). With regards to the UK, Snyder (2011: 567) argued that Christian communities, in particular, provide valuable assistance to refugees by mobilising substantial resources and organisational structures. Eby *et al.* (2011) argued a similar point with regards to the United States, noting how Christian networks are instrumental in supplementing areas of interventions neglected by the state. However, if these networks present opportunities for inclusion on the one hand, they can also operate practices of exclusion on the other. In fact, social networks can be used as means of differentiation amongst refugee populations, as well as strengthen a feeling of difference towards the host society.

Museums in the 'conflict zone'.

Organisations implementing community engagement initiatives with refugees must more carefully address how they position themselves in relation to the power struggles ignited by social networks. Museum scholarship has acknowledged museums' ability to encourage the formation of groups (Scott, 2006), facilitate the building of social networks among socially-excluded individuals (Newman and McLean, 2005, 2006; Silverman, 2010) and provide opportunities for civic participation, helping people feel part of the local fabric (MLA, 2005).

This dissertation argues that a critical review of the 'contact zone' concept can offer a theoretical premise from which to unpack issues raised by both forced migration and museology scholarship. Originally coined by Pratt (1991) to discuss cultural mediation in community settings, Clifford (1997) borrowed the concept of the 'contact zone' to emphasise how colonial power relations are embedded in the interpretation of collections. Purkis (2013) traced the contentious debates around the 'contact zone' across a range of scholarly approaches and practices.

The concept has been applied extensively to curatorial models of collaboration and, more recently, to co-production with communities (Golding and Modest, 2013). In the UK, the Museum Ethnographers Group (MEG) held two workshops exploring the nature of collaborative practice, particularly focused on community groups' involvement in the curatorial process (MEG, 2013).

However, as argued by Lynch (2011a: 150), despite museums' increased engagement work, there still seems to be little realisation of what this 'contact' actually entails. Lynch noted that a fundamental flaw of engagement work can be found in the assumed, sanitised model of museum-community relationships. As an alternative, Lynch posited reading the contact zone as a space of conflict, highlighting museums' reluctance to meaningfully engage with their communities. Lynch expressed this lack of effective participation through the concept of 'empowerment-lite', which she borrowed from international development (2011a: 149-150) and explored further in 'Whose cake is it anyway?' (Lynch, 2011b).¹ These contributions addressed conflict as a by-product of community groups' lack of empowerment in decision-making processes, or as a result of museums' engagement with difficult subjects in exhibitions and displays.² However, there has been scant critical attention paid to the conflictual effects that community empowerment might have on the groups museums engage with. Analysing these dynamics is particularly important in the context of working practices with refugees and the social networks formed in the resettlement process. In fact, a number of scholars have noted that museums can significantly impact the communities with which they engage (Crooke, 2007: 27, Anderson, 1991; Karp, 1992).

Drawing on the partnership between the SCVA and a local refugee group, this chapter aims to address these concerns, analysing what happens when museums step into the 'conflict zone'.

¹ The study was part of *Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners* (2012-2015), a project supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, which aimed to facilitate organisational change within museums and galleries committed to active partnership with their communities (see Bienkowski, 2014; Lynch, 2015).

² A recent special issue of *Museum Management and Curatorship*, edited by Lynch (2013), explored issues of conflict in relation to practices carried out at University College London, Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums and Glasgow Museums.

1. Negotiating access to participants.

1.1 The local arts sector and the Sainsbury Centre.

This section traces work done with refugees in Norwich since the early 2000s, discussing the partnerships formed by local arts and culture organisations in the implementation of relevant initiatives.

The first projects with asylum seekers and refugees came from the Refugee Orientation Centre, which was established in 1999, when the city became a dispersal area. Frontline Gateway Protection Programme organisations subsequently implemented relevant activities upon the arrival of the first refugee cohorts in 2005. These interventions focused on providing well-being services, which supported refugees in matters related to accessing the health system, eating and cooking habits. In 2006, funding secured from the Home Office helped to establish the West Pottergate Health Centre, which became a focal point for refugees. As part of the centre's services, social workers and private school teachers were hired to help refugee children transition into mainstream education. Gervais Koulongou Mambs, a Congolese national who was later employed as a Refugee Service Co-ordinator by the local branch of the British Red Cross, played a pivotal role in coordinating these activities.

The local arts and culture sector also provided relevant support to frontline services, contributing to a climate of hospitality and promoting refugees' integration in the city. A range of activities were set up, from projects aimed at the general public to initiatives specifically targeting refugees. The approaches the arts and culture sector adopted in this pursuit were often extremely inventive; for example, the Tiger Football Club, the first UK refugee football team funded by the local branch of Mind.

In the mid-2000s, in conjunction with the arts sector's rising interest in asylum, local initiatives also began to emerge in the city. The *Norwich City of Refuge* project (2007) was a milestone in this respect, as it became a working model for the local refugee arts and cultural sector.³

³ *Norwich City of Refuge* was supported by The Urban Cultural Fund, the University of East Anglia, PEN UK, The Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Anguish's Educational Trust.

The City of Refuge concept was inspired by the ‘Cities of Asylum’ initiative, which was developed by the International Parliament of Writers in 1993 and endorsed by writers such as Jacques Derrida, Salman Rushdie, Vaclav Havel and Margaret Drabble. Norwich became the first UK City of Refuge, joining a network of cities around the world committed to promoting free speech and anti-racism. The initiative’s success was instrumental to Norwich’s 2012 accreditation as England’s first UNESCO City of Literature.

As discussed by Shenaz Kedar, former Programme Manager at the Writers’ Centre Norwich, the City of Refuge project mobilised a number of partnerships in the local community.⁴ For example, the ‘Strangers and Canaries’ initiative enabled refugee writers and local writers to co-deliver school sessions. The ‘Shahrazad Letters to Europe’ initiative commissioned writers from across the world to write expressive letters about the identity and future of the continent, including how refugees and asylum seekers perceive Europe. In addition, local journalists were also sensitised to the complexities of how refugees and asylum seekers are covered by the media, looking at the legal terminology and at how refugee stories are often misrepresented in the press.

In 2008, building on the momentum generated by the City of Refuge project, Norfolk Education and Action for Development (NEAD), a local charitable organisation born of the School of Development Studies at the University of East Anglia, received funding from ‘Comic Relief’ to employ a Norfolk Refugee Week Coordinator.⁵ In the last eight years Norwich Refugee Week has grown considerably, both in terms of the number of activities organised and partners involved. Projects have ranged from food festivals, walking tours, and film screenings to creative writing workshops, stand-up comedy shows and fundraising events. In 2010, Norwich and Norfolk Archaeology Services partnered with Norwich Millennium Library and the Norfolk Record Office to produce the exhibition ‘Discovering Refugee History in Norwich’, which traced refugee movements to the city from the 16th century.

⁴ The author conducted an interview with Shenaz Kedar in Norwich on 30th May 2013.

⁵ Shenaz Kedar was Norfolk Refugee Week’s first project coordinator (2008-2009). Since 2010, the post has been covered by Pa Musa Jobarteh, Executive Coordinator at The Bridge Plus+, a local charity working with migrants and refugees.

In 2013, the British Red Cross and Norwich Millennium Library established a symbolic refugee camp in the city centre to mark the start of Refugee Week.

The SCVA was one of *Norwich City of Refuge*'s first partners, as the SCVA had played a pivotal role in the establishment of relevant community engagement initiatives and annual Refugee Week celebrations. The museum organised events ranging from lunchtime talks delivered by refugees to documentary film screenings in partnership with the Norwich Picturehouse cinema. In 2011 and 2012, the Sainsbury Centre also hosted two symposia for postgraduate researchers and early career scholars to discuss their ongoing research projects with refugees. The Sainsbury Centre's contribution was also recognised at the national level, as the museum became the Platforma network's regional hub between 2011 and 2012.

The study of local partnerships and networks increases our understanding of how the SCVA formed institutional relationships and gained access to project participants.

1.2 The partnership between the SVCA and City Reach.

This section addresses the partnership between the Sainsbury Centre and City Reach, a Norwich GPP health support service, and analyses the impact of refugee intergroup dynamics on engagement practices.

The Sainsbury Centre's first community engagement initiatives with refugees were the result of a collaboration with local health support services. Ann Webb and Jacquie Mosley, public health practitioners at City Reach, played a pivotal role in establishing this partnership, as they advocated the positive effects of museum visits on refugees' mental wellbeing. In 2007, Ann Webb visited the Sainsbury Centre with a group of refugees, paving the way for a more structured collaboration to emerge.

The initial SCVA-City Reach partnership intended to provide refugees opportunities to increase their confidence, as well as sense of individual and collective identity, and to express the changes they had experienced (Sekules, 2009). London-based British Caribbean artist Dave Lewis and Gigi Scaria from India – both in residence for the 'Aftershock, Aftermath of War and Conflict exhibition' at the SCVA (2007) – worked with the first GPP cohort to produce photographs and videos for refugees to send home

to their families. The insights provided by Dave Lewis – well-known for his work on the Stephen Lawrence case and for using art to represent the rights of black people – were particularly important in these early initiatives.

In 2009-2010, Dave Lewis returned to SCVA to develop a project with another GPP cohort. This project explored the role of objects in facilitating dialogue and the telling of personal stories. During this time, local artist Liz Ballard also developed activities with refugees, together with filmmaker Matthew Robinson. Robinson had previously worked on a two-year project with refugee families that explored their interactions with objects in the gallery (Sekules, 2015: 57-58).

In 2010, this dissertation's author joined the Sainsbury Centre's Research and Education Department, managing projects with refugees and asylum seekers, among others. The author, as a representative of SCVA, approached City Reach about developing an outreach project. After consulting with Ann Webb it became clear that refugees lacked access to ESOL provision, reflecting the trend highlighted by several GPP evaluation reports (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3). As a result, the SCVA designed two pilot sessions in order to develop an ESOL project that could meet local refugees' interests and needs.

The final list of attendees showed the high demand for such sessions, and required that they be run simultaneously. Reflecting the composition of the latest Getaway arrivals to the city, most of the participants were Congolese, but nationals from Iran and Ethiopia were also present. During the first day, it became clear that intergroup dynamics were an important element: the participants were, in fact, meticulously avoiding mixing with each other, arranging themselves according to country of origin. When, due to lack of space, an Iranian national was asked to move to another room, he refused unless he was joined by a compatriot.

Tensions also emerged the following week, when a second workshop was organised and numbers dropped dramatically. After discussions with Karl Smith, a trainee social worker at City Reach, it emerged that Iranian and Ethiopian refugees were no longer willing to participate in the project, as they felt 'too different' from Congolese nationals.

Following the drop-outs, City Reach tried to re-engage these participants, but with limited success. From their side, museum staff were unable to access participants' contact details, as this would breach confidentiality. It can be argued that, in this context, the Iranians and Ethiopians employed an exclusionary strategy against Congolese nationals. On the other hand, it could also be claimed that the exclusion of Iranians and Ethiopians might have exacerbated the feelings of rejection refugees experience from other sectors of society.

The SCVA-City Reach partnership illustrates how, in some circumstances, community engagement practices with refugees can further mechanisms of exclusion, placing organisations in a problematic ethical space.

1.3 Engaging with the museum and its collections.

This section focuses on the ESOL project developed with Congolese refugees, addressing the specific challenges practitioners encountered when the museum and its collections were used as means of engagement.

In response to the positive feedback on the pilot phase, SCVA-City Reach organised an outreach project.⁶ However, this project's participant pool was in flux, as some refugees changed residence in the course of the project. After their first year in the UK, refugees are no longer bound to the city of first resettlement and can choose to relocate (Voutira and Dona', 2007).

During the project, a relationship of mutual trust developed between museum staff and participants; a relationship cemented by interactions beyond the sessions. From 2010 to 2013, this dissertation's author volunteered at the Norwich International Youth Project (NIYP), which was attended by – among others – young Congolese refugees related to the SCVA-City Reach project participants. The weekly appointments at the youth club increased the frequency of contact with the group, as parents often joined their children in the activities.

⁶ A total of eight sessions were run between March and June 2010. The sessions took place at City Reach and were jointly moderated by Karl Smith (trainee social worker), Brenda (SCVA's gallery volunteer guide and former English teacher), and the author. Workshops were attended by an average of 10 people, with a fair distribution across gender and an age range of 24 to 50.

At the same time, this growing familiarity also led ESOL project participants to formulate an array of expectations of the support museum staff might offer.⁷

In the initial phases of the ESOL project, it was discovered that people were unfamiliar with the museum as an institution. Despite the Sainsbury Centre's previous work with refugees, the ESOL participants had never visited the SCVA. It emerged that most people had little knowledge of what museums actually were and held peculiar views about their social function. In a workshop, one participant recalled visiting the Norwich Castle Museum and explained that, after this experience, she believed museums were places where mummies are stored. Karl (trainee social worker) also commented that, following the visit, another participant was so struck by one of the objects on display at the museum that she looked on *ebay* to buy one. At the same time, as the following two chapters discuss at length, refugees' unfamiliarity with museums and their collections was, far from being an inhibiting factor, in fact a transformative force in people's relation with objects.

At the beginning of the project, in order to dispel assumptions and introduce participants to the SCVA, the museum held a Congolese Family Day that was attended by over 50 refugees. The event was programmed as part of the temporary exhibition 'Basketry: Making Human Nature', which also displayed material culture from the DRC.⁸ Most people were surprised to see objects from the Congo in the exhibition, struggling with the idea that people in England would care about what they considered 'old things from back home'. Memories emerged in response to objects and people shared stories triggered by shields from North Eastern Congo and cassava squeezers from around the world. During the tour, one of the participants was taken so by a Kuba mask on display that he called a family member in DRC. The Congolese objects were more than just 'old things'; they were able to trigger a network of associations which transcended both time and space.

⁷ During the project, participants approached museum staff for help with job applications, council tax and energy bills. On one occasion, a member of staff was asked to liaise with the local bus company to challenge a fine incurred by one of the participants. In another circumstance, a refugee asked to borrow the museum's video camera to record a wedding.

⁸ Adults were given a tour of the temporary exhibition and the Lisa and Robert Sainsbury collection, while children worked on paper masks inspired by the collection. Food and drink was also provided in the mezzanine area overlooking the main collection.

The project's original aim was to provide ESOL support for Congolese refugees. However, the English grammar and phonetics agenda had to be quickly adjusted as participants started to increasingly use the sessions as a forum to discuss matters concerning their everyday life experiences. Participants raised all manner of questions: from how people marry and divorce in the UK, to how to address doctors and public officials. Everyday narratives emerged more clearly when, in two of the sessions, objects were introduced as tools to build working vocabulary.

In these sessions, museum staff introduced a small handling collection of central African textiles, and participants were also invited to bring objects of personal significance (Fig. 3a). Museum staff asked participants to pay attention to the objects' formal qualities and aspects, such as colour, shape and weight, and this sensory exploration of objects offered unexpected glimpses into people's everyday experiences: the motifs of a Kuba cloth ignited a discussion about how people express their own identity in the UK; a participant's hat, which she bought at a charity shop, prompted other participants' comments on consumption and the amount of new objects people discard (Fig. 3b).



Figure 3a: Participants examining Kuba textiles.



Figure 3b: Discussing a straw hat brought by one of the participants.

The narratives that emerged in the workshops showed that certain objects held potential, providing refugees with a symbolic platform to express concepts and ideas which were otherwise difficult to verbalise.

The refugee cohort's lack of familiarity with the museum constituted an initial barrier to engagement. However, the experiential possibilities offered by the SCVA and its collections provided further opportunities for both research and practice.

2. ‘Intercultural Encounters’: Congolese identity politics at work.

As outlined in the sections above, the SCVA originally aimed to engage with the wider refugee population, but this collapsed under the pressure of intergroup dynamics. This section introduces ‘Intercultural Encounters’, a community engagement project devised by the Sainsbury Centre with local Congolese refugees and researched by the author as part of a PhD programme.⁹ This section addresses the interplay between Congolese identity politics and research practice, deepening our understanding of the refugee cohort with which the museum engaged.

2.1 The impact of ethnic alliances.

This section analyses the social networks formed by Congolese refugees in Norwich, arguing that the notion of a ‘Congolese community’ needs to be more carefully unpacked.

Various sociological and anthropological studies have described how refugee social networks use practices of differentiation in the resettlement; practices that are likely to reproduce the political divisions and conflicts experienced ‘at home’. These studies indicate that reasons for flight are often a source of disagreement among refugee populations, and present an obstacle to integration at the local level (Gold, 1992; McDowell, 1996; Valtonen, 1997).

In relation to the local Congolese diaspora, pre-existing ethnic conflicts and rivalries were fundamental to internal group dynamics. Patrick Ngoie, GPP translator for French and Swahili, spoke of a man referred to as Banyamulenge, who became so excluded from local social networks that he eventually relocated.¹⁰ This conflict was deeply rooted in the complex historical and ethnic relations between DRC and neighbouring Rwanda. The formation of the Rwandan Republic in 1961 led to an extensive migration of ethnic Tutsi Rwandese to then Zaire (nowadays DRC).

⁹ The initiative was funded by the TAP (Time and Place) initiative, part of the EU Interreg IV A Cross-Channel. TAP explored the cultural and environmental heritage of Northern France and South-Eastern England. The programme was led by the arts organisation Fabrica in Brighton, in partnership with Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in the UK and the Musée des Beaux Art Calais, the Communauté d’Agglomération du Calais, and FRAC Basse-Normandie in France (Sekules, 2015: vii).

¹⁰ The author conducted an in-depth interview with Patrick Ngoie on 27 May 2014 at City Reach, Norwich.

Incomers were called Banyamulenge, a term that designates those who come from Rwanda and is considered in common parlance as a synonymous for ‘strangers’. During the 1994 Rwandan genocide a more conspicuous number of Rwandese migrants reached Eastern Congo, setting off a series of events which led to the First Congo War (1996-1997) and the end of the Mobutu regime.¹¹ It is not difficult to imagine that the Banyamulenge man, despite being third generation Congolese, was considered a ‘stranger’ and held morally responsible for the outbreak of the civil war. If this was the case, he might have experienced several levels of exclusion: as an ethnic Tutsi, he was first persecuted in the Congo by Hutu genocidaires and later stigmatised by his compatriots in the diaspora.

Attempts to establish Congolese RCOs at the local level also brought the impact of ethnic rivalry on internal group dynamics to the fore. Norwich City Council offered up to 7000 pounds to fund the formation of relevant community organisations. At present however, the Norfolk Congolese Association (NOCA), established in 2013, is the only active Congolese organisation operating in the region. NOCA acts as a representative organisation for the Congolese community, and is directly involved in the provision of services and activities.

Patrick Ngoie revealed that the process of forming RCOs was often used as a medium for mastering consent and strengthening ethnic alliances, a process which exacerbated pre-existing ethnic conflicts. Upon resettlement in Norwich, new arrivals were systematically approached by ethnic compatriots, who promised to defend their interests in exchange for support in forming an RCO. Initiatives were not always successful, but in instances where RCOs were created, there were a number of allegations regarding how the council’s resources were used.

¹¹ In the 1994 Rwandan genocide, up to one million Tutsi were killed over three months. During this period, one and half million Rwandans settled in neighbouring Zaire, including some Hutu perpetrators who continued terrorising both against newly arrived Rwandan Tutsi and pre-existing Banyamulenge people in eastern Zaire. Banyamulenge people organised a rebellion that grew into a civil war and eventually overthrew Mobutu in 1997, reverting the name of the country to Democratic Republic of Congo (see Reyntjens, 2009).

Alongside ethnicity, the administration of public funding was another important driver for local Congolese identity politics, and the debts refugees had mounted during flight were particularly influential in this regard. According to Patrick Ngoie, many Congolese refugees knew each other before arriving in Norwich, having spent years living alongside one another in refugee camps in Zambia, Uganda and Tanzania. The translator observed that individuals' roles and responsibilities in the camps had established power relations that were being reproduced in Norwich. Refugees were assigned different roles in the administration of camp life, which effectively meant that some people, such as those responsible for food distribution, controlled more resources than others. As a result, those in positions of power were sometimes promised money in exchange for commodities, causing others to contract debts. If debts could not be repaid within a short period, it was informally agreed that they would be settled when more favourable conditions arose. Alongside debts contracted in camps, some people were also liable to creditors (mainly relatives), who had offered financial support during refugees' internal and external displacement.

