Introduction

Denmark's immigration and asylum policies are among the strictest in Europe, but they reflect broader political and historical changes in Europe and beyond, as suggested by the works of Khaled Barakeh and Nermin Duraković discussed in the Prologue.

This Introduction begins, therefore, with an outline of what migration studies refer to as 'the European border and migration regime', a discussion of the key term 'refugee' and related concepts, and a historical account of the development of the so-called 'international refugee regime' in the 20th century. Next, I consider the important part that visual imagery has played in buttressing a humanitarian system overtly focused on refugees as victims and figures of crisis. Only then, i.e. after having established a critical frame for understanding forced displacement and refugeedom, will I turn to the question of how refugeedom is addressed in contemporary art from Denmark.

The European border and migration regime

The year 2015 is often used as the symbolic temporal marker of what was, at the time, considered to be the height of the 'European refugee crisis'. In an authoritative study, the anthropologists Sabine Hess and Bernd Kasparek established that the so-called summer of migration in 2015 became a determining moment in an evolution of 'the European border and migration regime', involving complex dilemmas and mechanisms of control *and* protection (Hess and Kasparek 2017, 58–60; see also Hess and Kasparek 2019).[1]

1 Hess and Kasparek's Foucauldian use of the concept of 'regime' is arguably related to Gatrell's use of the concept to characterize the 'international refugee regime', to be introduced below (Hess and Kasparek 2017, 60). Hess and Kasparek use the term 'regime' to denote, in the words of the Transit Migration research group of which they were both members, 'a more or less ordered ensemble of practices and knowledge-power complexes […]. By regime we thus understand an ensemble of social practices and structures – discourses, subjects, state practices – whose arrangement is not given from the outset, but which consists precisely

This book adopts Hess and Kasparek's Foucauldian use of the concept of 'regime' to indicate 'the multiple levels and dimensions at play constituting the "border" as a dynamic and somehow contingent apparatus based on laws and regulations, institutions, technical devices, moral beliefs and representations, discourses, actors, and practices' (Hess and Kasparek 2017, 60).

According to Hess and Kasparek, the term 'refugee crisis' is misleading for several reasons. Firstly, they write, 'it was at its very core a crisis of the border regime' (Hess and Kasparek 2017, 59); and secondly, it began long before the summer of migration. It can, in fact, be traced back to the beginning of the Arab Spring in early 2011 when the social and democratic uprisings in North Africa destabilized 'the externalization paradigm' on which the Euro-Mediterranean border control depended (Hess and Kasparek 2017, 61). In the 2010s, many North and West African countries were, in various ways, involved in managing, and thereby limiting, immigration into the EU. However, immediately after the successful uprising in Tunisia the interim Tunisian government cancelled its cooperation with Italy, after which numerous migrants' vessels brought around 30,000 Tunisians to Italy. With the outbreak of the Libyan civil war in February 2011 and the subsequent NATO intervention, the Italian–Libyan cooperation also ended. Thus, by the end of 2011, the externalized border regime in the Mediterranean had 'significant gaps', and the number of migrants crossing the sea by boat began to rise dramatically. Despite seasonal variations and various attempts to reach an agreement with different North African regimes, the numbers, Hess and Kasparek conclude, have remained high ever since (Hess and Kasparek 2017, 61).

This destabilization and the ensuing attempts to restabilize European borders has shifted the parameters significantly since 2011. The governing rationale at the core of the European border and migration regime is what Gallya Lahav and Virginie Guiraudon have described as the fundamental 'control dilemma'. Emerging with the EU's creation of an internal market, the term 'control dilemma' refers to the difficulty in reconciling a neoliberal economic paradigm of an ideally global, free circulation of goods, services and capital with a continued biopolitical will to regulate the movements of people across borders (quoted in Hess and Kasparek 2017, 60; Lahav and Guiraudon 2000).