Therefore, refugees were expected to settle all debts contracted during flight when they resettled in Norwich. The local Congolese diaspora found a rather inventive way to deal with this issue. According to Patrick Ngoie, people formed an informal, cooperative banking system that used benefit money to pay back debts on a rota. The business model required each family to give weekly contributions according to the amount of benefits they received from the state. It was reported that conflicts arose when some families did not honour their weekly contribution, causing others to delay their repayments. As Patrick Ngoie noted, this system also led to a renegotiation of pre-existing power relations, as larger family units (who were entitled to more benefits) pretended to have more shares in the fund.

The local Congolese refugee population was far from homogenous. Both pre-existing ethnic conflicts and clashes over financial resources exerted considerable influence in the shaping of group dynamics.

2.2 The research participants.

This section investigates the composition of the refugee cohort engaged by the museum in more detail, exploring the impact of religious affiliation on group dynamics.

The research project ran between October 2012 and May 2013, and was joined by ten former ESOL project participants. All refugees hailed from Eastern Congo, although this encompasses a vast area and they allegedly did not know each other – from displacement camps or elsewhere – before their arrival in Norwich. Many attendees were married couples with a wide range of skills and expertise: there were some teachers, housewives, tailors, journalists and technicians. The majority of respondents were fluent in Swahili, and a minority also spoke French. The cohort was far from ethnically homogenous. At the beginning of the project, participants were asked what ethnicity they identified with, and this information was then triangulated by Patrick Ngoie, GPP translator. The refugees identified with a number of ethnic groups indicated in Fig. 3c below and including Luba-Kasai, Luba-Hemba, Bashi and Bangubangu.

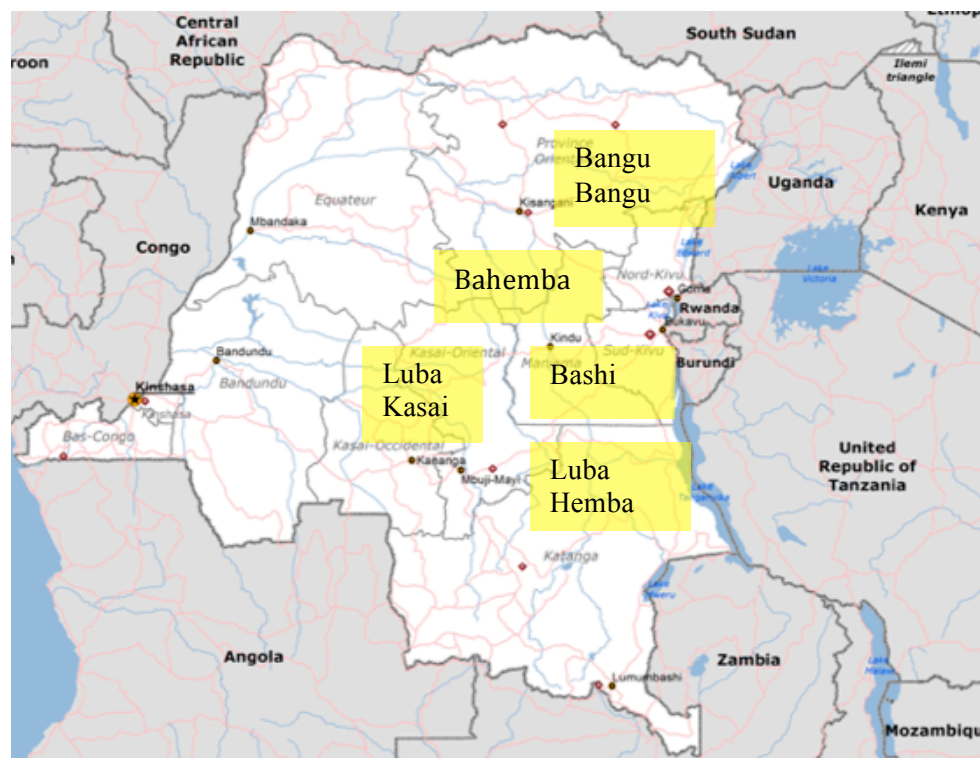


Figure 3c: Ethnic groups research participants identified with.
Maps of DRC (Google Earth, 2016).

The research participants did not form a stable and cohesive group. The ethnic rivalries characteristic of the local Congolese diaspora might have also influenced relational dynamics, as conflicts broke out throughout the research period and some participants withdrew from the project.

At the same time, while participants differed with respect to ethnicity, they all largely identified as practising Methodists or Pentecostals, both movements particularly active in Eastern Congo and the Katanga region. Chapters 4 and 5 explore the impact of Christianity on the project in more depth. At this stage, however, it is important to note that affiliation with a Christian community was not only a spiritual matter, it was also a driving force of local refugee identity politics. A different religious sensibility could also explain why Ethiopian nationals withdrew from the ESOL project. Ethiopian Christians regard themselves as having the authentic link to the lived experience of Christ, possibly accounting for their resistance to mix with Congolese nationals, even though also Christian.

Ann Webb, who assisted several Gateway resettlement cases, offered an important line of inquiry with respect to the local Congolese diaspora.¹² Ann observed that one of the biggest tensions amongst Congolese refugees in Norwich was, in fact, the split between those who believed in the efficacy of witchcraft and those who vehemently opposed it. She reported several instances when illnesses were attributed to sorcery and patients refused treatment, causing various conflicts to arise. On one occasion, a Congolese sorcerer visited a sick patient at a local hospital. Ann Webb reported that this sorcerer told the patient's family that they had been cursed and there was little doctors could do to help. The family was very upset by the sorcerer and the exchange escalated into a fight in which, eventually, the police were called.

The role of Christian organisations in the resettlement process also shows the influence of religious discourse in local Congolese identity politics. Project participants regularly attended Sunday services at the Norwich Chapelfield Road Methodist Church, which became a focal point for Congolese and other African nationals.

¹² The author conducted an interview with Ann Webb at City Reach, Norwich on 27 May 2014.

For a Pentecostal or Baptist, becoming part of a Methodist community would be considered adapting to the local ‘religious offer’. Historically however, the links between Methodism and Pentecostal movement are actually much closer than often assumed, as Pentecostalism grew out of the Methodist tradition and the 19th century holiness revival (see Dayton, 1986).

The influence of local Christian networks should not be underestimated, as they constitute an important aspect of social reconstruction in Britain. Shandy (2002), in a study on Christianity’s socio-political role in the resettlement of South Sudanese Christian Nuer refugees in the United States, observed that religious institutions often offer support with all manner of things, from clothing and goods to legal matters. Shandy argued that churches are also vital agents in converting immigrants into citizens, exerting considerable influence over the adaptation process in line with their worldview (ibid.: 216).

Religious affiliation was a source of tension within the local Congolese diaspora. Although hailing from a range of ethnic backgrounds, the research participants all identified as practising Christians.

2.3 The role of the gatekeeper.

This section analyses a partnership with a project participant who acted as a gatekeeper for the group, as well as the impact this partnership had on both community dynamics and research practice.

City Reach only provided support for refugees in their first year of resettlement, meaning that the organisation could no longer act as an intermediary for the group. Hence, in order to facilitate access to participants, museum staff and the researcher approached a member of the former ESOL group – ‘Albert’. Albert was a practicing Christian of Kuba descent and a respected member of the local Congolese diaspora. He had worked as a journalist in DRC and, after spending one year in a refugee camp in Uganda, had reached Britain with his family in 2009. Albert came into contact with the museum through the outreach project and immediately expressed interest in the initiative.

When the possibility arose, it was agreed that Albert should get involved in the research project, as it presented an opportunity for him to strengthen and develop his own skills. During the research period, Albert was paid a fee for coordinating the group and delivering talks during annual Refugee Week events.

However, Albert's position as both gatekeeper and research participant was quite problematic. At the beginning of the research, the researcher asked Albert to reach out to other Congolese nationals; a request he responded to rather reluctantly and remained an issue throughout the project. Project participants' transport to the museum represented an area of conflict. In the initial stages of the project Albert was responsible for distributing pre-paid daily bus passes, a system that was eventually replaced with the museum booking taxis. Participants received tickets which were filled in with the date of travel. When people failed to attend sessions, Albert was meant to collect unused tickets. However, not all research participants were willing to return their unused tickets, which resulted in tensions developing between Albert and the group. From this perspective, it could be argued that the transport system jeopardised Albert's role within the local Congolese diaspora, calling into question the pressure of research practice on community dynamics. At the same time, in light of the local identity politics investigated above, it should be expected that Albert's power to include some people might lead to the exclusion of others.

The collaboration with Albert helped to strengthen certain social networks, to the detriment of others, causing a number of conflicts within the group engaged by the museum.

3. ‘Intercultural Encounters’: problematising engagement with objects.

The section above looked at the impact local Congolese identity politics had on the research project. Following on, this section analyses the methodology of the in-gallery workshops, problematising how engagement with museum objects took place. Here, the environmental circumstances and relational dynamics of the sessions are analysed, contextualising the dialogue triggered by objects, which is explored in greater length in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.1 The ‘Living Area’ as a field of study.

This section argues that the design peculiarities of the ‘Living Area’, which hosted the workshops and houses most of SCVA’s permanent collection, elicited certain types of responses to objects.

‘Intercultural Encounters’ consisted of 13 object-led, in-gallery workshops facilitated by Dr Veronica Sekules – research supervisor and then Head of Learning at the Sainsbury Centre – and volunteer guides Brenda Packham, Peter Evans and Wilson Graham, as well as this dissertation’s author. In order to enable participants’ full engagement in the workshops, children’s sessions were held simultaneously in the SCVA Education Studio.¹³

Section 1.3 outlined how participants used objects creatively, to draw cross-cultural comparisons, when they were introduced in the ESOL sessions. Building on this insight, ‘Intercultural Encounters’ addressed a different cross-cultural theme each week, using a small cluster of objects chosen by gallery volunteer guides.¹⁴

¹³ Due to the lack of consistency in the research questions and the specific set of ethical and legal concerns, workshops with children are not part of the research data presented here. The sessions were moderated by volunteer Jennifer Barrett (2011-2012), Holly Sandiford and artist Ian Brownlie (2012-2013).

¹⁴ Themes explored were: ‘Feelings and Emotions’, ‘Communicating with Others’, ‘The Role of Women in Society’, ‘Kings and Queens’, ‘Rituals and Spirituality’, ‘Clothing and Hairstyle’ and ‘Food Habits’. The equal weight given to each topic at the outset was later adjusted to respond to people’s interests. As a consequence, the following topics were explored across two sessions: ‘Communicating with Others’, ‘Feelings and Emotions’, ‘Rituals and Spirituality’ and ‘Food Habits’.

As Froggett, Farrier and Poursanidou argued (2011), limiting the number of objects can facilitate more in-depth interactions, as such enables individuals to be physically absorbed. This happens regardless of whether the artefacts can be handled, as objects can also imaginatively touch subjects (Dudley, 2010a; Bagnall, 2003; Salom, 2008).

Robert Sainsbury had clear ideas about how his collection should be displayed; ideas reflected in the Norman Foster-designed gallery.¹⁵ Objects are arranged according to loose cultural regions (Egypt, Oceania, Asia, Africa, Central and South America) with 19th and 20th century European art distributed throughout. Inter-object sightlines are the display's principal effect, opening a space of quiet reflection and enjoyment of art, with no boundaries as to what art is, who makes it or when. However, this is not an innocuous operation, as new relations with objects are established by juxtapositions that may not account with the makers' intent. The ethnographic objects are particularly problematic, as they are taken out of context and aestheticised in accordance with affinities based on visual comparison.

The single open space and the absence of a clear navigation route means that no supremacy or precedent is given to any group, European and non-European alike. Paintings and drawings are hung on removable screens, while larger canvases are mounted on taller, free-standing panels that serve as vertical accents in the space (Fig. 3d). The loose geographical division and ease of passing from one object to another had an important impact on the workshops, as people often drew attention to artefacts other than those selected for the sessions, bringing into question the efficacy of the thematic approach adopted. Although this made the sessions more unpredictable, it also demonstrated how people used the gallery as an open-ended resource of visual aids for the sometimes complex discussions taking place. The juxtapositions introduced in the gallery, between objects belonging to different cultural traditions, also created the conditions for more cross-cultural connections and specific types of comments. As analysed in Chapters 4 and 5, discussions on the understanding of 'culture' were often polarised, which resulted in problems for both refugees and the project team.

¹⁵ The Sainsbury Centre's design approach was originally formulated by interior architect and designer Kho Liang Ie, who adopted a similar schemata for an earlier exhibition of the Sainsbury collection in 1966 at the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller in the Netherlands (Rybczynski, 2011: 36).



Figure 3d; Sainsbury Centre's Living Area. Fosters + Partners. Photo: Neil Young.

The type of object engagement the Sainsbury family facilitated also influenced the participants' responses to artefacts. The 'Living Area' was designed as an intimate and inviting space, evoking the spirit of the collection's original domestic setting. The patrons wanted visitors to walk around objects, so that artefacts could be seen in their entirety. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury sought to enable a sensuous experience of the collection; they wanted people to have 'the opportunity of learning the pleasures of visual experience – of experiencing works of art from a sensual, not only an intellectual point of view – and above all realising that certain artefacts are works of art as well as evidence of history' (Sainsbury, 1978: 15). Objects are also displayed without much written curatorial interpretation, creating an anti-monumental and informal space to experience the artworks (Rybczynski, 2011: 137-138).

These viewing circumstances had a profound impact on the workshops, transforming the act of looking (as form of detached, analytical observation) into one of seeing, when the viewer undertakes a contemplative experience. It can be argued that the particular 'gaze' the gallery's design facilitates leads to a more imaginative interaction with objects, which transcends actual experience. The notion of gaze lies at the core of 'sense experience', which turns an object into a being subjectively relevant to the individual (Merleau-Ponty, 2002).

Crucially, Merleau-Ponty argued, the circumstances of viewing take us beyond the limits of our actual experience, resulting in a sort of ‘ecstatic experience’ (2002: 81). Following on, this dissertation argues that it is precisely how we experience the positioning of objects that causes all perception to be perception of something. As noted in the following chapters, the circumstances of viewing were conducive to processes of self-reflection and self-realisation.

The Sainsbury Centre’s ‘Living Area’ allows a person to easily establish connections between artefacts. The gallery’s aesthetic curatorship and relative lack of interpretative texts create the conditions for more imaginative responses to objects.

3.2 The meaning of objects.

This section refines our understanding of how engagement with artefacts took place, analysing the interdependence of different notions of object-knowledge that emerged in the sessions.

Each in-gallery workshop followed a similar structure. At the beginning of the session, research participants and the project team gathered around the object(s) selected for the week’s theme. The gallery guides would then point out the object(s) remarkable features, such as provenance, manufacture and materials, and ask: ‘Who do you think used the object?’, ‘What for?’, ‘What does the object make you think about?’. Then, the discussion would be opened to the group. This format was intended to provide an intellectual structure easily accessible to people of varying linguistic skills and attendance.

The workshops’ method of inquiry led to the emergence of two complementary notions of object-knowledge. Gallery guides, having extensively researched the selected objects, were concerned with the transmission of curatorial knowledge, as participants were largely driven by imaginative associations triggered by objects. Participants might have been influenced not only by the design of the gallery, but also the instructions given by museum staff when objects were first introduced in the ESOL sessions.¹⁶

¹⁶ At the same time, as discussed in Chapter 4 (Section 1.2), it should not be assumed that refugee groups can only interact imaginatively with collections. Depending on the material culture employed and the composition of the group, refugees might equally foster curatorial knowledge of collections.

Responses to a pantheistic figure (Fig. 3e), introduced in a session on ‘Rituals and Spirituality’, present a good example of the interaction between these complementary methods of inquiry. Following the historical and cultural framework provided by gallery guides, one participant established a connection between the object and the Bishop of Norwich due to the artefact’s perceived similarity to the shape of the cross. A debate around ‘Kings and Queens’, sparked by an Egyptian artefact possibly depicting a sphinx (Fig. 3f), presented a similar scenario as participants drew associations with queen Elizabeth due to the figurine’s crown-like motif.



Figure 3e: Composite or Pantheistic Bes figurine. Egypt. Late Period, Dynasties XXVI-XXX, c. 650-342 BC. Green faience. h. 8.7 cm. Acquired 1977. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 682.



Figure 3f: Forepart of a sacred boat. Egypt. Third Intermediate Period, Dynasty XXV, c. 700 B.C. Bronze. h 11.2 cm. Acquired 1960. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 319.

The ‘specialist knowledge’ provided by gallery guides led to more in-depth exploration of objects and was instrumental in instigating the participants’ affective responses. The dialogical interactions triggered by objects turned artefacts into ‘creative thirds’ (Froggett, 2006, 2008) – neither solely themselves, nor exclusively part of the individual using them. Under these circumstances, as argued by Morrissey (2002), objects may enable individuals to find deeper connections with the world around them and each other, as the conversation twists around the objects and each individual’s thoughts and experiences.

The meaning attributed to objects was dialogically constructed. Museum objects helped to create a space of complicity between research participants and the project team.

3.3 Gender and engagement with objects.

This section argues that research participants’ engagement with objects was also influenced by the group’s gender dynamics, both in relation to linguistic competence and the process of participating in discussions.

The impact of gender dynamics in the workshops can be traced to the administration of gender roles in Congolese societies, where women are often relegated to subaltern roles. The resettlement process can further enhance inequality between the genders, as men and women are likely to access different resources and networks (Cheung and Phillimore, 2013), leaving women less exposed to public life (Goodson and Phillimore, 2008). Furthermore, as many research participants were married couples, the reproduction of certain relational dynamics in the gallery is to be expected.

The impact of gender was particularly felt in the process of taking turns, as men were more likely to participate in discussions than women. Gender had an impact on both verbal and nonverbal communication: when participants stood in front of objects or next to each other, men and women rarely mixed. Gender was also a driver in discussions, as participants were more likely to agree with views held by members of the same gender.

Varying levels of language skills and sensibilities also influenced participants' responses to objects, with men being largely more competent in spoken English than women. This disparity does not come as a surprise, and is largely due ethnic minority women's more limited exposure to learning (BIS, 2011). Varying levels of spoken English also created different sets of responses to objects. Conversations were often quite halted, short sentences using very limited vocabulary. Within the group, the more articulate and competent members engaged more easily in abstract thinking and discussions, with gender being a discriminatory factor.

The type of language used in the workshops was also a controversial subject, as participants disagreed on the matter. Whilst some struggled to speak English at all times, others more readily switched to French or Swahili when articulating nuances they found difficult to communicate in English. Language also constituted a barrier in accessing the research field, as only a few members of the project team spoke French and nobody spoke Swahili. This presents important questions about the skills researchers and practitioners need when working with non-native English speakers. Drawing on the Ragged School Museum's work with refugees, Morris, Orchard and Davison (2007: 24) posited that it may be a good idea to recruit museum professionals with relevant language skills. However, drawing on a V&A Museum of Childhood project with refugees, Nightingale (2014: 109) argued instead that it is practitioners' shared migrant background – more than languages spoken – that can enhance best practice.

Gender dynamics can impact object-led practices with refugees. In terms of the group investigated here, gender constituted a barrier to refugee women's participation.

Conclusion.

This chapter contributes to a better understanding of the dilemmas museums might face when engaging with refugees. It offers a perspective on scholarly debates around human rights and community empowerment, demonstrating that engagement practices with individuals whose human rights have been violated risks jeopardising mechanisms of exclusion.

The first part of this chapter discussed how research projects with refugees might interact with the resettlement process. The multiplicity of stakeholders involved in refugee work – from social workers to museum professionals and local refugee community representatives – points to the many difficulties researchers face in the study of resettlement. These challenges range from access to participants to the volatile nature of refugee populations and the partners' various agendas. It was argued that these difficulties might be heightened by refugees' relative lack of familiarity with museums, which can also open opportunities for both research and practice.

The second part of this chapter highlighted the insights gathered from the research project, demonstrating how a more detailed, intensive experience of working with exiles can illuminate wider thinking and analysis around the process of resettlement. As noted above, refugee studies places a greater emphasis on the study of the social networks refugees form in the diaspora. This study argues that museums can contribute to the debate, opening exploratory research pathways into community engagement practices with diaspora groups. The analysis here demonstrates the elusive nature of the concept of 'community', and the necessity of looking closely at the power dynamics at play in groups engaged with museums. The analysis also contributes to debates around museums' potential in enhancing civic participation and the development of new skills. Considering the lack of ESOL support services, the SCVA enabled refugees to practice conversational English using objects to spark discussions. Furthermore, Albert claimed that the research project was instrumental in building his confidence; confidence he needed to apply for a politics degree at the University of East Anglia and be hired as a research consultant on a study about the Gateway Protection Programme by the University of Brighton.