Hess and Kasparek suggest that, to regain control, four key changes or 'paradigms' have been implemented following 'the temporary collapse of the European border regime in September 2015' (Hess and Kasparek 2017, 63). Firstly, the externalization and differentiation of borders, which, as explained above, have a longer history. The objective here has been to (re)locate border controls away from the national borders and either outsource them to other states as a form of

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in generating answers to the questions and problems raised by the dynamic elements and processes.' (Karakayalı and Tsianos 2007, 13–14)

'remote control' or locate them at sites inside the national territory, for example in airports. Secondly, fortified yet 'smart' techno-scientific forms of border control have been introduced. Within border studies, these two paradigms are reflected in the centrality of the discourses on 'securitization', 'externalization', 'digitalization' and 'biometrization' (Hess and Kasparek 2019, 4–5). Thirdly, an internal mobility regime for asylum seekers has been introduced, resulting in 'the transformation of a *route* into a *corridor*' (Kasparek 2016, par. 1). Hess and Kasparek explain that 'a narrow and highly organised mechanism' has been put in place by states to regulate, channel and facilitate the movement of people. This apparatus aims to immobilize migrant populations within the European territory, and it remains 'the main point of contention' in the attempts to reform the Common European Asylum System (Hess and Kasparek 2019, 5). When migrants are asked why they do not leave the corridor to pursue an alternative route, a recurrent answer is that 'if you leave the flow, you are lost. Outside the corridor, you are subject to the regime of asylum, detention, and deportation. Only inside the corridor, you are allowed to move. The corridor, stretching across and seemingly connecting many countries, has a constitution of its own.' (Kasparek 2016, par. 4) One of the pivotal features of this infrastructure of transit is the proliferation across Europe of camps geared towards the processing of refugees and migrants, along with connecting lines of transport. Kasparek explains that, although migrants were and still are able to travel towards the north:

> [T]he corridor turned the active movement of people, which had constituted the route in the first place, back into a passive mechanism of being transferred. Migrants didn't travel the route anymore: they were hurriedly channeled along, no longer having the power to either determine their own movement or their own speed. (Kasparek 2016, par. 4)

The urban researcher René Kreichauf has coined the concept of 'campization' to explain what follows the channelling of the movement of significant numbers of people arriving in EU member states: 'forced infrastructures of arrival' (Kreichauf 2018, 4). As a result of law and policy changes to the socio-spatial configuration and function of refugee accommodation, larger refugee populations and sizeable groups of migrants are immobilized and confined to accommodation infrastructures that 'extend the borderscapes far into the European territory and ultimately into its cities' (Hess and Kasparek 2019, 7–8; see also Kreichauf 2018, 1). Based on case studies in Athens, Berlin and Copenhagen, Kreichauf argues that these structures are characterized by lowered living standards and a closed character that excludes refugees from civil society, and that the lowered housing standards unsettle the current conceptualization of forced migrants' accommodation as having a global

north ('asylum centres') and a global south ('refugee camps'). The law and policy changes have brought the camp to the north, as it were.

Kreichauf defines campization as 'a process in which the recent tightening of asylum laws and reception regulations have resulted in the emergence and deepening of *camp-like characteristics of refugee accommodation in European city regions*' (Kreichauf 2018, 2; emphasis added). He reduces these camp-like features to four common denominators. The first objective is to 'contain a specific category of the population'; accordingly, the structure of the camp is designed to maintain a distinction between those inside (immigrants as camp residents) and those outside (the local population), between the 'own' and the '(ethnic) stranger' (Kreichauf 2018, 14). Secondly, camps are demarcated and have boundaries, both physical barriers and other material and social forms of containment. Thirdly, camps are legally 'exceptional' spaces because they are usually governed by other legal instruments and frameworks than those which apply in the surrounding areas and to citizens of a state. Lastly, a refugee camp is 'a space of permanent temporality' because it is not intended to serve as a durable solution but only as a device to temporarily respond to forced displacement and irregular migration. At the same time, the length of the stay in camps is indeterminate, so camp residents exist in an interzone of uncertainty suspended between the temporary and the permanent (Kreichauf 2018, 4).

Returning to Hess and Kasparek's analysis, they identify 'a humanitarization of the border' as the fourth paradigm or change to the European border regime (Hess and Kasparek 2017, 60) – or what art historian Christine Ross designates as the emergence of 'a humanitarian-military complex'. This complex implements a management approach to the transit corridors and camp-like facilities which deploys military forces under a humanitarian rationale 'to protect migrating individuals while policing them and reinforcing the securitization of borderzones' (Ross 2022, 84). This humanitarian-military complex is historically connected to the development in the 20th century of what the historian Peter Gatrell has described as 'an international refugee regime' (of which, more below).

The drone-borne surveillance camera inspecting the border between Croatia, an EU member state, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, a non-member state, in Nermin Duraković's *Our Border* (2022) captures the techno-scientific nature of contemporary border control and the externalization of borders described by Hess and Kasparek. *Our Border* points up the fact that the management of 'our' (Danish) border is performed in distant places, including the vicinity of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian town of Bihać. *Our Border* thus offers a critical artistic perspective on the ongoing process of destabilization and restabilization of migration control at the borders of Europe. As Ross observes, borders and the systems of governance and administration implemented to control them 'were and will always be unstable, open as they are to new migration movements' (Ross 2022, 83).

It is in the light of these wider historical shifts in the European border and migration regime that this book examines works and projects from the Danish art scene. In other words, although the art scene under scrutiny is located within the EU member state of Denmark, the book's delimitation of its object of study is not national but profoundly transnational. The book departs from the observation that 'the national' is a product of its relationship to what lies beyond it. It is a product of, and deeply entangled in, transnational dynamics and global geopolitics. Thus, it is paramount to remember that borders simultaneously separate and interconnect – as Duraković's meditation on the implications and complexities of '*our*' border captures so well.

Why 'refugee'?

As the visual culture scholar Chrisoula Lionis observes in her important study of artistic engagements with the role of language in displacement, language matters when it comes to defining the experience of those forced to flee. The contested question of who qualifies as a 'refugee' is discussed across many different fields, from humanitarian organizations to political discourse, in press coverage, in the fields of philosophy and law, and in migration studies and refugee studies, as well as in other academic fields (Lionis, forthcoming). 'Refugee' is also the dominant term in the media and politics, and is used widely for activist mobilization – as in the slogan 'Refugees Welcome' used by Western civil society organizations. Today, the UNHCR – the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – often uses the term 'forcibly displaced person' to designate all people forced to flee, regardless of the cause and how they are classified under international and domestic law (Parekh 2020, 35), but it has not yet gained the same widespread use as 'refugee'. This observation can also be applied to the artworld, to art discourses and art projects. This book adheres to the common preference for the term 'refugee', but the terms 'displaced person' and 'displacement' will be used alongside it, in acknowledgement of the fact that the distinction between refugees and other forced migrants is, at best, blurry, as the philosopher Serena Parekh has argued (Parekh 2020, 27–49).

From anthropologist Liisa H. Malkki's thorough and frequently-quoted 1995 review of the evolving interdisciplinary field of refugee studies, to Serena Parekh's study of ethics and the global refugee crisis published in 2020, scholars have stressed that the category of the refugee evades clear definition and has some questionable effects, yet is hard to avoid, because the most important conventions relating to forcibly displaced people are based on it (Malkki 1995, 496; Parekh 2020, 28).

As the political geographers Orhon Maydar and Kara E. Dempsey have noted, how and by whom it is decided who is a refugee or not is largely dependent on the labelling and categorization institutionalized by the global refugee regime.

The term thus exists in a fluctuating relationship with policy-making processes. Labels such as 'refugee', 'economic migrant' (used about migrant workers, often in a derogatory way) and 'illegal migrant' (a likewise derogatory term for migrants in an irregular situation without the legal permission to stay in a host country) carry particular assumptions that 'narrow the political and social capacities of those so labelled' (Maydar and Dempsey 2022, 368–369). As Lionis observes, nation states – even those who are signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention – often harness the discrepancy between the popular understanding and the legal use of such terms to avoid offering sanctuary for forcibly displaced people (Lionis, forthcoming).

The role of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its supplement, the 1967 Protocol, is taken up below, but first I would like to introduce some of the distinctions that can be made between the term 'refugee' and a set of terms often used synonymously: 'forcibly displaced person', 'asylum seeker' and 'exile'. The subsequent introduction to the Refugee Convention will add to these categories some reflections on the relationship between these terms and the category of the 'stateless person'.

The term 'forcibly displaced person', and the short form 'displaced person', are increasingly used as a synonym for 'refugee'. Accordingly, the definition of 'displacement' on the International Organisation for Migration's (IOM) list of 'Key Migration Terms' covers both internal and cross-border displacement: 'The movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters'.[2] Yet, although the terms 'refugee' and 'displaced person' have substantial overlaps, they differ in the legal sense. Malkki is in agreement with IOM's definition when she observes that in many cases the term 'displaced person' is used to refer to an internally displaced person who has not crossed a national border and therefore does not qualify for formal refugee status (Malkki 1995, 502; see also Costello 2017, 722). Which brings us to 'asylum seeker' – a general term for any individual seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, the term refers to someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the government agencies of the country in which they have submitted it. It can also refer to a person in need of international protection. As the UNHCR's 'Master Glossary of Terms' explains: 'Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every recognized refugee is initially an asylum seeker.'[3]

2 The International Organization for Migration, 'Displacement' and 'Internally displaced persons (IDPs)' in 'Key Migration Terms', https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms (accessed July 11, 2024). IOM is part of the United Nations Systems.