The third part of this chapter concentrated on the research project's object-led methodology, discussing how research participants and the project team interacted with the collection. It highlighted the impact of design of the 'Living Area' on the workshops, and noted how the gallery created the conditions for cross-cultural connections between objects and more imaginative responses to artefacts. At the same time, this part of the chapter also discussed how gender constituted a barrier to refugee women's participation, pointing to the sensitivity of gender dynamics in working practices with refugees. The insights analysed here also contributed to shedding light on the potential of the dialogical interactions triggered by objects and the spaces of complicity these might generate between people.

Drawing on these insights, the following two chapters analyse the dialogues triggered by the 'Living Area' objects more closely, questioning what can be learnt about both refugees and the museum from such dialogues.

Chapter IV

Objects as the Counterpoint: Reconfiguring Belonging

What future is there for museums? Are museums perhaps too intimately linked up with material-and place-rooted, homogenous and bounded, conceptions of identity to be able to address some of the emerging identity dilemmas of the 'second modern age' or 'late modernity'?

Sharon Macdonald (2003) 'Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities', *Museums and Society* vol. 1(1), p. 1.

This chapter argues that object-centred practices can help museums counter stereotypical 'refugee identity' discourses and provide exiles with opportunities for self-reflection in the process of transition to a new cultural environment. The chapter is concerned with scholarly debates around using object-led practices with diaspora groups, as well as tensions between the categories of 'belonging' constructed by museums and those envisaged by individuals.

The introduction to this chapter explores how anthropology and material culture studies investigate the relation between objects and human mobility, and the role played by ethnographic collections in this respect. Following on, the first part of this chapter briefly returns to the Telling Our Lives project (Chapter 2, Section 3.3) to analyse how artefacts have been used in museums' work with refugees. Building on the critique of the case study, the second and third parts of the chapter address how refugees employed artefacts to both reconfigure the categories of belonging laid out by the museum and reflect on their own 'lived experience'.

People and objects on the move.

Sparked by the writings of Mauss (1990), it has become commonplace to understand the lives of persons and objects as mutually constituted in a phenomenological sense through the use of metaphor and perception. In other words, a person lacks a fixed, decontextualised essence; people are constituted by social interactions and the relations they establish with objects. Appadurai (1986) famously argued this point, softening the dualism between persons and objects in claiming:

[If] from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context. No social analysis of things (whether the analyst is an economist, an art historian, or an anthropologist) can avoid a minimum level of what might be called methodological fetishism [*italics in original*]. (ibid.: 5)

Appadurai's notion of methodological fetishism serves as an inspiring principle in this chapter's enterprise, helping to locate object-centred work in museums within a larger theoretical context. Daniel Miller (2002: 417) also argued about the role of material culture as a site for investigating human and social relations, claiming that material forms remain one of the key media through which people conduct constant struggles over identity and confront the daily contradictions and ambiguities they face. The study of material culture as a site of identity investigation is particularly relevant in the context of forced human displacement, considering the state of material dispossession refugees experience. Refugee studies scholarship, and indeed media representations, have been largely concerned with this aspect, as evidenced by the all too familiar photos of refugees bearing baskets, cloth bundles, and even items of furniture; the basic necessities people are able to carry with them.

In *Minima Moralia*, written in exile, Adorno (2005) offered an interesting perspective on the object-less nature of refugeehood. In fact, *Minima Moralia* has an eloquent subtitle: *Reflections from a Damaged Life*. In this text, Adorno vehemently opposes what he called the 'administered' world of the life left behind, made of ready-made forms and prefabricated 'homes'. He argued that everything one says or thinks, as well as every object one possesses, is ultimately a mere commodity; refusing this state of affairs is the exile's intellectual mission. The exile knows that, in a contingent world, the homes, borders, barriers and possessions defining her own experience are always provisional.

Social anthropologist David Parkin (1999) paid particular attention to the items of personal significance that people might carry during refugee flight. Parkin discussed how the objects refugees gather in the immediacy of their forced departure offer important insights for the study of displacement and objects as a sort of ‘socio-material prosthesis’ (ibid.: 304). He noted how, at the point of departure, objects that maximise the chance of survival might be chosen alongside other possessions, such as family photos, letters and personal effects with little or no utilitarian or market value. Such items are often private mementoes of stories, dreams and ideas that act as material markers of people’s social and cultural identities; they have the capacity to supplement refugees’ relational impoverishment, which sits alongside the more evident material loss. Parkin suggested that these items are not only a testament to what was left behind, but ‘they might also be invested with a sense of a *personal future and identity*’ (1999: 308, my emphasis).

Whether as communities or individuals, forcibly displaced migrants are constantly confronted with how to convey their own stories. Parkin argued that, when suitable conditions arise, refugees’ possessions offer possibilities in this regard. As they are mementoes of sentiment and cultural knowledge, these possessions offer people the opportunity to re-articulate their socio-cultural identities. Parkin claimed that, through a process of ‘reversible objectification’, object-mementoes can overcome the condition of de-personalisation induced by material loss, acting as a tool of self-recovery as one unravels oneself from one’s possessions (ibid.: 315-318). Parkin’s understanding of the relation between objects and people in flight should be located within the British psychoanalytical tradition, and the work of Donald Winnicott (1971) in particular. Winnicott discussed how the imaginative process triggered by objects is important to the development of self in one’s early years. The author was particularly concerned with the substance of the illusion infants develop through attachment to certain objects, like teddy bears or blankets, which are transitional in helping toddlers to distinguish between self and other. The concept of the transitional object – as an object external to the individual and amenable to subjective intervention – provides the theoretical premises for Parkin’s idea of reversible objectification. As the following sections explore, this understanding of subject-object interaction can have profound implications for the study of object-led practices with refugees.

Sandra Dudley (2007, 2010b), in her analysis of the complex subject-object relationships that unfold in refugee camps, explored the importance of objects – such as clothing, food, ritual items and photographs – in the context of refugee displacement. In her ethnography of Karenni refugees in Thailand, the author argued that objects, together with people and places, can help refugees create a meshwork of ideational links between their real and imagined past, present and future selves (2010b: 161).¹ Dudley (2007) explained how the meanings and values attributed to objects in exile can play an important role in the on-going forging and changing of refugees' cultural and political identities. The author commented on Karenni women's use of clothing to express ideas of Karenni and sub-Karenni ethnic identity. Dudley noted how particular ways of fashioning the body might stand as signifiers of the length of time a woman spent in the camp; an identity marker of the process of becoming a Karenni exile.

As Parkin and Dudley demonstrated, the study of the material conditions of exile can shed light on the understanding of forced human displacement. Considering these debates, one of this chapter's main questions addresses whether museum objects, like personal possessions, can similarly contribute to the process of identity rebuilding for people in flight.

Museums objects and the reproduction of difference.

Before responding to the challenges set out by Dudley and Parkin, it is first important to problematise how museums, particularly those holding ethnographic collections, have used objects to engage with diaspora groups. Lynch and Alberti (2010) highlighted how such initiatives have been framed within a colonialist way of thinking and operating, an attitude of Western institutions seeking, whether consciously or not, to maintain borders and privilege particular ways of knowing. Lynch and Alberti commented on how 'encounters between museum professionals and individuals from diaspora communities still bear traces of the *coloniser* meeting the *colonised*' (ibid.: 14, italics in the original). Peers and Brown (2003: 5-6) argued that, for communities whose way of life has dramatically changed as a direct result of colonialism, artefacts can help recover cultural

¹ The research took place in a refugee camp near the Burmese border in northwest Thailand. Although highly diverse in terms of ethnicity, language, level of education and religion, Karenni people all originate from the Kayah State in Myanmar (ibid.: 336).

knowledge, enabling individuals to hold on to aspects of their cultural identity and foster healing. Artefacts can also prompt the relearning of forgotten knowledge and skills, providing opportunities to piece together fragmented historical narratives and rehabilitate historical struggles.

When objects are used with diaspora groups, however, it is important to take a more critical approach to how the categorisation of collections has shaped practices of engagement. The essentialisation of cultural identities through museum collections has pushed practitioners to seek cultural correspondence with the groups engaged. Ethnographic collections, in particular, often reinforce a fixed notion of heritage and exacerbate cultural differences. Bodo (2008) observed that the notion of heritage, due to its close association with inheritance, has led professionals and policymakers to assume that material culture is fixed, immutable and unchangeable. Article 1 of UNESCO's 1972 'World Heritage Convention' also reflects this view, as heritage is defined as something stationary that needs to be 'transmitted' (ibid.: 51).

As noted by Gómez-Peña (1992), ethnographic objects have the pretence of offering a true and authentic picture of people and their culture, defining what is 'essentially' African, American or English; an operation radically defied by the experience of migration and uprootedness. Appadurai (1996) first criticised the segmentation induced by material culture, which literally 'produces' localities and engenders categories of difference. On this note, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991) observed that 'objects *become* "ethnographic" by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers' (ibid.: 387, my emphasis). This means that, despite claims to the contrary, even ethnographic objects are fabricated and not found (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 3). Echoing Bhabha's notion of the 'calcification of colonial cultures' (1994: 13), Gómez-Peña emphasised how claims of 'cultural authenticity' can be seen as strategies of oppression; strategies that reinforce hegemonic practices and reproduce the values and privileges of the centre. Postcolonial literature has warned about the particular ideological agendas under which bodies of thought and collections came into existence (Appadurai and Breckenridge, 1992; Lumley, 1988; Hewison, 1987; Stoking, 1985; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Karp and Lavine, 1991). Along similar lines, Bennett (1995) argued that objects powerfully intersect museums' technologies of display and are always entrenched in temporal and spatial networks.

In the context of museum work with refugees, object-centred approaches shaped by notions of cultural authenticity can be particularly problematic. Refugees' protracted displacement across multiple geographic and cultural borders may challenge the very notions of 'locality' upon which ethnographic collections are constituted. More recently, Mears and Modest (2012) argued for locating object-based practices with diaspora groups within a wider social justice framework. According to the authors, we must move beyond the 'politics of cultural difference', as such risks perpetuating reductionist approaches to questions of identity. Instead, they argued, it is important to focus on a 'politics of positional difference', whose prime concern is to highlight structural inequalities between social groups (2012: 299). In the context of African collections, Mears and Modest noted that while engaging people from Africa or the African diaspora through African objects may help give that 'community' a sense of place and feeling of control over their cultural heritage, this practice can also reproduce stereotypes and reinforce inequalities (*ibid.*: 307).

This dissertation argues that 'colonial objects' (Barringer and Flynn, 1998: 1) can only open up genuine opportunities for engagement if spaces for resisting the correspondence between people and objects are also created. Furthermore, investigating how refugees respond to certain museum objects can also contribute to critical refugee studies' growing interest in methodologies that facilitate the emergence of personal narratives of displacement. The following sections of this chapter build on these considerations and explore how museum collections have been used to articulate the experience of exile, as well as how refugees have resisted the essentialisation of their cultural identities in the context of the object-led workshops in the 'Living Area'.

1. Museums objects and Refugees.

1.1 The material dispossession of exile.

This section explores how museums have tackled the exile's state of material dispossession and the tropes used to represent the loss of commodities in refugee flight. Museums around the world have largely exploited the paucity of material assets necessitated by forced displacement through countless curatorial interventions referencing the items of personal significance people bring with them. This approach has been adopted, in particular, in the context of institutions' work with and about Jewish refugees.

Museums have frequently reverted to the suitcase as a metonymy of exile, a *topos* developed by institutions in the framework of Refugee Week (see Witcomb, 2009; Purkis, 2013; Crooke, 2014). Suitcase stories are embedded in the 19 Princelet Street museum's permanent display in London. In Paris, a similar approach has been adopted by the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration.

Contemporary artists have also become interested in the loss of commodities imparted by forced migration, as they are increasingly responding to the material challenges of mass displacement. For example, the outdoor installation 'Nowhere is Home' by Syrian-German artist Manaf Halbouni, exhibited at the Southbank Centre in June 2015 (Fig. 4a), featured a car loaded with personal possessions. As the curator's notes outline, the piece is meant to stand as 'a moving testament to loss, resilience and hope for over 50 million displaced people across the world, who are often forced to hastily pack a few cherished belongings onto a car before escaping war, natural disaster or conflict'.²

² 'Nowhere is Home' was co-commissioned by the V&A and Counterpoints Arts. The car was also driven around London to engage the public with issues of global displacement. The installation also featured in 'Dis/placed', at Shoreditch Town Hall (2015), an exhibition and week-long programme of events exploring the experiences of people who live in stateless limbos, detention centres, refugee camps or urban settlements.



Figure 4a: 'Nowhere is Home'. Courtesy of the artist.

In a similar vein, the 'Keepsake' project (2015) – developed by the Migration Museum Project for the exhibition 'Adopting Britain: 70 years of Migration' at the Southbank Centre – explored the nature and importance of personal keepsakes in telling stories of migration (Fig. 4b). People's possessions were showcased as museum objects in the display, establishing a parallel between the two. As the accompanying interpretation panel read:

[M]useum collections represent a society's decision about what objects are valuable enough to hand down to future generations. But museum objects matter less to most people than the objects their parents and grandparents chose to pass on to them, and which they hand onto their children and grandchildren.



Figure 4b: 'Keepsake' project (2015). Adopting Britain' exhibition.

In recent years, ethnographic museums have also paid increasing attention to forced displacement by looking at their collections through the lens of subject-object movement; for example, the '[S]oggetti migranti: dietro le cose le persone' (Migrating Subject/Objects: People behind things) exhibition at Rome's Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini (Munapé, 2012).³ This area of practice has also been explored in the UK through experiences of community curatorship with refugees, such as the Hackney Museum in London's collaboration with Kurdish refugees.⁴

Museums have addressed the loss of commodities imparted by forced displacement by emphasising the relevance of the personal items refugees bring with them.

1.2 Object-led practices with refugees.

This section analyses how museum objects have been employed in community engagement initiatives with refugees and what these approaches reveal about institutional practices. Object-led projects with refugees stem from a branch of museological scholarship – referenced in the introduction to this dissertation – that looks at museum objects' capacity to mobilise metaphorical associations.

³ The exhibition was a final outcome of the READ-ME project, referenced in the introduction to this dissertation. '[S]oggetti Migranti' re-examined the museum's collection through direct encounters with diaspora groups to explore the contemporary value of ethnographic objects (ibid.: 13).

⁴ Two parallel exhibitions were organised: one about traditional Kurdish culture and history, and the other exploring life in Britain. In both exhibitions, refugees conducted interviews, wrote texts, sourced photographs and created video and sound footage (Morris, Orchard and Davison, 2007: 10-11).

Manchester Museum's 'Telling Our Lives' project was developed within this framework, offering important insights into the debates explored in this chapter. The initiative ran for three years and each week the group met at the museum for an object-handling session and workshop with a community artist.⁵ Lynch outlined how the women were presented with items from the museum's collection of photographs from Italian Somaliland, which were taken by an army photographer during World War II (2001: 5). The photographs were presented without much explanation and the women were encouraged to explain the photographs from their own perspective.

However, interactions with objects were also sometimes problematic. As Lynch outlined, a woman encountered a 'mistake' in one of the photographs during a session, commenting on the landscape: 'This is not Somalia, there is no railway in Somalia and there is one in this picture. Also this is an Ethiopian traditional dress, not a Somali one' (2000: 140). Another woman also noticed that the photographer likely wandered across the Ethiopian border without knowing. Moreover, in another session, the group argued that a bowl identified as Islamic and Somali instead hailed from pre-Islamic or Persian traditions (*ibid.*: 139). However, the Keeper of Ethnology at the Manchester Museum was hesitant to engage with the information provided by the women; he was more concerned with the health and safety of the collection (2004: 139).

At the core of these 'mistakes' lay important debates on the authority to interpret collections. The dismissal of the women as authoritative informants demonstrates that some curatorial practices remain anchored to an over professionalised understanding of object-knowledge. In the context of 'Telling Our Lives', the unequal power-knowledge relationship that emerged in the workshops might have been heightened by the project's trauma-focused approach, which cast the women in the role of passive victims (see Chapter 2, Section 3.3).

Museum objects can offer a useful means of engagement with refugee groups. At the same time, object-led practices require organisational shifts that incorporate refugees' knowledge and expertise.

⁵ The project was supported by an English language teacher, a storyteller and a documentary filmmaker. At the end of the project, a large textile banner with excerpts from the women's personal stories was also produced.

1.3 Objects as a tool of ‘autoethnography’.

This section investigates how museum objects can provide opportunities for reflection, analysing how refugees might use objects as tools of self-inquiry.

As Lynch noted, alongside factual information, the photographs prompted the women to impart personal memories, which added another layer of interpretation to the objects. Lynch commented on the expression of great nostalgia in discussions of the photographs; nostalgia for well-remembered or part-remembered landscapes related to the women’s lives in Somalia, which produced strong emotional connections with the objects (2004: 138).

In the Tlingit elders’ much cited visit to the Portland Museum of Art in 1989 (Clifford 1997: 189), objects from the Rasmussen Collection were used as means of engagement and played a pivotal role in uncovering various aspects of Tlingit culture. As Clifford noted, the curators expected the elders to advise how objects should be displayed. However, the elders instead used the objects as ‘aides-memoires’, enacting a spontaneous ceremonial event where people performed songs and recalled myths and stories related to the objects.

In *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt (1992) posited that the emotional reactions triggered by museum objects presents an opportunity for the subalterns to select and create using elements of the dominant culture. The author considered these interventions to be a form of autoethnography, which formerly colonised subjects might use to represent themselves in ways that engage the coloniser’s own terms (ibid.: 7). Reed-Danahay (1997: 2) noted that the notion of autoethnography synthesises postmodern ethnography – where the realist conventions and objective position of the observer in standard ethnographic practice are called into question – and postmodern autobiography, where the notion of a coherent and individual self is deeply challenged.

The concept of autoethnography offers a useful methodological framework for analysing object-led practices with refugees. The idea of objects providing a platform from which formerly colonised subjects can articulate new ideas of subjectivity finds correspondence in the debates around hybridity and ‘diasporisation’ presented in the introduction to this dissertation.

In this context, Bhabha (1994) pointed out that the overlap and displacement of domains of difference is where new understandings of selfhood can emerge. In these interstices where different notions of culture and identity are negotiated, new ideas of belonging can emerge. In the context of affect theory, Massumi (2003) argued that subjects experience a duplicity of forms that participate ‘spontaneously and simultaneously in two orders of reality, one local and learned or unintentional, the other nonlocal and self-organising’ (151). Massumi claimed that the nonlocal order of reality can have a disruptive role in the reconfiguration of what it is to be human, envisaging the potential to contest notions of subjectivity based on specificity and particularities of difference, particularly at a cultural level.

Museum objects can elicit personal memories and prompt discussions around cultural identity, offering refugees a platform to reflect on the process of identity rebuilding in resettlement.

2. Re-configuring Belonging.

The previous section discussed the relation between objects and people in flight, suggesting that refugees might use museum objects as a means of autoethnography. Drawing on the insights gleaned from the object-led workshops in the Sainsbury Centre’s ‘Living Area’, this section analyses what interactions with objects can reveal about both refugees and the museum.

2.1 A counterpunctual sensibility.

This section returns to Said’s notion of ‘counterpoint’ discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, and analyses how interactions with certain objects challenged the categories of belonging laid out by the museum.

Borrowing from music theory, Said argued for locating the forced displacement experience outside the imagined singularity of cultural identities, claiming that life in exile is the cohabitation of two melodies that meet incidentally, without ever creating a harmonic composition. The debate around a ceremonial staff attributed to the Luba-Hemba people of modern-day DRC offers important insights in this respect (Fig. 4c).



Figure 4c: Ceremonial staff. Central and East Africa, Zaire: Luba-Hemba. Late 19th century. Wood, iron, brass, beads, shells, fibre. h 146 cm; Acquired 1953. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 266.

Following the object's introduction by Brenda, an English woman from the voluntary guiding services, a brief discussion on the meaning of the word 'scarification' began. Once the concept was explained, the participants reacted immediately, alternating between French and Swahili to establish their respective ethnic backgrounds.

As the first narrative block (below) suggests, people assumed that the ceremonial staff was an object of sorcery and employed a number of narrative strategies to distance themselves from the artefact. One participant, Adela, attributed the object to Angolan people through a personal memory of life in a refugee camp. Adela was most likely referring to the Lovale people, an ethnic group that is well-known within present day Zambia for witchcraft and voodoo, still practised in both rural and urban areas. However, the object was also used to create a divide between village traditions (of which the object is seen as an expression) and modern city life (with which the group was willing to be associated). This narrative was reiterated by a participant's linkage to a documentary on witchcraft practices in DRC that had recently aired on the BBC.