3 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 'Asylum seeker' in 'Master Glossary of Terms' (2006), https://www.unhcr.org/glossary (accessed May 20, 2025).

Malkki's critique of the term 'refugee' begins from the premise that the analytical usefulness of the term 'refugee' is not as a typological label for a particular kind of person or situation, as forced population movements have diverse historical and political causes, and displaced people find themselves in 'qualitatively different situations and predicaments'. There is no such thing as an 'essential refugee' or 'the refugee experience', i.e. a generalizable, transhistorical experience that can be divided into identifiable stages, as famously argued by the social science scholar Barry N. Stein (Stein 1981; Malkki 1995, 510–511). The term can only serve as 'a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of different socioeconomic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations' (Malkki 1995, 496). This is precisely why it is helpful in the context of the present study, which encompasses art projects addressing extraordinarily diverse personal and collective histories of displacement and resettlement.

By adopting the term 'refugee', this study also departs from the formerly dominant preference in art history and literary studies for the term 'exile'. In his seminal essay 'Reflections on Exile', the Palestinian intellectual and literary scholar Edward Said suggests that this predilection has much to do with the word's capacity to distance the creative individual from the mass phenomenon of forced displacement: 'The word "refugee" has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas "exile" carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality.' (Said 2007, 286) Malkki picks up on Said's distinction, adding that there is 'a whole history of differences' built into the contrast between 'refugees' and 'exiles', and that the mass phenomenon is subject to different representational codes than the individual exilic figure. While the former 'connotes a bureaucratic and international humanitarian realm', the latter 'connotes a readily aestheticizable realm' (Malkki 1995, 513). Accordingly, exile became a central theme in 20th-century literature, building on the notion of exile as a triggering force of creativity which had gained ground with early-19th-century Romanticism across Europe (Josenhans 2017b, 16).

In her study of 20th-century autobiographical writings, Caren Kaplan has explained with great accuracy the link between 'exile' and the 'view from afar' typical of much modernist writing: 'Even those writers who do not find themselves actually exiled may easily extend the metaphor. Thus, within modernism the exiled writer has come to assume a privileged position as witness and seer …[I]solation, solitude, alienation, and uncertainty are necessary preconditions for "great art" since it is distance and perspective that produce "vision".'[4] These representational codes also operate in the domain of 20th-century art. An influential example is the Montreal

4 Caren Kaplan, *The Poetics of Displacement: Exile, Immigration, and Travel in Contemporary Autobiographical Writing*, PhD thesis. University of California, Santa Cruz, 1987. Quoted in Malkki 1995, 513.

Museum of Fine Art's 1997 exhibition and catalogue *Exiles and Émigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*, which focused on the flight of European avant-garde artists, architects and designers between 1933 and 1945, and the imprint they made on American postwar art and culture. The continuation of the artworld's preference for the word 'exile' well into the 21st century is evidenced by Yale University Art Gallery's 2017 exhibition and catalogue *Artist in Exile: Expressions of Loss and Hope* (Josenhans 2017b), which focused on artists from the early 19th to the 21st century. The curator Frauke V. Josenhans's aim was to expand the scope of exile studies in the visual arts by broadening its previous Eurocentric interest in primarily mid-20th-century artists exiled from Europe to include artists from other periods and continents. However, when stating that 'exile should be considered not only as a mental or physical state but also as a catalyst for creativity' (Josenhans 2017a, 15), she also perpetuates the tendencies criticized by Malkki – firstly, to decouple the exiled artist from the wider political and humanitarian context of mass displacement by foregrounding exile's potential as a catalyst of 'personal and artistic metamorphosis' (Josenhans 2017b, 15); and secondly, to universalize the exilic experience: 'It is also true that exile is not only a social or political condition but a universal experience that seemingly everyone has faced at some point – albeit most often on a personal scale – either physically, spiritually or emotionally.' (Josenhans 2017b, 21)

This universalizing approach evokes Kaplan's critique of the tendency inherent in the modernist association of artistic genius with distance and metaphoric exile to aestheticize the exilic experience to the extent that it becomes available to 'expatriates and tourists alike' and is decoupled from the prolonged effects of material exile (Kaplan, quoted in Malkki 1995, 514). Thus, it is not surprising that many of the recent critical studies of politically engaged art on forced displacement have responded to this problem by distancing themselves from exile studies in the visual arts by substituting the term 'exile' with 'refugee', and in some cases 'displacement' and 'displaced person'.