Narrative block 1

Léo *These things are used for witchcraft and they are no good. I don't like them. They are traditions that village people believe in...*

Adela *I know that some Angolans still use these things...When I lived in a refugee camp in Zambia, I saw lots of people with tattoos practising rituals.*

Albert *Yes, it is also true that some bad people in the Congo still practice witchcraft. Have you seen the documentary on the BBC about it?*

At the same time, the strategies participants used to disentangle themselves from the object offer a line of inquiry that reveals important information on how museum objects might intersect with local identity politics. According to the researcher's initial information, at least one member of the group self-identified as Luba, but this participant did not affiliate herself with the artefact in the context of the workshop. There could be several reasons for this omission. On the one hand, it is possible that this person had no prior experience with such objects; a plausible scenario given that the ceremonial staff was taken to Britain in the late 19th century. However, it is also possible that peer pressure could have acted as a deterrent to internal group conflict, which leads one to look more closely at the social dynamics at play when the group encountered the object.

As discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 2.2), religious affiliation played an important role in local refugee identity politics, as evidenced by the split within the local Congolese diaspora between those who believed in the efficacy of witchcraft and those who vehemently opposed it. The second narrative block (below) seems to corroborate this perspective, as – considering the Bible and its teachings – Christianity emerged as the ideological backbone in discussions against the ceremonial staff.

This contextual circumstance influenced the meaning participants attributed to the ceremonial staff, despite the fact that this staff had enjoyed a more positive reception in the museum's work with other Congolese refugees. In a video produced by filmmaker Matthew Robinson in 2010, a teenage girl is shown next to the ceremonial staff as she proudly chooses this as the object that most resonates with her in the collection.

Narrative block 2

- Fabienne *These things are against the Bible. We don't do them anymore.*
- Albert *I don't like the object from Bahemba [Hemba] because I am Christian.*
- Madalene *The statuette from Luba is not good for the Bible.*
- Babette *This is not for us. These are old things for old people.*
- Madalene *They are traditions for village people, not for us. We are British now.*

The ceremonial staff also intersected important issues related to people's sense of personal and collective identity. Madalene's closing remark, 'We are British now', projects the museum into a highly contested political arena and unveils another layer of complexity in community engagement practices with refugees: it is not difficult to read in the commentary an answer to prevailing legal discourses on exiles, which construct the refugee as non-British for not holding full citizenship rights.

At the same time, Madalene's statement shakes the museum-defined politics of belonging, suggesting that refugees might not identify the local Congolese diaspora as their community of reference. 'Britain' is imagined instead as a holding environment, echoing Said's idea that exiles often choose to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology – instead of their country of origin – in an attempt to reconstruct their broken lives (2000: 177).

However, the teenage girl's positive reaction to the ceremonial staff seems to demonstrate the possibility of profound intergenerational differences in the way people affiliate with their culture of origin. As a second-generation migrant, the young girl might have used the object to articulate her sense of belonging to Congolese culture, reverting the terms of affiliation discussed above. These dynamics seem to corroborate the idea that processes of cultural negotiation, as determined by the 'counterpunctual sensibility' of exiles, can be transmitted to the next generation.

Reactions to the ceremonial staff contested the politics of belonging defined by the museum, revealing the challenges refugees encountered in negotiating their identity in resettlement. The object became permeable within a wider interpretative framework, reflecting the ethnic and religious rivalries characteristic of the local Congolese diaspora.

2.2 On the cultural specificity of objects.

This section questions whether research participants should be considered a 'source community' for the Congolese objects in the 'Living Area', and provides further insight to debates around the use of culturally specific objects in community engagement practices with diaspora groups.

The meaning the group attributed to the ceremonial staff greatly differed from scholarly accounts of the object: while participants related the artefact to sorcery, researchers revealed how the object is meant to depict a female ancestor, the founding-maternal figure of the Luba people. Among the Luba, in fact, the sceptre – kept in charge by one of the chief's wives – identifies the spokesman, standing as the formal symbol of his leadership (Hooper, 1997: 203).

In light of these discrepancies, it is hard to argue that the group held interpretative authority over this particular object. Even Clifford (1989), despite accommodating information other than fact about artefacts, was still very much interested in enriching a curatorial understanding of objects. More recently, this issue was raised by Mears and Modest (2012) and Modest (2013), who commented on the need to understand what 'source' actually means and whether anyone who identifies as part of the African diaspora can be part of a 'source community' for objects from Africa.

Participants' reactions to other Congolese objects in or evoked by the 'Living Area' corroborates this argument. For example, one participant (Marcel) associated a Yoruba statuette from West Africa (Fig. 4d) with a Kuba statuette from present-day DRC exhibited at the Musée National de Kinshasa (an example of such is illustrated in Fig. 4e). In Marcel's own words: 'Many objects also from the Congo represent naked women. I remember having seen many Kuba statuettes like this one when I went to a museum in Kinshasa.' However, it is arguable whether Kuba statuettes are in fact concerned with representations of the naked female body. As Cornet (1982) argued, the anthropomorphic statuettes to which Marcel might be referring are '*symboles des règnes*' and likely portray Kuba kings (*ndop*) with their respective *ibol*, the characteristic element attributed to a king and his reign (*ibid.*: 42). It is also interesting to note that only one statuette of its kind was held at the Musée National de Kinshasa, and it was stolen during the Mobutu era.⁶ Moreover, Kuba people are not renowned for carving naked figures, as the sculptures in the collections at the Brooklyn Museum, the British Museum and the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Belgium demonstrate (*ibid.*: 74-124).



Figure 4d: Shango staff in the form of a woman. West Africa, Nigeria, Oyo: Yoruba. 19th/early 20th century. Wood, beads. h. 39.0 cm. Acquired 1953. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 227.

⁶ John Mack, Personal communication, 9 September 2016.



Figure 4e: *Ndop* figure of King Shyaam aMbul aNgoong, late 18th century. Wood, h. 54.6 cm. British Museum. BM 1909.1210.1.

A similar scenario emerged when Albert – a Kasai of Kuba descent – was asked to deliver a lunchtime talk on a Kuba mask from the ‘Living Area’ (Fig. 4f) as part of Norwich Refugee Week 2011. Two weeks before the talk, Albert approached this dissertation’s author to make arrangements. In the course of the meeting it emerged that Albert had no previous knowledge of the mask and wanted to know relevant literature to consult. After examining a number of articles and publications in the Sainsbury Research Unit library, Albert delivered the talk successfully, speaking confidently about an object he had only encountered a few weeks prior.



Figure 4f: Dance mask. Central and East Africa, Zaire: Kuba. 20th century. Wood, raphia cloth, beads and cowries. h. 34.0 cm. Acquired 1974. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 594.

At the same time, while Albert was a relative newcomer to the dance mask, this object ended up acquiring a relevance that transcended the talk itself. While gathering information on the artefact, Albert contacted his father in DRC, and Albert's father was familiar with the object's history and significance. This engendered a sense of pride in Albert and feelings of achievement for engaging with his Kuba ancestry.

As explored in Chapter 3, the refugee cohort that participated in the project was not culturally homogenous, just like the Congolese objects in the 'Living Area', which hailed from different geographical and ethnic areas of modern day DRC. The participants were unfamiliar with the collection's Congolese objects, forcing museum professionals to revisit their assumptions about the impact and resonance of using certain objects with diaspora groups.

2.3 'Unfamiliar' objects.

The previous section explored the complexities of using culturally specific objects in work with diaspora groups. Following on, this section looks at the other side of the coin in questioning what dynamics might be triggered by objects assumed to be 'culturally unfamiliar' and less relevant to people's life experiences.

A ladle from Native American Wasco-Wishram culture (Fig. 4g) presented interesting case in this respect. Pete, from the guiding services, introduced the object through a brief description of Wasco material culture. Pete then invited participants to approach the object from different angles and notice the difference in colour tone between the inside and the outside, noting how the inside's shiny surface indicated that the bowl was used as a food container.



Figure 4g: Ladle with animal handle. North America, Washington/Oregon: Wishram or Wasco. 19th century. Wood. h.16.8 cm. Acquired 1975. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 634.

As the third narrative block (below) suggests, participants established a connection between the Native American ladle and a ‘*kibuyu*’⁷ (an example of such is illustrated in Fig. 4h), which triggered memories of personal significance.

Narrative block 3

Marcel *This is like the kibuyu made of a fruit that once opened, dried out and cleaned can be used as a plate.*

Albert *The inside looked always a bit wet, we used to drink banana beer in it. I remember using it in special occasions such as weddings or birthday celebrations where it was passed around to men sat in a circle.*

⁷ The *kibuyu* (Swahili for gourd) is used to collect milk and animal blood. *Kibuyu* might also be used as drinking vessels, as pointed out by Marcel. Traditionally, the beer is fermented in large clay pots and then poured into gourds and served with a reed straw for drinking. In ceremonial settings, beer might be sipped from a large communal pot or passed around in smaller gourds.



Figure 4h: Beer gourd. DRC, Katanga Region. Luba Culture. 16 cm x 8,5 cm. Musée royal de l'Afrique Centrale. EO.0.0.36636.

Following Marcel's *kibuyu* analogy, Pete asked if objects of similar manufacture were used as food containers in the Congo, as was the case among Wishram/Wasco people. The question sparked an animated discussion about Congolese cuisine and food habits, which provided further insight into the social dynamics of the local Congolese 'community'. The term 'community' is used here to emphasise a reverse scenario to that analysed in connection with the ceremonial staff, as the ladle was able to consolidate the group rather than divide it.

As the fourth narrative block (below) outlines, food is mobilised as a defining trait of Congolese identity: here the Congo is imagined as a homogenous community with a set of national dishes based on 'fufu' and cassava, providing common ground. However, although Congolese cuisine relies on common starches like cassava root, corn and plantain, culinary practices are strikingly different across the country's various climatic regions, between cities and the countryside, and with regional variations such as green vegetables, insects, fish and meat (Mukeng, 2002). What is significant here is not whether there is such a thing as a Congolese national cuisine, but rather that no regional food is used as an identity marker of people's ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The lack of affiliation with regional cuisine could be related to the paucity of ingredients in Britain, but it is still an important point to consider.

Narrative block 4

- Albert *All people from the Congo eat the same food, we all like to cook the same thing everywhere.*
- Adela *Our food is very good, I cook Congolese food every day because I am Congolese.*
- Madalene *I want my family to eat cassava bread every day, so they know where we come from. It is important.*
- Adela *We only eat Congolese food at home. I miss the Congo and food makes me feel more at home here.*
- Fabienne *My children want chips and beans so I cook them as well. Sometimes they don't want to eat Congolese food and want British things.*

It is clear that food is important not only at a social level but also within single family units, as food is key to cultural transmission. As argued by Fabienne in the narrative block above, food can be highly contested territory in households under increasing pressure to adjust to British cuisine. The evaluation of a food festival organised as part of the ERAS project at the Salford Museum and Art Gallery outlined a similar scenario. As Eida and Conway (2011: 70) noted, children asked their mothers to cook British food, but the mothers did not know what recipes or ingredients to use.

These insights into refugees' culinary habits can provide important information for scholarly understandings of resettlement, as such suggest possible avenues of support for newly arrived migrants. This is particularly significant when studying household relationships, as negotiations around food can intersect with feelings of alienation between children and parents during the resettlement process.

In order to find the ingredients necessary to Congolese food, refugees' social networks had to be mobilised. As shown in the fifth narrative block (below), the need for common staple foods generated a sense of solidarity amongst the group. People rely on supplies from as far afield as London, organising ad hoc trips to stock up on provisions.⁸

Food's capacity to reinforce social networks at a local level was also confirmed by women's weekly shopping trips to Anglia Square, a local multicultural hotspot hosting a shopping centre and small businesses that stock products from around the world.

Narrative block 5

Albert *I have a friend that knows somebody in London that sells things in a market and this is where we get the spices. Ingredients are cheaper there. We organise trips to London where we buy most things.*

Adela *One or two times a week we go together to Anglia Square where we can get some products. We meet there and spend the afternoon shopping and talking when the children are at the school.*

This section raised key points for understanding how refugees negotiate their identity, showing how the exile's contrapuntal sensibility can infiltrate every corner of life.

2.4 The 'memory capital' of objects.

This section builds on the discussion around object's therapeutic potential for refugees, first introduced in Chapter 2 (Section 3.2), and questions whether the debate around culturally familiar and unfamiliar objects contributes to a better understanding of this area of practice.

Objects considered as culturally familiar are often bestowed a form of 'memory capital', and assumed to hold more evocative potential than their unfamiliar counterparts.

⁸ At the end of the session, Albert clarified that the market was located in East London. He was most likely referring to Ridley Road Market in Dalston, as it is home to many African food and spice stalls.

This type of approach, widely adopted in the sector's work with refugees, imparts a particular 'politics of remembering' that requires more careful analysis. Particularly when a collection shares cultural correspondence with a group of people who suffered persecution, important ethical questions arise concerning whether or not refugees should be exposed to objects that might trigger traumatic memories.

Memory-study scholars have argued that eliciting traumatic memories is important to the healing process, but that refugees should not be overexposed to the practice of remembering.⁹ In other words, it is important to create the conditions for trauma to emerge incidentally, not by intent. Therefore, projects using culturally specific collections or attempting to find a nexus between a place and culture can confront refugees with the urgency of remembering, not the possibility.

Two figures (Pick a Back), a sculpture by John Davis (Fig.4i), is a good example in this respect, as it was the only piece that elicited memories of trauma in the course of the project. Participants' responses to the object also provided significant insight into the challenges museum practitioners might face in reminiscence work.

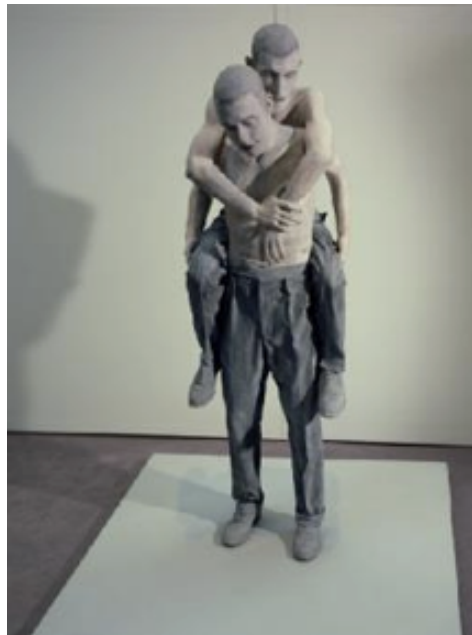


Figure 4i: *Two figures (Pick a Back)* 1977-80. John Davis. UEA 782.

⁹ According to mental health professionals, overexposing refugees to reiterations of trauma is a major cause of distress, as the telling and retelling of traumatic accounts is a central element of the asylum process (Robjant, Hassan and Katona, 2009).

During one session, a participant noticed the object while walking throughout the Lisa and Robert Sainsbury collection. The sculpture is concealed behind a partition, inviting people to enter an intimate, interactive space with the object. The physicality the sculpture expresses led participants to question the action the figures are performing. As shown in the immediate responses of the sixth narrative box (below), the intimacy of the two figures was associated with a feeling of ‘friendship’ and ‘brotherhood’, which led to flashbacks of the hardships endured during flight.

Narrative block 6

- Adela *They are brothers: one of the two is very thin, he is probably hungry that's why he is being helped.*
- Léo *Their shoes are very old and their trousers dusty. They are not well off people. If they were ok, they would dress smarter. Maybe they are miners...*
- Albert *This makes me think of people helping me in the past. One person carrying another person shows the importance of being nice to each other. I always teach this to my children... Especially I remind them how hard was life in the refugee camp and how much we need to thank strangers for the help received, particularly people from UNHCR and IOM.*

Albert's line of thought prompted Adela to share a detailed account of her first midwifery experience:

During the war, I helped a pregnant woman to give birth under a big tree. We were both scared hiding from soldiers and she was running out of time, she had to give birth. She was standing still trying to make no noise and then I helped her. It was very difficult.... Then, I used a piece of my kitenge¹⁰ to cut the umbilical cord, made a hole in the ground to hide the placenta so nobody could find out... It was the first time I helped a woman to have a baby and then I worked as a midwife for 13 years in a refugee camp.

¹⁰ The kitenge is a garment worn by women across Africa. It is wrapped around the chest or waist, over the head as a headscarf, or as a baby sling. Kitenges serve as an inexpensive, informal piece of clothing that are often decorated with a variety of colours, patterns and even political slogans. The printing on the cloth is done using a wax-resist dyeing technique of Dutch origins, which might have been introduced in Africa by the Yoruba people of modern-day Nigeria.

Albert and Adela's responses to the object were at odds with the rest of the group, who stood by the sculpture without meaningfully engaging with it. This dissonance also manifested in the evaluation at the end of the session, where no further comments on the object or the events it evoked were recorded. These dissimilar reactions – the retrieval and non-retrieval of traumatic memories – might, in fact, be interdependent. As Loftus (1993) outlined in his study of PTSD, the object could have triggered two complementary psychological mechanisms: 'hypernesia' and 'amnesia', where memories of traumatic events are easily recalled or avoided respectively. However, it could also be argued that these idiosyncrasies were more a sign of the subjective nature of responses to objects. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the meanings attributed to objects were often dialogically constructed; a particular reading or interpretation acquired further resonance as the group's conversation developed.

In both cases, museum staff and the researcher were confronted with how to handle group dynamics. Nonverbal language was particularly telling in this respect, as staff exchanged eye contact signalling a legitimate concern that they might lose control of the situation. At the end of the session, volunteer guide Brenda confirmed how uncomfortable she felt about the interaction. This discomfort recalls the practitioner attitudes discussed in Chapter 2, who acted under the assumption that something had to be done and refugees should be sheltered from traumatic memories. Staff reactions also raised ethical questions regarding whether museum practitioners and the researcher were equipped to deal with the situation, pointing to a need to more closely work with psychologists and social workers.

'Unfamiliar objects' are less fraught with dilemmas than their 'familiar' counterparts, as the former are more likely suited to eliciting memories of trauma incidentally, rather than intentionally.

Conclusion.

The experience of forced migration destabilises notions of home, culture and community of belonging. Building on these considerations, this chapter offered a framework for considering how museum collections can be used to move beyond ideas of locality and cultural specificity, thus contributing to museologists' increasing interest in the affective potential of museum objects.

The first part of this chapter noted how museums emphasise exiles' loss of commodities, stressing the personal possessions refugees bring with them in particular. This section also discussed how, when museum objects are used as means of engagement with refugees, institutions may not adequately recognise the knowledge and expertise of the groups engaged. The analysis here also argued that museum objects may be able to elicit personal memories and experiences, offering refugees a means to reflect on the process of identity rebuilding in resettlement.

The second part of this chapter concentrated on the use of culturally specific objects in work with diaspora groups. Considering the group's ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, this section questioned whether the workshop voices can be considered the expression of a 'source community' or treated in entirely subjective terms. This second part claimed that artefacts' material qualities come to the fore when they are freed from their cultural components, reconfiguring the relationship between people and objects. This leads to the imagining of new notions of personal and cultural identities, challenging museum practitioners to develop methodologies that enable individuals to relate to objects *per se*, as opposed to what such objects mean to the museum.

Through objects, the research team gained significant insight into the identity markers participants adopted to recreate a sense of belonging. However, the individual refugee portraits that emerged in the workshops should not be considered a synecdoche of the experience of exile or held as representative of the Congolese diaspora as a whole. The narratives triggered by objects contested homogenous ideas of the 'refugee experience', and challenged the discourses around trauma and exceptionality explored in Chapter 2.

However, there was no evidence to suggest that refugees were intent on questioning or countering hegemonic interpretations of refugee identity. Research participants simply used objects to establish a dialogue with museum staff, openly discussing matters related to their lives in transition.

The following chapter further explores objects' potential in reaching into people's lives and providing opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue between the research participants and project team.

Chapter V

Migrating Bodies: Objects and Embodiment from a cross-cultural perspective

What could be more mundane, more significant than embodiment? What could be more bodily than everyday life? [...] Whether it is the challenges presented by the day's to do list or getting closer to understanding the meaning of life that occupies our attention, the concrete embodied practices that enable these important efforts continue to elude our grasp as analysts.

Lock, M. and Farquhar, J. (eds), (2007) *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, p.241.

This chapter builds on the notion that artefacts can offer refugees means to reflect creatively on their own lived experience, helping museums establish a platform of cross-cultural understanding. The analysis here is particularly concerned with museological debates around the embodied experiences stimulated by objects and the complexities these present in a cross-cultural context. It argues that processes of embodiment are important to how refugees negotiate belonging in resettlement, and objects representing the human body intersect this area of experience.

To build the argument, this chapter begins by discussing the construction of the idea of embodiment, focusing particularly on how migration and uprootedness can disrupt bodily practices, and then considers how objects participate in processes of everyday embodiment. Following on, the first part of this chapter analyses the impact of Christianity and notions of body secrecy on the reception of anthropomorphic objects. Then, in the second section, a closer look is taken at how refugees mobilised the physicality of objects to discuss perceived areas of dissonance in practices of everyday embodiment in Britain.

Embodiment and forced migration.

Fundamentally, we experience the world through the body, which plays a key role in the construction of how we understand our surroundings. Analysing the processes of embodiment can, therefore, provide an excellent framework for understanding people's lives, as experience is always lived in a bodily manner. The study of embodiment has, in the second half of the 20th century, attracted the attention of academic traditions spanning philosophy, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. Social theory has emphasised the biopolitical dimension of the body (Foucault, 2004) and how our bodily actions are culturally and symbolically created through socialised norms (Bourdieu, 1977). Erving Goffman (1959) was interested in the interplay between the subjective and societal dimension of the body. In his research on social interactionism, Goffman discussed the role of bodily performances in the representation of the self. Sociologist Anthony Synnott (1993) also noted that the body is not only the symbol of self but also of society as a whole. In anthropology, more recently, scholars have built upon these contributions by studying the body in everyday life experiences more closely (Highmore, 2002; Willis, 1991).

In *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002), Merleau-Ponty emphasised that human existence and personal subjectivity involve the constant engagement of the body and living space. The author went beyond the notion of space as a mere physical object, rejecting the distinction between lived and phenomenal space on the one hand, and objective space on the other. According to Merleau-Ponty, this distinction creates a false dichotomy between subject and object, reducing the human body to a material, quantifiable and measureable object. Merleau-Ponty argued that it is only by challenging the concept of the body as a scientific and static object that subjective experience can be properly understood. The body is the origin of expressive movement and a medium for the perception of the world. It is through the body that the world comes into being:

But our body is not merely one expressive space among the rest, for that is simply the constituted body. It is the origin of the rest, expressive movement itself, that which causes them to begin to exist as things, under our hands and eyes. (ibid.: 169)

In this context, Ingold (1993) observed that our everyday interactions and relationships are not only physical exchanges, but also processes based on the reciprocal perceptions of the world brought about by subjects. Reflecting on the practices of the everyday, philosopher Michel de Certeau (2011) argued that processes of embodiment are an inherent condition of social life, offering a glimpse into how individuals negotiate the relationship with their surroundings.

In the context of human mobility, this dissertation argues that the way subjects conceptualise processes of embodiment has a heightened impact on their everyday life experience. A focus on the body is particularly important if migrating subjects bear the scars of the colonial encounter, as body management was key to how colonial powers sought to shape new subjectivities. Lock and Farquhar (2007: 307) discussed the notion of the ‘colonised body’, illustrating how – in the 18th and 19th centuries – the body of colonised African subjects was considered a sort of ‘symbolic inversion’ of European bodies and often described as ‘diseased, lazy, and grotesque’. Therefore, it was thought that improvements could be made through strict regimes of personal and domestic hygiene and changes in the public presentation of the body.

In the context of forced migration, a focus on embodiment has informed debates around the bio-political nature of refugee movements. Chapter 1 noted that Agamben (1998) considered refugees to be the ultimate bio-political subjects: ‘bare life’ whose political status has been stripped and reduced to mere biological existence. Recently, Owen (2009) questioned this stance, claiming that, far from being neutered, refugees’ bodies can also be used as means to resist state power.¹

The body is also central in asylum processes, as visible evidence of bodily trauma is important proof of persecution. Fassin and Rechtman (2009) coined the term ‘psychotraumatology of exile’ in arguing that, in the context of growing suspicion of ‘bogus’ asylum seekers, the production of medical certificates confirming the evidence of physical trauma has become instrumental in validating asylum claims (ibid.: 222). A focus on the evidence of trauma has also influenced a wealth of anthropological research on embodied memory.

¹ Owen referred to the 2002 protest at the Woomera detention camp in South Western Australia, where about 50 refugee inmates sewed their lips shut in a shocking protest against their incarceration (see also Stonebridge, 2013).

Kidron (2011: 451-466), in particular, argued that sensorial imprints of a violent past can translate to bodily practices, which can then be transmitted from one generation to another as lived memories of genocide.

This chapter argues that, despite this emphasis on refugees' bodies, the notion of how ideas about the body are formed and embodied practices conceived has been largely neglected by refugee studies scholarship. Here it is claimed that museological thinking and practice can bring important insights to this area of inquiry.

Objects and embodiment.

Objects constantly partake in processes of everyday embodiment. The sensorial experience is in fact at the very centre of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project. Sensory experience, as defined by Merleau-Ponty (2002), is that vital communication with the world that makes it present as a familiar life setting. The perceived object and the perceiving subject owe their 'thickness' to this sensory experience:

Our perception ends in objects, and the objects once constituted, appear as the reason for all the experiences of it which we have had or could have. For example, I see the next-door house from a certain angle, but it would be seen differently from the right bank of the Seine, or from the inside, or again from an airplane. (ibid.: 61)

Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'motor intentionality' further clarifies the extent to which objects and bodies are implicated in the perception of the world. He argued that the act of understanding an object cannot be separated from the subject's bodily experience; our bodily activity is itself a kind of understanding of the object (ibid.: 127). In a similar vein, Latour (2005) claimed that objects and bodies always interact within networks of human and non-human forms that all contribute to the formation of the social world.

In museological scholarship, the importance of the body and senses in subject-object relationships has been particularly influenced by the 'sensual revolution' instigated by material culture scholarship – referenced in the introduction to this dissertation (Howes, 2005). Tilley (1999) argued that artefacts' formal characteristics can enhance people's personal experience and imagination, fostering a dynamic, object-human dialogue. Tilley invited readers to understand reality as a process of mapping produced by a network of objects, events and texts that subjects continuously navigate.

According to the author, such understanding is gained through metaphorical associations, helping subjects translate the unknown into something familiar. For Tilley, metaphor is not a pure cognitive construction, but a complex process involving emotional impulses and sensual experiences. Interestingly, this research pathway is also explored in neuroscience (see Ramachandran, 2011: 75).

These object encounters are, according to Jill Bennett, in a very palpable sense *felt* rather than merely observed; Bennett noticed how ‘these reactions are a kind of language of the body, an untranslatable idiolect which makes our engagement with museum objects richly meaningful’ (2005: 131-132, my emphasis). Moreover, Golding (2009: 189) emphasised that embodied experiences triggered by objects can not only positively permeate intellectual explanations, but also help people connect with the social world and their relationships with others in this world.

1. The body of objects.

1.1 The body, religious.

This section takes a more in-depth look at the relation between religiosity and embodiment by investigating the influence of Christianity on the way refugees approached anthropomorphic objects. This follows on from Chapter 3’s identification of the religious discourse as an important identity marker for refugees participating in the project, and Chapter 4’s discussion about refugee social networks and the division between practising Christians and those who believe in the efficacy of witchcraft.

Participants’ reactions to a statuette of the Hindu goddess Kaumari – from 17th century India – presents a good example of how religion impacted the interpretation of objects. In Hindu mythology, Kaumari is a warrior goddess affiliated with the Matrikas, a group of Hindu goddesses considered to be the ‘seven mothers’: Brahmani, Vaishnavi, Maheshvari, Indrani, Kaumari, Varahi, Chamunda and Narasimhi. Gallery guides Wilson and Brenda introduced the artefact, discussing its geographical provenance and meaning in relation to the Hindu tradition.

Wilson remarked on the representation of the goddess as having many arms and legs, and described Kaumari as one of several female deities of the complex Hindu pantheon (Fig. 5a).



Figure 5a: Image of the Goddess Kaumari. India, Punjab Hills. 17th century. Bronze. h. 29.9 cm. Acquired 1977. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 680.

As the seventh narrative block (below) shows, participants used the Swahili word '*pepo*' to describe the object, as (for them) it recalled representations of Satan in Christian iconography. The meaning the group attributed to the object reverted the role of the deity in Hinduism, where Kaumari is seen as assisting the great Shakta Devi goddess in her fight against the demons.

Narrative block 7

- Babette *This is wrong, 'pepo'. A female god is against the Bible, something that cannot exist.*
- Fabienne *This is Satan. It looks like it.*
- Wilson *I do not find anything offensive about it. I don't think that any religion is better than others.*
- Babette *I will pray for you so you can change.*
- Adela *In the Bible God says not to judge each other. I have a brother who now lives in Zambia and converted to Islam two years ago. I don't agree with him but I accept his choice and don't pray so he can change.*

Here, participants established an interesting correspondence between the word *pepo* and Satan. In Swahili, *pepo* is a generic term for an evil spirit that can possess people, a word usually attributed to practices of witchcraft. However, in this context participants incorporated the word *pepo* into Christian cosmology so as to interpret ideas of good and evil. Cimpric (2011: 109-130), in her study of witchcraft and Pentecostalism in the Central African Republic, argued a similar point. Cimpric pointed to the difficulty of disentangling witchcraft and Christianity, as Christian value-systems have largely obscured local cosmologies. The author observed that, in Africa, Christianity turned 'witchcraft' – or more precisely the 'spirit of witchcraft' – into a metaphor for Satan in current ecclesiastical language. Cimpric argued that the divide between body and soul imported by missionaries led to a simplified association of the body with the devil and God with the soul (ibid.: 114).

The impact of Christian ideology on people's worldview is further exhibited in the eighth narrative block (below), articulated during a debate around religious sensibilities in Britain. Here participants' interpretation of the statuette of Kaumari is extended to their perception of British people's detachment from Christianity.

Narrative block 8

- Albert *When Europe colonised us they brought the word of God, but when we moved here I realised that they forgot it.*
- Léo *People don't believe in god, they are lost in their everyday life and don't go to Sunday masses.*
- Brenda *It is not that we have forgotten God, but we call it in different ways. People in Britain believe in different Gods.*
- Babette *Here in Norwich, it is not good that some churches are made into shops or businesses, those are the house of God.*

Albert invoked colonisation here in arguing for British society's need for renewal, which interestingly echoed the arguments of 19th century Christian missionaries in Africa. As Knibbe (2011) argued, in her analysis of the Redeemed Christian Church of God in Europe, Charismatic Christianity considers Europe to be the 'dark continent' and its church-planting mission is often phrased as 'bringing the gospel back to Europe'. Through her comparative research into Pentecostalism in the Netherlands, England and Germany, Knibbe pointed out that Pentecostals seem to believe the wealth of Europe has corrupted people's soul. In prayers and prophecies, Europe's conversion is often framed in terms of releasing Satan's hold over the land, clearing the way for revival (ibid.: 92-93). This particular reading of Europe's divergence from its own teachings also underpinned Babette's comment on the need to pray for Wilson's soul, which placed museum staff and the researcher in problematical ethical territory (narrative block 7).

Refugees emphasised the importance of religious affiliation as an identity marker, voicing their disillusionment with the role of contemporary Christianity in British society. Gallery guides, by de-emphasising the interdependence of religiosity and personhood, constructed a notion of subjectivity that appeared provocative to participants. In light of the impact of religious politics on the local Congolese diaspora, one should question where participants positioned in relation to witchcraft the gallery guides, the museum staff and the researcher.

The reactions to Kumari were underpinned by substantial differences in the way refugees and museum staff conceptualised the relation between religiosity and personhood. The liberal thinking articulated by the project team contrasted with the participants' religious beliefs, raising questions about how matters of faith should be addressed in engagement practices with refugees and diaspora groups.

1.2 Revealed bodies.

This section investigates how participants' religious sensibilities impacted their reception of certain objects – objects that, for example, exposed nudity and genitalia – and takes into account the relation between body secrecy and personhood in African societies.

Religious sensibility was particularly influential in the reception of anthropomorphic objects, most notably in reactions to the statues of naked bodies exhibited in the 'Living Area'. Research participants profoundly rejected these bare bodies, both men and women alike. This attitude contrasted with earlier SCVA projects with refugees, where participants' reactions to naked statues revealed a more positive affiliation with these objects.

This dissertation argues that Pentecostalism's view of the body and senses played a central role in some research participants' perception of 'naked objects'. This powerful area of experience is better explained by participants' responses to *Eve*, a statue by Charles Despiau (Fig. 5b) in the gallery.

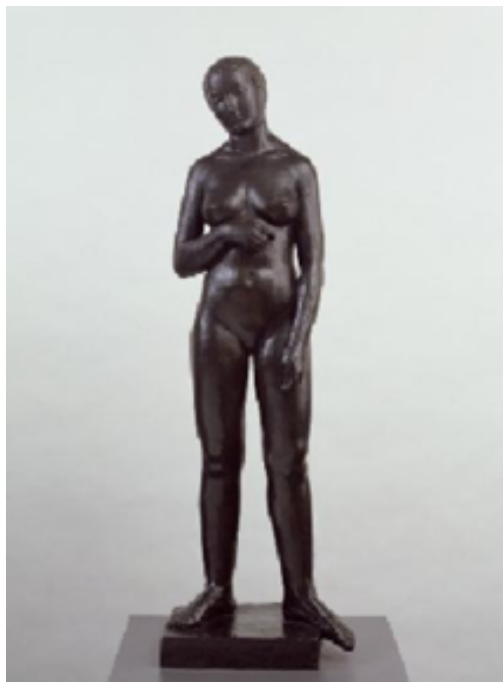


Figure 5b: *Eve*. Charles Despiau (1874-1946). France. 1925. Bronze. h. 78.1 cm. Acquired 1936. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 40.

As seen in ninth narrative block (below), some research participants saw objects exposing nudity and genitalia as pornographic. This is an interesting reformulation of the modernist sensibility that inspires the ‘Living Area’, where nudity is celebrated as an aesthetic canon of the ‘classical’ body. At the same time, this attitude towards naked objects did not apply equally across the rest of the collection. It could be argued that, in contrast to other objects, Despiau’s *Eve* was criticised for explicitly pointing to breasts and genitalia, which the group could have considered an outrageous act.

Narrative block 9

- | | |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Marcel | <i>This is a form of pornography. It is no good...you can see everything.</i> |
| Fabienne | <i>It is not nice to show everything. It is not good to show this in public.</i> |
| Léo | <i>These things are private. You don’t talk about them. We don’t have them in the Congo.</i> |
| Babette | <i>Children can ask questions I don’t want to answer...</i> |

A number of speculations can be made about the attitude provoked by some of the collection's naked objects. Although the tropes of Christianity were not always explicitly evoked, it could be important to consider how nakedness is conceptualised in the Bible.²

The category of 'colonised bodies' (Lock and Farquhar, 2007) can also help to understand how the colonial encounter might have led people to embrace a particular sense of 'decency'. As Lock and Farquhar explained:

'nakedness' did *not* proclaim, to the evangelist, either savage innocence or nude nobility. It evoked degeneracy and disorder, the wild and the wanton, dirt and contagion – all familiar signs and ciphers in European conceptions of the continent. (ibid.: 224, emphasis in the original).

The authors also commented on the fact that, from first contact, colonial Europeans in Africa insisted that Africans in their presence adopt a minimal standard of decorum by, at the very least, covering their 'private' parts (ibid.: 249), an attitude endorsed by colonial powers across the world. In the context of Protestant missions in Tswana, Comaroff and Comaroff (1997) argued that this attitude consistently took the shape of covering African 'nakedness' by re-dressing people in European fashion, insinuating a newly embodied sense of self-worth, taste and personhood. In the Katanga region, where Pentecostal missionaries were particularly active, the body and senses were an important locus of the coloniser's moral reform operation (Meyer, 2010).

In this context, Knibble (2011: 94) argued that a good Christian needed particular ways of talking, moving and doing things, which were considered factors in attaining salvation. However, while Charismatic Christianity and the colonial encounter may offer keys to the interpretation of 'naked objects', this dissertation claims that participants' notions of decency cannot be fully understood without taking into account notions of privacy and secrecy in African societies.

² The theme of nakedness is, for example, evoked in Genesis in association first with innocence, then with self-discovery, shame, fear and finally divine wrath, followed by expulsion from Eden. Moreover Hebrew culture possessed complicated rules and ideas about the exposure of the human body, including a long list of prohibitions on uncovering the nakedness of near kin (see Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997: 470).

As Fabienne and Léo outlined (narrative block 9), decency goes hand in hand with discussions of what is acceptable to share in the public domain and what should be kept private, and therefore secret.

As Beidelman (1993) argued, secrecy is central to all human affairs. The paradoxes and ambiguities of concealment and revelation infuse every form of human behaviour: from how we dress to the way we speak, from formal modes of etiquettes to the most routine daily encounters. In Africa, the body is at the very centre of these ambiguities, sometimes presented as seductive and dignified, and sometimes as harmless or dangerous; concealing the body, secluding it, veiling certain bodily functions all play crucial roles in defining a social person (*ibid.*: 45).

On the relation between body secrecy and personhood, Mary Douglas (2002) observed that the physical body is an entry point to understanding a society's norms; the symbolic conception of a polluted or clean body can affect the interpretations of taboos and the boundaries we create with others. However, Douglas was most concerned with the social function such labels have in the social construction of a group's reality. Labelling things or persons as 'pure' or 'polluted' serves as a way to maintain group identity, as such indicates the power to include and exclude. Moore (1984: 9-11) also argued for the impact of body secrecy on social relations in his study of privacy's social and cultural history. Moore noticed how, in many cultures, the secretive treatment of body parts is not only central to the development of privacy but, more importantly, to that of personhood.

The relation between privacy and secrecy also finds a corroboration in socio-linguistics across Africa: in KiLuba, spoken in most of the Katanga province of modern-day DRC, the word for secrecy also means 'prohibitions', while in other languages the concept is linked to 'lies'; for members of the Poro association of West Africa, secrecy is that which cannot be discussed; and in many Bantu languages, the vocabulary of secrecy also relates to the concept of obscurity (Nooter, 1993).

At the same time, from a cross-cultural perspective, *Eve* presents a dilemma for the practice and exercise of body secrecy, as people might hold conflicting views on what should be kept private and what can be shared. The issue becomes more apparent in narrative block 10 (below), as *Eve* evokes recent memories of a trip to the coast.

Narrative block 10

- Albert *Social service took us to the beach. Everybody was expecting us to put on swimming clothes and off to the sea...But where I come from I cannot swim half-naked in front of my children!*
- Sabine *If you go swimming with your children, you need to wear underwear [swimming clothes] and children can't see mothers in underwear..that's why I don't swim.*
- Brenda *But you are not naked, you are wearing a swimming costume. I don't see the problem.*
- Fabiene *It is not good for children to see naked bodies. They cannot see the body of their father or their mother, their legs, anything!*

Here, parents faced the practical problem of how to convey a sense of body secrecy to their children that is at odds with the view endorsed by social services and society at large. These types of ambiguities have been significantly under-researched in the study of secrecy. In the few comparative analyses that do exist, contributors either studied secrecy through the lens of history (Moore, 1984) or conducted a limited cross-cultural enquiry for isolated examples (Tefft, 1980). There are no instances where research on secrecy involved analysing cross-cultural interactions, arguably making this study the first of its kind.

The participants' reaction to the *Eve* statue demonstrates that certain naked objects were considered indecent not only for showing private body parts, but also for revealing a form of knowledge that should be kept secret.

1.3 On secrecy and personhood.

This section analyses the challenges that migrating to a new cultural environment might pose to the control of secrecy, particularly in relation to the organisation of children's transition into adulthood.

As discussed in the section above, participants deemed it inappropriate to display artwork that exposes certain body parts in the public domain. According to Babette (narrative block 9, p. 152), displaying such art could lead children to ask uncomfortable questions. In fact, an important aspect of the administration of secret knowledge is in its transmission to the next generation through a set of understood restrictions and silences about the proper time and place for certain discourses (Picton, 1990: 193).

From this perspective, the passing of secret knowledge does not only concern the revelation of new information, but also the contexts in which such information should be revealed. Some of the tensions that emerged in the latter responses to *Eve* were more clearly articulated in discussions surrounding the Fisherman's God statuette (Fig 5c). These figures, which originate from Rarotonga Island in the Cook archipelago in the central South Pacific, were mounted at the front of fishing canoes along with food and flowers, as offerings for the God before setting sail (Hooper, 2006: 219). This object was presented to the group a week after the workshop with *Eve*, and it is fair to assume that the first debate could have influenced the second.