The 1951 Convention and the making of the modern refugee

In *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, Peter Gatrell argues that the history of population displacement in the 20th century is closely linked to the development of ideas of international action which led to the creation and operation of 'an international refugee regime' consisting of 'a set of legal rules, norms and agreements between sovereign states about refugees and states' responsibilities towards them' (Gatrell 2013, 5). Another crucial component was the increase in organized programmes of humanitarian assistance devised by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations, including the UNHCR and the humanitarian organization UNRWA, a United Nations agency assisting Palestinian refugees

in the Near East. In previous centuries, political upheavals, war and persecution had also compelled vanquished populations, religious communities and politically obdurate groups to seek refuge elsewhere, but these mass displacements did not generate the institutional and international response that became a distinctive feature of the modern era when the refugee came to be construed as 'a "problem" and amenable to a "solution"' (Gatrell 2013, 5). This institutional development is also reflected in the historical intertwinement of 'the international refugee regime' and 'the international humanitarian order'. As the political scientist Michael N. Barnett has explained, an international humanitarian order has existed 'for centuries'. It includes an interlocking set of norms, informal institutions, laws, conventions, treaties and discourses of compassion, responsibility and care linked to claims that the world 'has obligations to its weakest members' and to secure their fundamental rights. In the 20th century, this order was incorporated into an international refugee regime based on professional international agencies such as UNHCR and nongovernmental organizations such as Doctors Without Borders (Barnett 2014, 242–244).

The term 'refugee regime' is thus widely used to refer to the dynamic and historically contingent framework that informs the response of states to forcibly displaced people and shapes refugeedom – a regime comprising multiple institutions, conventions, laws, policies, technical devices, support/control structures, power structures and inequalities, moral beliefs, representations, actors, discourses and practices, all operating and interacting at different scales. The goal of the international legal regime for refugees is to end refugee status by allowing the individual 'to rebuild his or her life in safety and dignity'. This has generally been achieved by pursuing three classical solutions, which are not mutually exclusive: voluntary repatriation, once the conditions causing the flight have ceased to exist; assimilation in new communities, either through local integration in the country of first refuge; or resettlement in a third country. It should be noted, however, that although such solutions may be durable, they do not necessarily resolve related issues, such as the loss of property or other claims vis-à-vis the country of origin – the right to return, for example, or reparations for material consequences. In addition to reparations for material consequences, the importance of redressing immaterial consequences of displacements, such as the splintering of a people's social fabric and collective identity, is increasingly acknowledged (Albanese and Takkenberg 2021, 10).

The international refugee regime first materialised following the First World War, when European states responded with ad hoc arrangements to the arrival of Russian and Armenian refugees. After the Second World War, the new United Nations (UN) refashioned the framework. According to Gatrell, this humanitarian framework has remained 'largely intact' for more than seven decades. As Malkki notes, there is a risk of Eurocentrism in looking for the global figure of 'the refugee'

in postwar Europe, but there are also justifications (Malkki 1995, 497). It was towards the end of the Second World War that the refugee camp became 'a standardized generalizable technology of power' to manage mass displacement. The refugee camp was instrumental in producing the modern refugee as 'a knowable, nameable figure and as an object of social-scientific knowledge', as well as instituting standardized practices of care and control of refugees (Malkki 1995, 498; see also 499–500). The key elements of international refugee law and related legal instruments grew largely out of this situation of mass displacement in Europe, as well as the strong sense of shame and moral responsibility for those who had been able to flee the Holocaust. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted along with the Genocide Convention. Refugee law is thus inseparable from the code of Human Rights (Malkki 1995, 500).