Figure 5c: Male figure- 'Fishermen's god'. Rarotonga, Cook Islands. Late 18th to mid 19th century. Wood. h. 40.7 cm. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 189.

The biography of the Fisherman's God statuette is crucial for contextualising the responses that emerged, and helps to further clarify how subjects and objects interacted with each other. The artefact suffered a genital mutilation in the late 18th century by Christian missionaries in Polynesia. Albert was familiar with the story of the statuette, due to his research on the collection for Refugee Week 2011 (Chapter 4, Section 2.2). When the group gathered around the statuette, Albert awkwardly discussed the artefact's dismemberment, pointing to the section where the genitalia had been.

As can be seen in narrative block 11 (below), the subsequent conversation corroborated the correlation between religious sensibility and ideas of decency and secrecy discussed above. However, it is important to note that participants were not necessarily worried about sex education *per se*, as Babette argues that such education can be useful. In this context, the use of condoms is interpreted as a means of HIV prevention, as opposed to a tool to reduce teenage pregnancy. In fact, participants seemed more concerned with whether it was at all appropriate for schools to handle this knowledge, which is part of the national curriculum from age 11.

Narrative block 11

- Albert *Why do people talk so much about sex here? I don't understand.*
- Sabine *For example, why children have to know everything about it [sex]? Last week, we received a letter from the school where my niece studies and they wanted us to say 'yes' to sex education.*
- Albert *I received the same thing, it is a consent form. I have not signed it, I have to think about it...*
- Dominique *The other day my eight year-old son came back home from school and asked me if it was true that 'when mum and dad sleep in the same bed they have babies'...I didn't know what to say to him, so I didn't reply and went to the other room..*
- Babette *It is good for them [children] to know that they need to use condoms. I am happy that they can learn about it. If you don't learn, you die.*

In relation to the above responses, it is fair to ask whether refugees considered schools to be interfering in the administration of secret knowledge. While body secrecy might be concealed by tighter social networks or ritual structures in DRC, in the UK it is revealed, formalised, administered by the state and poses a direct threat to family dynamics.

In the context of discussions around *Eve* and the Fisherman's God, more subtle forces might have also been at play. As Simmel (1950: 345) argued, secrets provide protection and their exposure can lead to a loss of autonomy and esteem for the person or group whose secrets are revealed. Along these lines, parents' concern for their children could be reframed as a deeper discomfort related to issues of belonging and group identity.

As argued in Chapter 4, the diasporic experience is a state of hybridity with multiple and often conflicting forces at play. In this ‘discontinuous state of being’, in Said’s words, establishing what it is to be Congolese is not an easy matter or even the point at all times. It is, therefore, unsurprising that a year later Albert said he was taking his children to swim at the coast over the summer holidays, despite his previous claims otherwise. The reactions to *Eve* and the Fisherman’s God demonstrate how a new environment’s ideas of privacy and body secrecy can pose a threat to family dynamics. Parents were worried that children would come to embody cultural norms that are at odds with Congolese notions of individual and social personhood.

1.4 Concealed bodies.

This section shifts the focus onto museum staff and the researcher, arguing that their understanding of privacy and body secrecy raised ethical concerns in terms of the facilitation of interactions with certain naked objects.

Two Figures in a Room, by Francis Bacon (Fig. 5d), offers an interesting perspective in this respect. Although the artist never publically acknowledged that the depicted figures were both male, a substantial body of research points in this direction (see Cooper, 1994; Arya, 2012). Even if little is known about the painting, it is clear that the artist is making a private moment public in his depiction of this scene.



Figure 5d: *Two Figures in a Room*. Francis Bacon (1909-1992). England. 1959. Oil on canvas. 198.1 x 141.6 cm. Acquired 1960. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 33.

The painting is prominently located in the gallery and has striking dimensions, standing at almost 2m x 1.50m. Although the project team tried to avoid drawing attention to the painting during the workshops, the group still gravitated towards the painting several times. In one session, the project team asked a group of women to select an object to discuss and they immediately chose the canvas. The women expressed a desire to be accompanied by a female member of staff in their encounter with the painting. However, the researcher also insisted to be present to record the groups' reaction to the object (reproduced in narrative block 12); a request that the group hesitantly accepted.

Narrative block 12

Madalene *The big white naked man looks like he wants to have sex with the other man, he is in that position!*

Babette *I don't like this. I don't want to talk about this.*

Madalene *Two men cannot be together, why they are here?*

Adela *I want to stay and learn about this.*

The member of staff who facilitated the debate observed how the initial absence of male participants meant the women were more open in discussing the contentions raised by the object. Hence, when the male researcher joined, the tone changed and the women's behaviour became more formal. Looking at these dynamics in the context of the discussion of secrecy, it could be argued that the women felt it was inappropriate for them to debate the object in front of a man. As noted by Nooter (1993: 24), the boundaries of secrecy are often gender sensitive, so that men and women might differently approach what can be revealed and ought to be concealed in every situation. The researcher's presence was therefore highly problematic: withdrawal from the debate would have benefitted research ethics, but failure to attend would have impacted data collection. However, by crossing the gender divide the researcher could have also endangered his relationship with the group, had the women disapproved.

At the same time, it is also interesting to consider the project team's initial avoidance of discussions on this particular object, as their attempt to bypass the painting was, in fact, based on the assumption that debating homosexuality would generate conflicting responses within the group. This is an element that also further emphasised the researcher's ethical challenges. In his reflexive ethnography *Syrian Episodes: Sons, Fathers, and an Anthropologist in Aleppo*, John Borneman (2007) debated the dilemmas of discussing his sexual orientation with research participants, and concluded that it is a private matter that does not need to be disclosed. As narrative block 13 illustrates (below), the researcher took a similar position, thinking it inappropriate to disclose his homosexuality to research participants.

Narrative block 13

- | | |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Babette | <i>What do you think about it?</i> |
| Researcher | <i>I don't see anything wrong about it...</i> |
| Babette | <i>So do you think that two men having sex is ok?</i> |
| Researcher | <i>Yes.</i> |
| Babette | <i>Do you have a girlfriend?</i> |
| Researcher | [no answer] |

The attempt to avoid the painting demonstrates how notions of secrecy, public and private knowledge can continuously shift in cross-cultural contexts. In this case, participants considered nakedness to be a form of knowledge inappropriate for public debate, and the project team and researcher took a similar approach to homosexuality. Nevertheless, this apparent equivalence was undermined by a fundamental ethical problem: participants had no agency in deciding what was up for public debate until the question of the Bacon study arose, whilst museum staff and the researcher exerted the power to conceal and reveal relevant knowledge throughout. In this context, the researcher's position deeply challenged issues of authority and reciprocity in the field.

On the one hand, it could be claimed that the researcher benefitted the research process by concealing his homosexuality, as it prevented a possible break in the relationship of trust with participants. However, on the other hand, the act of concealing revealed a lack of reciprocity in the process: participants trusted the researcher and discussed important aspects of their lives, but did not enjoy mutual recognition.

The dynamics that emerged in response to *Two Figures in a Room* demonstrate the challenges scholars can encounter when researching privacy and body secrecy. The interactions triggered by the painting presented the researcher with the ethical dilemma of how to study a gendered discussion, questioning his right to access the debate.

2. Techniques of the *object-body*.

The sections above argued that refugees resisted, in certain ways, public display of naked bodies, and claimed that ideas of decency, privacy and body secrecy all intervened in how research participants perceived certain objects. However, the project team also entered this space with their own assumptions around the body, which brought areas of cross-cultural negotiation to the fore in relation to the types of knowledge that should be revealed or concealed. Following on, this section looks at how refugees used the expressions, moods and positions associated with anthropomorphic objects to imaginatively reflect on processes of everyday embodiment and relevant cross-cultural variations.

2.1 The nonverbal dimension of objects.

This section investigates how participants used objects' posture and body language to conceptualise the relation between *self* and *other* in resettlement, using techniques of the body (Mauss, 1979) as a conceptual framework for analysing bodily practices. Mauss defined body techniques as 'ways in which from society to society men know how to use their bodies' (1979: 97). Body techniques are embedded in cultural contexts where they have symbolic significance and are normatively regulated. Mauss also posited that these embodied forms of knowing and understanding are social, meaning that their principles are communicated and passed through networks.

According to Mauss, body techniques vary considerably across societies and social groups. The author uses the notion of ‘habitus’ to conceptualise the collective knowledge involved in ‘body techniques’. On this note, Bourdieu (1990: 74) argued that from the time of childhood, this knowledge is transmitted through practice and processes of mimesis, which do not necessarily rise to the level of discourse.

Migrating to a new environment can create all sorts of assumptions (and misunderstanding) about the messages conveyed by nonverbal communication. In this respect, Von Raffler-Engel (1988) explained how cultural differences in nonverbal communication can lead to misunderstandings in gestures, touches, eye contact and their attributed cultural meanings. Von Raffler-Engel argued that nonverbal signs are symbols within the culture of their sender, and all receivers may not attribute the same or similar meaning to such symbols (ibid.: 96).

In one instance, the position attributed to a statue led to a cross-cultural debate on practices of mediating personal space in social interactions. Volunteer guide Brenda introduced Henry Moore’s *Mother and Child* sculpture (Fig. 5e) to the group; she presented the object, discussed its formal qualities and remarked on the sculpture’s strong sense of physicality. The group was then invited to comment on what they thought the artist was trying to convey, which encouraged people to describe the object. As reported in narrative block 14 (below), participants noted the mother’s firm hug, the idea of safety expressed by the sculpture, and lamented the lack of physical contact between mothers and children in the UK.

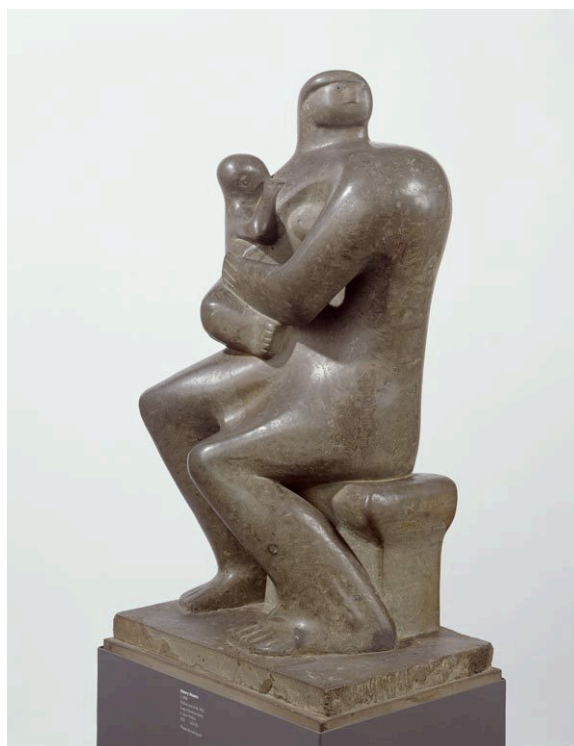


Figure 5e: *Mother and Child*. Henry Moore. 1932. Green Hornton stone
h 99.5 x w 53.5 x d 38 cm. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 82

Narrative block 14

- Babette *She is worried, like she is scared for her baby... that's why she holds him like that... She loves her baby, you can see how she is looking around, like she is in a jungle or a dangerous place.*
- Adela *Mothers don't carry babies like this here. Children don't get a lot of hugs here. People seem a bit scared of touching each other... In the Congo, it is the opposite, people touch you all the time.*
- Albert *I don't know what to do sometimes, if you get too close to people it doesn't look a good thing. I tried a few times to stop and have a chat with my neighbours in the street. They say 'hi, how are you' but when I start answering back they don't really listen to what I say! Maybe, I am not polite, I don't know...*
- Adela *When I walk around, I hear people saying 'sorry' all the time, also when they have done nothing wrong. Is this what is to be polite?*
- Brenda *People really value their privacy in the UK, so being polite is a way of showing deference rather than keeping people at a distance. When I say sorry it is to make sure I am not doing anything to hurt other people's feelings...*

In response to the object, one of the research participants picked up her niece to mirror the sculpture's action. In another instance, a participant identified with a Yoruba priestess figure, which depicts a women similarly carrying a baby on her back (Fig. 5f).



Figure 5f: Research participants mirroring the actions performed by sculptures.

The act of mimicry is interesting here in establishing the terms of phenomenological interaction with the object, where a human and non-human actor – as Latour would have it – conjoined in the generation of meaning. The network of associations opened by the object showed the participants' difficulties in decoding everyday social interactions. The intimacy suggested by *Mother and Child* led to questions about how the body might be used to demarcate both physical and social distance, as well as emphasise how 'politeness' provides a framework for bodily interactions. In this context, Brenda's relation between privacy and politeness might have been anachronistic to the group, in light of the discussions around nakedness explored above.

The debate around the sculpture accentuates how processes of embodiment play an important role in the way refugees construct a sense of belonging in a new environment. The discussion demonstrates how the negotiation of personal space can be a source of tension in relation to the host society.

The body language suggested by objects also provided a platform to reflect on changes impacting even the more intimate interpersonal relationships in resettlement. In one instance, the meaning attributed to an interaction between two figures was imaginatively used to discuss changes perceived to be affecting gender roles. Such was the case of *Study (I)* by Jacob Epstein, which depicts a man kneeling before a woman (Fig. 5g). The drawing's body relations became a metaphor for how male participants saw gender roles in the new environment (discussed in narrative block 15), as they felt their authority was being challenged. However, this was an instance when female respondents stood silent. As explored in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3), most of the participants were married couples and gender dynamics played an important role in interactions.



Figure 5g: *Study (I)*. Jacob Epstein. England. c. 1931. Crayon, wash. h. 55.7 x w. 40.6 cm. Acquired before 1932. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 76.

Narrative block 15

Léo *This makes me think about me and my wife. Back home many jobs in the house are made by women: from looking after children to farming. When I was in DRC I didn't help because these things are not the responsibility of men. But here I have to help my wife more...*

Albert *There is a big difference between here and the Congo. Here you see men and women doing almost the same things. This is not possible in the Congo. For example, when I arrived I couldn't believe there were female bus drivers. I felt very unsafe at the beginning.*

Marcel *In the Congo people are poor and society favour the strongest, the male who are sent to school if possible, whilst women are left behind to work in the fields and care about the family.*

Mother and Child and the *Study (1)* offered participants a symbolic resource to reflect creatively on body language and its cross-cultural variations. At the same time, following Merleau-Ponty's line of thought (2002), it can be claimed that anthropomorphic objects enabled people to interpret the social world as a 'chiasmic' intertwining of bodies, the perceiving and perceptible, the sensuous and sensible. As argued by sociologist Nick Crossley (2007: 84), others' perception is not ordinarily perception of 'a body'. The other is not a physical thing but rather a locus of meaning; body posture, comportment, gestures, movements and associated meanings foreground our perception. Crossley carried on by arguing that body techniques are not merely a matter of appearance to be studied through semiotic analysis. Instead, they are phenomenological agents that can modify perceptual, affective and cognitive structures, playing a crucial role in rendering the world meaningful (ibid.: 90).

Anthropomorphic objects functioned beyond the symbolic, highlighting the ways in which refugees interpreted everyday bodily experiences. Participants used objects to both identify aspects of body politics that differentiated them from the host society and discuss these perceived areas of dissonance with the project team.

2.2 Fashioning the body.

This section analyses how the attributing of human form to objects led participants to discuss artefacts in relation to even more subtle and specialised forms of communication, such as dress and bodily adornment.

The study of processes of embodiment has been particularly concerned with the fact that the ‘surface’ of the human body can be highly political terrain. In his ethnography of the Kayapo people of modern-day Brazil, Turner (1980) argued that the body is a ‘social skin’ that forms the biological and social frontiers of the self:

The surface of the body, as the common frontier of society, the social self, and the psycho-biological individual, becomes the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialisation is enacted, and bodily adornment (in all its culturally multifarious forms, from body-painting to clothing and from feather headdresses to cosmetics) becomes the language through which it is expressed. (ibid.: 112)

Following from Turner, it is clear why discussions on dress and bodily adornment are relevant to the dynamics investigated in this chapter. Turner claimed that ‘as these two (the biological and social) entities are quite different and cultures differ widely in the way they define both, the relation between them is highly problematic’ (ibid). In a cross-cultural environment, the processes of negotiation disclosed by dress code and outer appearance might not only reveal cultural norms, but also individuals’ strategies of resistance.

Degas’ *Little dancer aged fourteen* sculpture (Fig. 5h) provoked a telling debate in this respect. Gallery guides Pete and Wilson introduced the object, discussing its bronze casting technique and variation in materials. Pete revealed that the girl who inspired Degas’ statue was a 19th century dancer, likely called Maria. This contributed to further humanising the object, as participants subsequently addressed the statue by name.



Figure 5h: *Little dancer aged fourteen*. Edgar Degas. 1880-81. Bronze, edition unknown, cast c. 1922. h. 99.1 cm. Acquired 1938. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 2.

Narrative block 16 presents a similar *topos* to that explored in the earlier parts of this chapter, demonstrating how dress codes are implicated in deep-seated ideas of decency. In fact, clothing was a central aspect of colonial evangelism, with missionaries strongly believing in the capacity of proper dress to impart profound change on people's sentiments and conduct (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997: 236).

Narrative block 16

- Fabienne *Maria is a little girl, it is not good that she wears this skirt. I can't understand why women in this country can go around with short skirts like this.*
- Adela *I saw in the news that a Nigerian man slapped a young woman in public because she was wearing a short skirt. The man wanted to make her a favour in telling her not to wear that... but then the man was taken to court for this...*
- Léo *In the Congo the family of the woman would thank the man for what he did, instead of taking him to court... The family would be ashamed and everybody would talk evil about them.*

The importance of dressing ‘properly’ was evoked here in association with the recent news of a woman who had been slapped in public for wearing a short dress. This news report triggered a discussion that even further clarified the political dimension of clothing in the diaspora. In narrative block 17 (below), dressing ‘the Congolese way’ is alluded to as an important component in building a sense of personhood in exile. As argued by Akou (2004), who studied the politics of dress among Somali Muslim refugee women in Minnesota, clothing can provide a strong sense of belonging and collective identity. The author noted that the women started covering their hands and face in public, once in the US, to reaffirm their Muslim identity in a predominantly Christian country (ibid.: 50). Akou argued that to publically dress in Somali fashion signalled the significance of the Somali nation to both their diaspora community and the population among whom the women live.³

Narrative block 17

Fabienne	<i>Here there are also young Congolese girls that go out dressed like Maria. They are no good people, because they don't know what is to be Congolese.</i>
Albert	<i>We don't have to forget Africa...we should never forget Africa!</i>
Babette	<i>I don't want to see them anymore. They are a bad family.</i>

Akou's observations add further nuance to the counterpunctual sensibility of life in exile. Albert's plea not to forget Africa demonstrates how dress codes are mobilised to articulate the sense of cultural duality experienced in the diaspora. In Chapter 4 (Section 2.1, narrative block 2), Madalene's remark ‘We are British now’ mirrored this sense – the constant negotiation between differentiation and assimilation, between here and there.

³ For a wider analysis of how African textiles became a symbolic and economic asset in the politics of identity-making in the diaspora, see Boateng (2004).

Participants' responses to *Little dancer aged fourteen* clearly highlighted the function of dress codes as expressions of both cultural resistance and desires to integrate. Participants emphasised that being Congolese means adopting African apparel and rejecting 'other' ways of fashioning the body. There could also be deep historical roots to the reactions to the statue, particularly in relation to the rhetoric of 'traditional dress' used in the context of the DRC. Moorman (2004: 85) claimed that Mobutu's '*authenticité*' mandate is perhaps the most well-known example of the association between dress and politics in Africa. Here, the independent state promoted African apparel during the nation-building project as a form of roots recovery: African cultural forms were to act as a remedy for the Eurocentric identity of some urban residents, seen in their tendency to wear European clothes and speak French.

In the course of the project, participants widely adopted the embodiment strategy of using dress to signal a sense of belonging: people attending the sessions – women in particular – put great effort into fashioning their bodies with elaborate kitenges and headdresses (Fig. 5i).



Figure 5i: Research participants wearing African apparel.