The principal intergovernmental agency supporting refugees has been the UNHCR, founded in December 1950. This organization supervises the application of the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which was an attempt to ensure that refugees could access their basic human rights (Parekh 2020, 31). The Refugee Convention is the backbone of international law on displacement. It protects the rights and welfare of any person outside their country of nationality, provided that it can be ascertained that they have 'well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion' and 'is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country' (quoted in Malkki 1995, 501). In contrast to the prewar doctrine, this definition does not offer protection to specified groups of displaced people but to an individual who can 'demonstrate persecution'. However, as Parekh points out, the questions of what counts as persecution, who has to be responsible for the persecution for it to count and how severe it has to be, are answered differently by different countries and varies over time. As a consequence, asylum is often granted in an arbitrary fashion (Parekh 2020, 28, 34).

Importantly, the signatories to the 1951 Convention agreed to the principle of *non-refoulement*, which states that no refugee can be returned to any country where they face the threat of persecution or torture (Gatrell 2013, 5–6). Although this legal instrument was broader than the case-by-case treaties of the prewar period, it was still only intended to tackle the European refugee situation of the immediate past. To remedy this limitation, the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees was introduced in order to remove the war-linked time restriction and the Eurocentric geographical limits. The 1967 Protocol thus turned the Geneva Convention into 'a universal instrument of refugee law' (Malkki 1995, 501), transposing a basically European definition of refugees to a global scale at a time when decolonization struggles and Cold War conflicts were causing profound geopolitical change.

To recap the historical development, after the Second World War, a UN-based framework of multilateral institutions was created, within which certain in-

ternational organizations were given 'a clearly delineated de facto monopoly' over particular issue areas pertaining to refugees (Betts 2014, 68). In refugee studies and the discourses on humanitarianism and refugee law, this framework is often designated 'the international refugee regime'. The UN became the principal organization within this structure, and the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol became the centrepiece defining who qualifies for refugee status and the rights pertaining to that status (Loescher 2014, 216). Especially in recent decades, the nature of this regime has changed significantly as new parallel, overlapping and nested institutions and structures of global forced migration governance have been created at bilateral, regional, international, and even network levels. Consequently, some scholars, such as the political scientists Gil Loescher and Alexander Betts, suggest that the structure of global governance should be understood rather as a 'refugee regime complex', within which a range of different institutions overlap (Loescher 2014, 222–223) and key actors 'shape and define how states and other actors can and do respond to forced displacement' (Betts 2014, 68).

As Gatrell notes, the international response to crises of forced displacement has varied according to geopolitical considerations. For example, UN member states expressed little interest in mitigating the refugee crisis caused by the partition of India in 1947, which was perceived as a mainly internal affair. Conversely, following the founding of the state of Israel and the Arab-Israeli War in 1948, which forced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to flee in what Palestinians call the *Nakba* – the 'disaster' that undermined a traditional way of life and condemned many to a life in exile – the UN entrusted the responsibility for Palestinian refugees in the Middle East to the specialized 'relief and works' agency UNRWA (Gatrell 2013, 7). In the absence of a solution to the Palestine refugee problem, the UN General Assembly has repeatedly renewed the agency's mandate ever since. As UNRWA's website explains, when the agency began its operations in 1950, it was responding to the needs of about 750,000 Palestine refugees. Today, some 5.9 million Palestine refugees from four generations, or more, are eligible for UNRWA services.[5] The agency collaborates with 'a wide range of partners – from the smallest NGO to UN sister organisations with global mandates'.[6] UNRWA thus exemplifies the evolution and widespread implementation of organized humanitarian assistance programmes, highlighted by Gatrell as a main feature of the 'international refugee regime'.

After the Second World War, the numbers and scope of NGOs grew rapidly. As Gatrell explains, they provided 'technical solutions', but the cultural assumptions underpinning their actions also contributed to consolidating an image of forcibly

5 UNRWA, 'Who We Are', https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are (accessed March 20, 2025).

6 UNRWA, 'Partners', https://www.unrwa.org/how-you-can-help/private-partners/ngo-partners (accessed March 20, 2025).

displaced people as 'helpless victims who had lost self-control rather than as ordinary people with the capability to surmount the extraordinary difficulties they encountered' (Gatrell 2013, 285). Gatrell's main point is that these humanitarian programmes are intricately entwined with the construction of refugees as a 'problem' necessitating a corresponding 'solution':

> These programmes did not begin in the twentieth century, but they became more ubiquitous and intrusive over time. The implications were enormous. Charitable organizations established, trained and supported teams of relief workers in the 'field' alongside a central administration charged with the task of disseminating publicity and fundraising. […] Most NGOs developed close links with governments and international organizations that commissioned programmes of assistance, thereby contributing to their budgets as well as raising their profile. […] Part of my argument is that the humanitarianism they embody was an essential component in fashioning the modern refugee as a passive and 'traumatized' object of intervention as compared to the active, purposeful and much-travelled relief worker […]. (Gatrell 2013, 7–8; see also p. 285)

Despite the general tendency to cast the modern refugee as a problem, there has never been a 'one size fits all' definition of refugees in the Western and non-Western world. Acknowledging that several different and sometimes overlapping governmental, nongovernmental and intergovernmental practices and policies or '*refugee regimes*' coexist, Gatrell develops the term *refugeedom*, first used to describe the refugee crisis in Russia during the First World War (Gatrell et al. 2021, 75, note 23), into a concept and an analytical perspective that enables historians to think about the condition of being a refugee in ways that allow for different, changing and contested practices and policies to be taken into consideration. In Gatrell's understanding, *refugeedom* refers to a historical construct that connotes a new status and category of humanity defined by forced displacement (Gatrell 2013, 6; Gatrell et al. 2021, 75).[7] The concept of refugeedom captures how the changing manifestations of the refugee regime, and the multiple relationships that Ilana Feldman has termed the 'humanitarian circuit', determine the conditions and life of refugees (Feldman, quoted in Gatrell et al. 2021, 75). Crucially, as Gatrell et al. observe, refugeedom cannot be reduced to such power relations. The concept also

7 In refugee studies, there are several synonyms of 'refugeedom'. Closely related to Gatrell's concept is Malkki's usage of the term 'refugeeness' to designate the social, political and legal constructions produced by 'the international refugee regime' (Malkki 1995, 505–506, 510–511). Similarly, Cathryn Costello uses the term 'refugeehood' in her discussion of refugee situations and the status of refugees before the citizenship that is supposed to bring refugeehood to an end – a situation of often protracted limbo and severe restrictions on movement and work rights (Costello 2017, 718 and 735).

'encapsulates the cultural and social worlds of refugees, including the framing of displacement as something experienced by an individual or by an entire group' (Gatrell et al. 2021, 75). This attention to social and cultural, hence also aesthetic experience makes the concept of refugeedom a suitable theoretical frame for the present study.

I will end this introduction to the international refugee regime with some remarks on the relationship between the categories of 'refugee' and 'stateless person', exemplified by the historical and present plight of refugees from Palestine. The term 'stateless person' refers to an individual who is not considered by any state to possess its nationality. Importantly, not all stateless people are refugees, and all refugees are not technically stateless, although many refugees are, in reality, stateless as they have lost the protection of their state (Malkki 1995, 501–502). Moreover, refugeedom can generate statelessness, for example when refugee children are unable to claim any nationality. However, Professor in International Human Rights and Refugee Law Cathryn Costello cautions against conceiving of refugees as if they have been denationalized, because it obscures the fact that many refugees wish to return to their country of origin and find ways to renegotiate their relationship with their home state and restore bonds with their fellow citizens (Costello 2017, 721, 731–732).

One of the most politically contentious examples of this overlap between refugeedom and statelessness is the Palestinian refugee problem – one of the longest-lasting and most complicated refugee crises in the world. In 1948, approximately 750,000 Palestinians were displaced with the foundation of the state of Israel, and in 1967, another mass exodus of 400,000 Palestinians took place when Israel occupied the Palestinian Territories in the Six Day War – the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip (Albanese and Takkenberg 2021, 3–4). In 2023, the Gaza Strip had a population of approximately 2.4 million people, including some 1.6 million Palestine Refugees.[8] It is the refugees from the 1940s who are still living, plus their descendants, who make up about 81 per cent of Gaza's population. All are counted as refugees today because no permanent solution for them has been found. For more than 70 years, displaced Palestinians have claimed a 'right of return' to their original towns, villages and homes in what is now Israel, a position Israel rejects, while its government officially supports citizens who build new settlements in the occupied West Bank and force more Palestinians from their homes. In May 2025, for example, Israeli ministers announced that 22 new Jewish settlements had been approved in the West Bank – the biggest expansion in decades (Bronner 2023, n.p.; Albanese and Takkenberg 2021, 5–6, 20; UNHCR 1978, Gritten and Knell 2025).

8 UNRWA, 'Where we work: Gaza Strip', updated August 2023. https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip.

Following the Israeli military invasion of Gaza after Hamas's terror attack and hostage-taking on 7 October 2023, 90 per cent, or nine out of ten, of