At the same time, as narrative block 16 demonstrates, dress politics are far from an easy matter for diaspora groups. Participants' association between the *Little dancer* and a young woman who, through wearing a short skirt, allegedly brought shame on both herself and the Congolese community revealed the overlapping sensibilities around dress and its public function. In their exploration of embodied forms of resistance, Bobel and Kwan (2011) noted how dress codes, among other signifiers, can violate normative uses of the body and be employed to contest cultural norms, particularly within subcultural groups.

This highlights how bodily resistance is a complicated dance of negotiation, with constant tension between resisting and accommodating (Weitz, 2001). Adult members of the local Congolese diaspora use Congolese apparel as both a positive reinforcement of their traditions and an act of resistance against assimilation into European fashion; while a Congolese teenager employs European fashion in reaction to her diaspora group's politics of dress. As the responses to the statue attest, dress codes can therefore become an issue affecting internal group dynamics, as the family of the teenager could be considered unworthy and consequently ostracised from local social networks.

The responses to *Little dancer* also intersect with wider debates in contemporary cross-cultural discourses around the increasing politicisation of dress codes and reading fashion through the lens of particular ideological agendas. Across Europe, recent debates around the Muslim veil and burkini are a good example in this respect, as these objects changed from signs of religious devotion to a means of oppression through public discourse. These discussions are quite relevant in the context of work with diaspora groups, refugees in particular, as scholars are increasingly interested in the influence of dress code on the process of refugee integration. Deuchar (2011) provides a promising pathway in this area of research. Drawing on a small-scale qualitative research with young refugees in Glasgow, Deuchar pointed to the impact of dress codes in defining refugees' relations with local Glaswegians, as well as how the dress codes adopted by refugees might reinforce prejudices in mainstream culture.

The debates that emerged in response to *Little dancer aged fourteen* provided significant insight into the relation between dress and embodiment, furthering our understanding of the local Congolese diaspora.

2.3 The feelings of objects.

This section explores how the human features and characteristics attributed to objects also sparked debate about deep-seated, everyday feelings and emotions.

In the above section, the reactions to Henry Moore's *Mother and Child* – where participants associated the 'mother' with feelings of love and worry for her 'child' – already pointed to a connection between the pose attributed to objects and the feelings this pose might convey. Bourdieu (1990), commenting on the role of posture in the social field, observed that 'the simple effect of re-placing the body in an overall posture – which recalls the associate thoughts and feelings – is one of the inductive states of the body which, as actors know, give rise to states of mind' (69). The intimate connection of linking posture to emotions is unsurprising and an important component of the processes of everyday embodiment investigated here.

The politics of emotion surrounding museum objects came even more to the fore in participants' reaction to *Head of a Woman (Anna Zborowska)* by Modigliani (Fig. 5j). In this painting, the woman's expression led participants to notice cross-cultural differences in the way anger is expressed and the perceived tone of voice.



Figure 5j: *Head of a Woman (Anna Zborowska)*. Amedeo Modigliani. 1918. Oil on canvas. h 53.7 x w 36.8 cm. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. UEA 13.

While standing in front of the painting, one participant (Marcel) noted the pursed lips, the inclination of the eyes and the woman's reclining posture, which he associated with feelings of anger. Marcel then enacted the woman's position several times, mimicking an irritated expression (Fig. 5k). This embodiment strategy recalls another participant's re-enactment of the action performed in *Mother and Child* (Section 2.1).

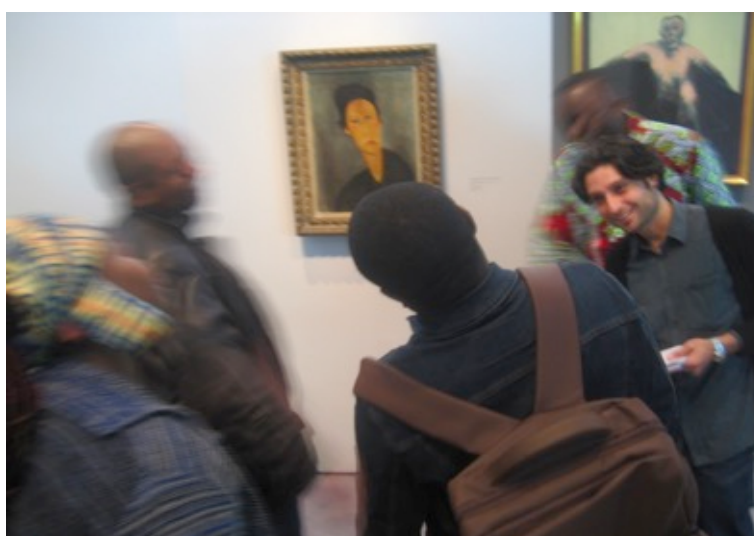


Figure 5k: Marcel interpreting the painting through bodily associations.

According to Benjamin (1979), the mimetic process passes between bodies and subtends without replacing or superseding cognitively mediated communication. Mimesis trespasses the sphere of subjective action, placing itself at the junction between subjects where similarity can appear in a flash. Along similar lines, Adorno (1984) used the concept of mimesis to express not the imitative dimension of social life, but rather the playful, imaginative and performative relationships people share, as well as cultural forms and processes. In response to Marcel's initial comments, a number of participants remarked that the woman's facial expression did not match their understanding of anger (seen below in narrative block 18).

Narrative block 18

- | | |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fabienne | <i>I don't think she is angry, when I am angry I go crazy in the house... she looks calm I think</i> |
| Babette | <i>I think she is not angry, when I am angry I shout to everybody and then I go to my room!</i> |
| Léo | <i>In the Congo if you are angry in the street you can shout or do something. Here you cannot do it, otherwise people think you are crazy.</i> |
| Albert | <i>Sometimes I feel sad for this. The other day, I was on the bus talking on the phone and somebody asked me to be quiet...</i> |

The responses emphasised ways of dealing with anger that clashed with Marcel's interpretation of the painting. People were particularly concerned with how anger is dealt with at both the private and public level, highlighting how the management of emotions depends on the cultural context. Léo noted how he had felt restrained since moving to Britain, particularly in relation to public displays of emotion. Albert followed on, commenting on how tone of voice is a problematic area of everyday embodiment.

Participants' non-verbal language also emphasised the stress involved in the careful management of one's emotional life: while standing in front of the painting, people kept signalling to their head and heart areas, mobilising their entire bodies to convey their thoughts; in the gallery, people looked at their own bodies in their search for how to express their thoughts and feelings. In this respect, Rosaldo (1984: 143) argued that the self is a sort of body-container, where emotions are 'embodied thoughts which are felt in flushes, pulses, movements of our livers, minds, hearts, stomachs, skin'.

The mimetic strategies adopted in response to *Head of a Woman (Anna Zborowska)* led some of the participants to embody the feelings and emotions evoked by the object, triggering a discussion on cross-cultural variations in the way emotions are expressed.

Conclusion.

The debates explored in this chapter show how museum objects can offer individuals opportunities for self-reflection and self-realisation. This chapter contributes to scholarly debates on the study of phenomenological interactions between subjects and objects, as well as the embodied experiences that can result from these encounters.

The first part of this chapter argued that refugees used anthropomorphic objects to reflect on the changes affecting individual and social personhood in Britain. The processes of embodiment evoked by objects shed light on how refugees conceptualise their relation with the host society, offering forced migration scholars with a promising research pathway for the resettlement process. The section claimed that notions of body secrecy and decency shaped the way research participants related to anthropomorphic objects. The workshop discussions also highlighted the ethical challenges involved in researching body secrecy and the complexities these present in a cross-cultural context.

The second part of this chapter noted that the body language refugees attributed to objects was used as a means of cross-cultural comparison, translating problematic areas of cultural adjustment. The analysis here also provided further insight into local Congolese identity politics. Furthermore, this section argued that research participants effectively humanised objects by projecting thoughts and feeling onto them. In the case of *Mother and Child* and *Study (1)*, the interactions between subjects and objects were also enriched by a further intersubjective dimension.

The dialogic interactions triggered by anthropomorphic objects generated opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue between research participants and the project team. These exchanges led individuals to meet each other on their own terms, using objects as means to establish empathic connections. At the same time, while museums and their collections can be suitable terrain for practices of cross-cultural dialogue, they also present risks. Questions arose concerning the kind of expertise museum represents, as museum staff are primarily trained in working with objects. While object-based practices can lead museum professionals to unravel complex discussions around identity and belonging, the debates that emerged around the body demand a partnership approach that incorporates relevant expertise in 'embodiment studies' in museums.

CONCLUSION

Towards a more hospitable museology.

This dissertation sits at the intersection of four disciplines: refugee studies, museology, anthropology and sociology. It examined the complexities, conflicts and ethical dilemmas involved in the study of refugee resettlement in Britain, arguing that museums can play a fundamental role in current debates around asylum and actively participate in the political, cultural and representational challenges confronted by society. In conclusion, this final chapter addresses this investigation's contribution to the fields of refugee studies and museum studies.

The study of refugee resettlement has traditionally been concerned with analysing the legal, economic and demographic aspects of displacement. When attempts have been made to focus on the subjective dimensions of resettlement, scholars primarily investigated refugees' experience through the prism of trauma studies and psychoanalysis. This dissertation contests this approach, contributing instead to forced migration scholars' growing tendency towards person-centred methodologies, which can empower refugees to articulate their own lived experience. Furthermore, this study underscores how an anthropological approach sustained throughout a prolonged period of engagement with refugee groups can lead to a better understanding of the dynamics of resettlement.

This dissertation also contributes to debates in museology around human rights and the affective potential of objects in museum practice. It drew attention to the ambiguities surrounding the human rights discourse articulated by museums in Britain; the analysis suggested that object-based practices with refugees can bring a fresh perspective to this debate, offering exiles a means to reflect on the process of identity rebuilding in resettlement.

The following paragraphs first summarise this study's main contributions. Then, the focus shifts to the notion of hospitality – discussed in this dissertation's Introduction – to identify how the analysis here can contribute to relevant debates emerging in museology.

The first part of this dissertation investigated how state actors and museums have sought to articulate or counter the experience of refugees in contemporary Britain. Chapter 1 offered an account of the post-2000 social policy framework and public discourses around refugees, as constructed by state actors and the media. This chapter argued that asylum discourses and practices have gradually reshaped the duty of protection articulated by the Geneva Convention. By examining the mechanisms of exclusion mobilised against refugees, this chapter emphasised the complementarity of such mechanisms with the state's practices of inclusion, which were fabricated to imagine the national community. It was argued that refugees have been reconfigured as a threat to community cohesion, a menace to national security and the labour market. One of this chapter's main conclusions is that hegemonic discourses of 'refugee identity' have progressively stripped asylum seekers and refugees of their fundamental humanity, introducing dangerous, anti-humanist rhetoric to public debates around migration.

Following on, Chapter 2 explored the ambivalent nature of the discourses and practices museums have developed around asylum. As there are a dearth of systematic studies in this area of practice, the researcher undertook an extensive survey across the sector. Through a close observation of the partnerships established with the refugee advocacy sector, this chapter argued that museums have either romanticised exiles' 'positive contribution' or pathologised refugees as traumatised subjects. One of this chapter's main conclusions is that these extreme formulations have effectively placed refugees 'outside the ordinary', subjugating human rights discourses to a logic of conditional belonging.

What emerges with particular clarity from the first two chapters is that, despite claims to the contrary, museums have failed to articulate effective counter-hegemonic discourses around forced migration. This corroborates the point argued by postcolonial scholars in this dissertation's Introduction: even when dominant discourses around identity are challenged, hegemonic powers are still the source of counter-discourses.

The second part of this dissertation argued that object-based practices offer museums an opportunity to modify and question hegemonic interpretations of refugee identity and provide individuals with tools of self-inquiry.

Chapter 3 looked at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts' work with refugees in Norwich, arguing that community engagement practices with individuals whose human rights have been violated can jeopardise mechanisms of exclusion. One of this chapter's main conclusions is that the power struggles ignited by refugee social networks can profoundly impact museum research and practice.

Chapter 4 claimed that object-based practices can provide exiles with a symbolic resource for discussing the process of identity rebuilding in resettlement. Furthermore, it also argued that this analysis can help museum scholars and practitioners move beyond notions of locality and cultural specificity in working with diaspora groups. Chapter 5 then expanded on these considerations by exploring the phenomenological interactions between subjects and objects in the gallery. Here, the analysis focused on the embodied experiences triggered by anthropomorphic objects, demonstrating how refugees conceptualise the changes affecting individual and social personhood in resettlement. Exiles used anthropomorphic objects as means of cross-cultural comparison in order to translate problematic areas of cultural adjustment. The dialogic interactions triggered by anthropomorphic objects generated opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue whereby research participants, the researcher and the project team established empathic connections with each other.

Museums and Hospitality.

This dissertation demonstrated that asylum policies and discourses have gradually eroded people's universal right to hospitality; a right Kant argued is acquired from birth. Hospitality is no longer framed as a duty or obligation, now it is a right one must acquire according to the host's increasing conditionalities. In Britain, the politics of belonging around asylum demonstrate the double binding nature of the notions of hospitality and hostility. At the same time – as Deridda (2000b) reminded in this dissertation's Introduction – it is possible to imagine an absolute or 'unconditional hospitality', where the stranger is welcome on his/her own terms. One this dissertation's key aims is for unconditional hospitality to be actualised through political practices, bringing empathy to the core of asylum legislation and public debates around forced migration.

In the context of museums, a move towards unconditional hospitality requires institutions to construct representational discourses that go beyond extreme formulations, and instead depict refugees as ordinary individuals. Turton (2004) argued that there is greater potential for building empathic connections when society views refugees as ordinary people. When refugees are viewed in this way, they are seen more like 'us' and, hence, members of the community. Displays that engage visitors in processes of self-identification with the 'other' offer a promising research pathway in this respect. Recently, this approach was explored in the 'Identity: yours, mine, ours' exhibition at Melbourne's Immigration Museum in 2011, which asked visitors to focus on how processes of identity, identification and belonging continuously shift (Schorch, 2015). This exhibition used digital interactives as tools to challenge visitors' responses to and perceptions of everyday encounters with migrants. Such approaches present an opportunity to shift current debates around refugees, inviting visitors to undergo processes of self-alteration through experiencing what is to be the 'other'.

However, if organisations wish to move in this direction, more in-depth research on the theoretical underpinnings of museums' human rights practice is needed. In this context, theories of recognition can offer museums a springboard for articulating more sophisticated human rights discourses. Fraser (2001, 2003) noted that recognition is a question of social status, as it allows group members to participate as full partners in social interactions. The author argued that certain social groups, like refugees, are often misrecognised by discursive patterns that label actors as inferior. This dissertation's analysis of museum practices with and about refugees fully illustrates these dynamics. Furthermore, Fraser argued that a focus on recognition should be coupled with an emphasis on redistribution, as people who experience the injustices of misrecognition also suffer socio-economic inequalities that lead to marginalisation and exploitation. The author situated recognition and redistribution as two interdependent conceptual domains that are co-fundamental to achieving social justice. This approach offers a guiding principle for museums' activist positions, placing institutional practice within a much wider social, economic and political context. At the same time, as this thesis demonstrates, there are important challenges to consider when museums step into a territory traditionally occupied by advocacy organisations. This points to the need for more in-depth studies on the organisational shifts required for museums to adopt a more politically active role in the promotion of human rights.

Community Engagement practices with refugees.

This dissertation argued that more detailed and intensive experiences with refugees can illuminate wider thinking and analysis on forced migration. The case study demonstrated the relevance of longitudinal research with exiles and the importance of developing engagement methodologies that can respond to refugee group dynamics. In particular, this dissertation highlighted how research practice can interact with the resettlement process, bringing a fresh perspective to discussions around notions of community empowerment in museums.

At the same time, research-led community engagement work also presents a number of challenges for practitioners. This dissertation demonstrated that museum work with refugees tends to be reactive and less concerned with long-term partnerships. Partnerships with refugee organisations can be particularly demanding in terms of resources, questioning their sustainability in an increasingly adverse funding environment. At the time of writing, only a handful of institutions across the country have on-going relations with refugee organisations.

However, this dissertation still argues that community engagement practices with refugees have the potential to imagine new ways of realising unconditional hospitality through museum practice. Museums can be configured as spaces where refugees are encouraged to represent themselves on their own terms. More importantly, community engagement work presents both exiles and museum staff with an opportunity to share moments of complicity and bridge the gap between self and other. Having said so, it is important to recognise that, in order for these practices to have tangible impacts, methodologies that can realise their full potential for society at large need to be developed.

To this end, promoting engagement practices that move beyond the logic of positive discrimination, and therefore facilitate interactions between refugees and members of the local community, is an important first step. This approach could foster a culture of welcoming and mutual understanding by providing opportunities to explore people's shared commonalities. As an example, museums could build strategic partnerships across all sectors of civil society, inviting local schools, libraries and businesses to facilitate occasions for refugees and the local population to interact.

This dissertation demonstrated that museums are well-placed in this respect, as they offer individuals a space for participation and civic engagement. Furthermore, this dissertation also underscored that museums can help newly arrived migrants develop new skills. The case study presented here demonstrated how refugees can practise conversational English by using objects as a locus for engaging in sometimes complex discussions. In addition, the project also aided some participants' access to employment opportunities.

Museum Objects and Intercultural Dialogue.

The analysis here stressed the importance of approaches that facilitate sensory interactions with museum objects. When imaginative relations are established with artefacts, the boundaries between human and non-human forms can often be crossed. In this context, this dissertation argued that affect and imagination are key to helping individuals establish empathic connections with each other. Throughout, this study has emphasised the need to overcome over-professionalised understandings of object-knowledge and elevate the significance of affective responses to artefacts. This project could have an important legacy if the Sainsbury Centre were to, for example, incorporate participants' responses to objects in the 'Living Area' into the museum's curatorial narrative, as such would encourage visitors to approach the gallery as an 'open work' of endless possibilities.

This dissertation argued for the adoption of object-based methodologies that can create 'third spaces'; spaces where individuals are permitted to cross the boundaries of belonging and offered genuine opportunities for self-representation. It was argued that museum objects can provide a platform for enhancing processes of intercultural dialogue between new comers and the host society. As it pertains to the case study presented here, however, the cross-cultural juxtaposition of objects in the SCVA gallery might have enabled certain types of responses to arise, calling into question the extent to which its methodology can be replicated in other museum settings.

More importantly, this dissertation argued that objects became an active component in the dialogical interactions taking place in the gallery. It demonstrated that when individuals collectively participate in the generation of meaning, new communicative possibilities can be imagined.

Thus, objects provided refugees and the project team with a common lexicon to connect with each other. The intersubjective experiences triggered by objects configured the gallery as a space of negotiation, illustrating the challenges and opportunities presented by cross-cultural practice. On the one hand objects acted as means of empathy and complicity, while, on the other, they also reified areas of perceived cross-cultural tension between refugees and the project team. The analysis here demonstrated how intercultural dialogue risks reinforcing, rather than reducing, cultural differences. In this context, it was clear that museum professionals need to be equipped with the skills and expertise to untangle the complexity of cross-cultural work. However, dialogue should not be understood as the end product in and of itself, but rather as a process through which conflict can become a catalyst for change; a transformative force for all parties involved.

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APPENDIX

Museums' work with refugees: an overview of UK practices

In the last ten years, over thirty museums and art galleries in the UK have organised activities of some form with refugees and asylum seekers. The data analysed has been collected between November 2011 and June 2012. Research was carried out through desk research, email correspondence, face-to-face and telephone interviews with museum professionals across the country. The work analysed is grouped into three interconnecting strands:

- *Exhibitions*: addressing displays developed with and about refugees and asylum seekers.
- *Community Engagement*: programmes involving refugees and asylum seekers.
- *Public Engagement*: initiatives and events aimed at the general public.

Some common features can be drawn across the practices investigated:

- The majority of museum work with and about refugees has been traditionally concentrated in London.
- The range of the work undertaken is very eclectic, ranging from celebratory events, skill development and health and well-being projects to initiatives aimed at facilitating refugees' integrations in their new localities.
- A number of institutions engage with refugees and asylum seekers through projects more widely aimed at migrant groups, diaspora or religious communities.
- Partnerships with social services providers, local authorities and Refugee Community Organisations are a widespread feature of the work undertaken by museum in this area of practice.

UK museums and art galleries included in the survey.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Bolton Museum and Archive Service

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

British Museum, London

Croydon Museum, London

Geffrye Museum, London

Glasgow Open Museum/Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) / St Mungo Museum of Religious Art and Life

Hackney Museum, London

Horniman Museums and Gardens, London

Jewish Museum, London

Leicester City Museums Service

Manchester Museum & Whitworth Art Gallery

Museum of Liverpool

Museum of London

Museum of London Docklands

Museums Sheffield

National Waterfront Museum, Swansea

Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery

Oxford University Museums and Collections

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

Ragged School Museum, London

Redbridge Museum, London

Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Gallery, Exeter

Salford Museum and Art Gallery.

Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts

Tate Modern, London

The Art House Southampton

Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums

- Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne
- Museum and Winter Garden in Sunderland

Victoria and Albert, London

Childhood Museum (V&A), London

Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Distribution across the country.



Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

- Data collection method: email correspondence, followed up by phone interview.
- Contact: Richard Statham, Audience Development and Interpretation Manager.

Relevant projects.

- *Exhibition*: ‘Roots to Revolution’: held at the Birmingham Museum Community Gallery from December 2009 until March 2010. Outcome of a series of workshops exploring arts and crafts, jewellery making and ceramics. The initiatives were run in partnership with Craft Base and aimed at refugee women coming from different countries.
- *Community Engagement*: ‘In our backyard’: a project led by an artist and former refugee exploring the city through photography and film. The project was aimed at families with children under 5. Length of the project: April - July 2010.

Bolton Museum and Archive Service.

- Data collection method: email correspondence, followed up by phone interview.
- Contact: Matthew Constantine, Museum Manager.

Relevant Projects.

- *Exhibition*: In April 2007, Bolton Museum held an exhibition of photos of refugee families from Sudan resettled in the town under the Gateway Protection Programme. Bolton photographer Stephen Fielding was commissioned by Bolton Metropolitan Council to produce pictures accompanied by testimonies, describing the lives of refugees before leaving Sudan, and their experiences of Bolton during their first year.

Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives.

- Data collection method: email correspondence.
- Contact: Ben Meller, Community Partnerships Officer.

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement*: In 2009 the museum worked in partnership with 20 diverse Bristol families from local refugee groups, ‘Single Parent Network’ and ‘Hartcliffe Dad's group’. Scrapbooks and digital stories were created looking at their lives and the connections between them. The scrapbooks and the digital stories feature on the museum website and can be also accessed in the Bristol Life gallery.

British Museum.

- Data collection method: face to face interview.
- Contacts: Laura Phillips, Head of Community Partnerships and Dr. Emma Poulter, ‘Talking Objects’ Programme Manager.

Relevant projects.

- *Public Programme:* Lunchtime tours run by migrants and refugees in 2010. Insights offered on the collection by people who had a personal resonance with objects. These tours were organised by Claire Paul who set-up a similar initiative at the V&A.
- *Additional Information:* Refugees are not a core audience. The museum engaged with refugee groups mainly through the work done with diaspora communities in London. In 2010-2011, refugee clients were also engaged through:
 - 55+ programmes that no longer have access to the museum-care home, resource centers.
 - The Talking Object initiative.
 - ESOL classes run in the museum space.
 - Training for transferable skills and employability
 - Partnership developed with the 'Helen Bamber Foundation': refugee clients visited the museum and built a music performance responding to some of the objects of the collection. The 'tree of life' was one of the objects explored.

Croydon Museum Service.

- Data collection method: email correspondence and phone interview.
- Contacts: Oliver Tipper, Arts Participation Officer.
- Partner of Refugee Heritage Programme, London Museums Hub.

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement:* Between 2004 and 2006 the museum worked in partnership with 'Nile Volunteers Network' and 'Yes Africa'. The participants took part in film-making workshops before creating their own. 'Isonga' by Yes Africa looked at marriage ceremonies and traditions. 'A Taste of Croydon' by NIVON highlighted the links between identity, belonging and food.

Geffrye Museum.

- Data collection method: email correspondence and phone interview.
- Contacts: Laura Bedford, Education Officer: Access and Public Programmes.

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement:* In 2011, the youth co-ordinator ran a 6 weeks project working with a group of young refugees from Afghanistan and Eastern Europe and volunteers from the 'Refugees and Befriending Red Cross' youth group. During the sessions, the group worked with a product designer and staff from the Geffrye Museum to explore the theme of 'Home, Culture and Self'. The project began with a tour of the main galleries and observational drawing in the period rooms, followed by an object handling session. Participants created mood boards of what 'home' meant to them, which was used as inspiration for subsequent activities. While one boy painted a scene of a bay near his Kosovan home on a plate, another opted for a Union Jack motif across his tea towel.

A celebratory event was organised at the end of the project, when the young people returned to see their creations on display.

- *Additional Information:* Refugees and asylum seekers are not a core audience of the museums, although some may participate in ESOL sessions.

Glasgow Open Museum, Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA), St Mungo Museum of Religious Art and Life.

- Data collection method: face to face interviews.
- Contacts: Elaine Addington (Curator, Open Museum), Aileen Strachan (Education Officer, St Mungo), Katie Bruce (Curator, GoMA).

Relevant projects.

- *Exhibition, Community Engagement and Public Programme:* ‘Sanctuary’ project, GoMA (2008). Referenced in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.
- *Exhibition, Community Engagement and Public Programme:* ‘Curious Project’ (2011-2012), St Mungo Museum of Religious Art and Life. Part of the Scottish Cultural Olympiads, celebrated the diversity of people in Glasgow and the museum collection. There were four strands to the project: an exhibition, a school and learning programme and a conference. For the exhibition, the team worked with over 100 people who selected and interpreted the objects on display. During the engagement process the museum worked with the largest ESOL provider in Glasgow to develop a targeted learning programme addressing issues of identity and intercultural dialogue. Objects handling was used as a means of engagement. A volunteering scheme with asylum seekers and refugees was also set-up leading to the organisation of events as part of Refugee Week. Volunteers also developing their facilitation and presentation skills delivering language tours in Polish and Urdu.
- *Community Engagement and Public Programme:* The Open Museum (2012) engaged with refugees and asylum seekers living in the south of the city. During the outreach project refugees were invited to design carrier bags that were then displayed in a community gallery. The exhibition was then transferred to a small gallery of a local hospital. The Open Museum has an ongoing partnership with ‘North Integration Network’ for the organisation of Refugee Week activities. In a recent collaboration with ‘Impact Art’ (2012), a design firm based in Glasgow, the museum worked with asylum seekers to improve their living circumstances. The textile collection of the museum was used as a source of inspiration.

Hackney Museum.

- Data collection method: email correspondence and phone interview.
- Contacts: Cheryl Bowen, Project Manager.
- Partner of Refugee Heritage Programme, London Museums Hub.

Relevant projects.

-Community Engagement and Exhibitions: Between 2004 and 2006, the museum worked with the Kurdish community in Hackney and North London, and with Halkevi Kurdish-Turkish Community Centre and Kurdish Community Centre in Haringey (KCC). Two interactive exhibitions were organised: ‘Traditional Kurdish Culture and History’, and ‘Kurdish Cultural Identity and Celebration of Kurdish Culture in the UK’. In each project participants carried out interviews, wrote interpretation panels, sourced photographs and created video and sound footage.

Horniman Museums and Gardens.

- Data collection method: face to face interview.
- Contact: Georgina Pope, Community Learning Manager.

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement:* tailored-made visits to the museum and outreach sessions with local refugee community organisations are regularly organised.
- *Public Programme:* since 2008 the museum programmes Refugee Week and the ‘Crossing Borders’ event, co-planned with the Southwark day Centre for Asylum Seekers. The overall aim of these days is to deliver the message that the Horniman museum is a safe neutral place where people can come and feel at ease.
- *Additional Information:* Since 2009 Refugees and Asylum Seekers are a target audience in the museum corporate plan. A training scheme for community group leaders is also offered to partner organisations so that they can devise activities independently at the museum.

Jewish Museum, London.

- Data collection method: email correspondence, followed up by a phone interview.
- Contact: Rickie Burman, Museum Director.

Relevant projects.

Exhibitions and Public Engagement: ‘Closing the doors? Immigration to Britain 1905-2005’ looked at the experience of immigrants from 1905 - the date when the first restrictive immigration legislation was passed - to 2005. The exhibition explored the evolution of legislative measures, alongside press myths reflecting the way immigrants to Britain have been portrayed in the last 100 years. Objects were also featured to reflect migrants’ working lives and their contribution to UK culture and society. A community engagement project was also organized in partnership with the association of Jewish refugees and with Holocaust survivors.

In 2012 the ‘World Cities Refugee Stories’ exhibition also opened in conjunction with Refugee Week and 2012 London Olympics. The exhibition featured the stories of 9 refugees who settled in Britain from 1930s onwards and included two films produced by the Refugee Council. The project was part of a wider public engagement initiatives, which also featured seminars, world music, food events and creative writing workshops delivered in collaboration with ‘Exile Inc.’.

Leicester City Museums Service.

- Data collection method: desk research.
- Partner museum of the ERAS project.

Relevant projects.

- *Public Engagement:* in 2006-2007 the museum developed a school programme for Refugee Week, which used the universal subject of bullying as a starting point for discussion. The intention was to challenge common myths about refugees and asylum seekers.
- *Additional information:* In 2007 the museum launched an innovative mentoring scheme, which involved established artist Satta Hashem. Satta mentored three young artists, one of whom was an asylum seeker from Iraq. These young artists were recruited through a competitive process and have not previously had the opportunity to work with a mentor.

Manchester Museum & Whitworth Art Gallery.

- Data collection method: email correspondence, followed up by face to face interview.
- Contact: Esme Ward, Head of Education at Manchester Museum and Whitworth Art Gallery and Ed Watts, Adult Programme Coordinator.

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement:* ‘Telling Our Lives’ and ‘Collective Conversations’ projects (referenced in Chapters 2, 4 of this dissertation). From 2008 to 2012, both the Museum of Manchester and Whitworth have worked in partnership with the ‘International New Arrivals Team’ at City Council, to develop a ‘new arrivals programme’ aimed at families with under 5. In 2011 over 50% of the refugee families that participated in the programme at Whitworth now take part to the gallery core activities. ‘Handmade Social’ was also a project where artists worked together with refugees and asylum seekers to develop their arts and craft skills. Each of the sessions were delivered by one or two community artists themselves refugees and open-end responses to collections were encouraged.

Museum of Liverpool.

- Data collection method: emails, followed up by phone interview.
- Contact: Cheryl Magowan, Senior Communities Manager.
- Lead museum of the ERAS project.

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement*: ‘Bridges not Walls’ run in 2008 focused on the stories of displaced women and those living in areas of conflict. The project involved a group of women from a variety of different backgrounds coming together to share their thoughts and experiences. The project aimed to highlight some of the issues faced by women whose freedom and way of life are restricted by war, the asylum system and government agendas. In 2008 two displays were produced as a result of the project, which were shown in the World Cultures gallery and Community Base at the World Museum.

- *Exhibitions*: ‘Home Sweet Home?’ was a community exhibition building on the ‘bridges not walls’ project. A temporary shelter was built in the atrium of the museum to represent the shelters often used by displaced people fleeing their homes. Visitors were asked to think about the things that were really important to them by answering the question: ‘If you had three minutes to leave your home, what would you take with you?’ Visitors wrote or drew their answers on the shelter. When the shelter was dismantled this artwork was created using some of the responses. ‘Face-to-Face’, opened during Refugee Week 2008, was a community exhibition including self-portraits created by the young learners group (14-16 years old) at Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS).

- *Additional Information*: in 2011 the museum worked in collaboration with EMTAS to deliver a programme for unaccompanied minors outside of mainstream education. The students undertook maths, English and other core curriculum subjects.

Museum of London.

- Data collection method: emails, followed up by phone interviews.
- Contact: Isabel Benavides, Programme Manager (Family Outreach).

Relevant projects.

- *Exhibitions*: ‘Belonging: voices of London’s refugees’, analysed in Chapter 2. ‘Streets of Gold’ (2012), was an exhibition on the positive contribution that migration makes, and has always made, to London. The display was made up of four artworks. All the pieces are inspired by and physically include objects of the museum collection. They interweave London's rich cultural heritage with the histories and practice of five young artists from across the globe.
- *Community Engagement*: the learning team also developed resources and activities for English Speakers of Other Languages. Some of the students that took part to the sessions were refugees or asylum seekers.

Museum of London Docklands.

- Data collection method: email correspondence, followed up by a face to face interview.
- Contact: Kirsty Marsh, Inclusion Programme Manager.

Relevant projects.

- *Exhibitions:* 'People and Change: exploring enforced migration' (2011) focused on the global issue of enforced migration, featuring work by artist Rosemarie Marke, who came to London as a refugee from Sierra Leone. The artist displayed her work alongside some drawings created by clients from the Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers. The 'Freedom from' exhibition (2011) was open to coincide with the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its abolition. The display included a map representing cases of slavery across Greater London and personal testimonies of those affected by slavery. The exhibition was also exhibited at the Inspiring London Gallery at the Museum of London.

Museums Sheffield.

- Data collection method: websearch.

Relevant projects.

- *Exhibitions:* In 2009 the museum opened 'Fight for your rights' in the Our Sheffield Life and Times gallery. The display explored the life of refugees and asylum seekers in Sheffield, and the help and support they receive in the city.

National Waterfront Museum.

- Data collection method: email correspondence
- Contact: David Evans, artist involved in the project

Relevant projects.

- *Exhibitions:* 'The Refugee House/Container Project' (2012) exhibited at the National Museum of Welsh Life, St Fagans and Waterfront Museum in Swansea was an interactive installation reflecting on the everyday experience of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. The installation represented a typical home situated in an inner city, created through a series of workshops involving members of the refugee and asylum seeking community.

Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery.

- Data collection method: websearch

Relevant projects.

- *Exhibitions:* in 2010 the Norwich and Norfolk Archaeology Services partnered with the Norwich Millennium Library and the Norfolk Record Office to produce the exhibition *Discovering Refugee History in Norwich*, which traced refugee movements into the city since the 16th century. In 2013 the British Red Cross and Norwich Millennium Library set up a symbolic refugee camp in the city centre to mark the start of Refugee Week

Oxford University Museums and Collections.

- Data collection method: email correspondence.
- Contact: Nicola Bird, Community Outreach Education Officer.

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement:* In 2013 the museum worked in partnership with Oxford charity Refugee Resource, which supports the emotional and social needs of settled refugees in Oxford. Initially, the museum organised activities hands-on experience for families at the Pitt Rivers Museum during the holiday period. The outreach team then visited the group at their community centre for a celebration of womanhood, starting a long-term project on marriage, children, cultures and diaspora. and histories.

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery.

- Data collection method: web research

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement:* ‘Traditional craft group’ was an initiative developed in 2009 together with Plymouth and District Racial Equality Council and textile artist Helen Round. The project included women of all ages and cultures who meet regularly to create children’s blankets. The blankets were then given to local charities working with refugees and asylum seekers arriving in the Plymouth and Devon area.

Ragged School Museum.

- Data collection method: websearch.
- Partner of the Refugee Heritage Programme.

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement:* ‘Hidaha Iyo Dahqankayaga’ - Our Tradition, Our Culture, a film produced in collaboration with the local Somali community through the Ocean Somali Community Association. The project was the outcome of a 2 years long collaboration (2004-2006) where participants learned film-making skills, shared memories, and drew parallels between East End history and their own stories.

Redbridge Museum.

- Data collection method: email correspondence.
- Contact: Gerard Greene, Museum Manager.
- Partner of the Refugee Heritage Programme.

Relevant projects.

- *Exhibition and Community Engagement*: the museum worked with Ariana, a group of Afghan women and children to explore their experience of Afghan culture and identity. They took part in storytelling, rug weaving and craft activities culminating in the ‘Ariana’ exhibition (2008).

Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Gallery.

- Data collection method: email correspondence.
- Contact: Ruth Gidley, Community Participation Officer.
- Partner of the Moving Here project.

Relevant projects.

- *Exhibition, Community Engagement and Public Programme*: during the Moving Here project members of the public, including refugees were invited to participate to the interpretation of the collection. Participants’ comments were recorded and published in an online database. Some of the comments and pictures collected formed part of ‘From Devon to Delhi’ (2011), an exhibition displayed in venues across the city, including the Picture House Cinema and the Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital. Comments collected in the project were also published as part of the BBC radio programme ‘A History of the World in 100 Objects’.

Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts.

- Data analysed in Chapters 2-5 of this dissertation.

Salford Museum and Art Gallery.

- Data collection method: websearch
- Partner of the ERAS project.

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement and Public Programme*: The programme ‘Embrace’ (2007-2010) was developed in collaboration with Rainbow Haven (Salford), Women of the World, Women Working Together, SALT, Salford PCT, Salford College and Healthy Hips and Hearts. One of the outcomes of the project was a co-produced food festival presenting food from Kurdistan, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iran, Albania, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ivory Coast, as well as Lancashire. During the development period, the museum commissioned a local college to deliver a Food Hygiene Level 1 training to

community partners involved. Recipe cards were also created presenting a recipe and a map indicating the country where the recipe originated. These recipes were collated into a recipe book, now on sale at the Museum shop.

Tate Modern.

- Data collection method: websearch.

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement*: ‘Creative workshops series’ (2012) an open call for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers to join a series of free skill development workshops. The workshops were led by artist Ahmet Ögüt.

Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums.

- Data collection method: email correspondence, followed by a phone interview.
- Contact: Harriet Goudie, Assistant Outreach Officer, TWAM Sunderland.
- TWAM Museum and Winter Garden in Sunderland was part of the ERAS project.

Museum and Winter Garden in Sunderland, TWAM.

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement*: In 2011 - as part of a refugee awareness campaign connected to CMAI (Campaign! Make an Impact, a British Library led initiative) - the museum worked in partnership with Stephenson Memorial Primary School in Howdon on a project exploring the historic roots of the Fairtrade campaign. The pupils explored the plants on display at Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens in order to make the connection between the food we eat, how it is produced and where it comes from. Pupils also attended a cultural taster sessions of African Drumming, an Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony and traditional Ghanaian crafts.

In 2011 as part of ‘Stories of the World-Journey of discovery’ project, the museum engaged with a group of young people from the North East Refugee Service to research world culture collections at Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens. ESOL packs were created as an outcome.

In 2012 the ‘Monkwearmouth Railway Alphabet’ initiative was also organised in collaboration with the local Sunderland Refugee and Asylum Seeker community. The group took part in a number of craft sessions with the aim of reproducing a modern day version of the Victorian Railway Alphabet, used in Victorian times as an educational tool for school children.

Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, TWAM.

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement and Exhibition*: The digital stories project ‘Culture Shock’, across the TWAM network, also included responses from asylum seeker and refugee. At Laing Art Gallery (2010), the project was coordinated in

partnership with the South Tyneside Adult Learning Services, ESOL department. The workshops were designed to create digital stories which would go on permanent display at the new 'Northern Spirit' gallery, Laing Art Gallery. The group agreed that they would like to have a focused theme for all of the stories. They chose to talk about their experience of the North East and of South Shields in particular which had become their new home. In the process museums objects were used, including archive photographs of the town.

Victoria and Albert Museum.

- Data collection method: email correspondence, followed up by face to face interview
- Contact: Filipa Botelo, Assistant Outreach Officer.

Relevant projects.

- *Public Engagement*: Lunchtime talks 'Made By Refugees' during Refugee Week 2011. 'Asylum Dialogues' (2011) was also a performance scripted by Sonja Linden and staged by members of Actors for Human Rights, a network of over 500 professional actors dedicated to drawing public attention to contemporary human rights concerns.

V&A, Childhood Museum.

- Data collection method: websearch

Relevant projects.

- *Exhibition*: community collecting and interpretation for the 'World in the East End' gallery, now a permanent feature of the 'Home' section at the V&A Museum of Childhood (referenced in Chapter 2 of this dissertation).
- *Public Engagement*: 'New Voices' festival (2011, 2012), during Refugee Week, celebrated the cultural richness of East London's new residents. The New Voices Festival was held in the Museum Gardens, and included family activities, live music performances, stalls and a children's area.

Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

- Data collection method: websearch

Relevant projects.

- *Community Engagement and Exhibition*: 'Shared Horizons' (2008-2009) was a photography exhibition featuring fifteen young unaccompanied asylum seekers from Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Senegal and Zambia. It was the culmination of a project aimed at 14-18 years old asylum seekers living in Wakefield, Barnsley and Kirklees. Members of the group achieved their Bronze level Arts Award qualification.

'Winter Solstice Experience' Each year the Friends of the museum support a Winter Solstice celebration for separated children in Wakefield. The young people come to YSP to experience sunset in Skyspace, a stunning artwork by James Turrell. Following their trip to the Skyspace the group shares a festive meal in the YSP restaurant followed by an exchange of gifts donated by staff.

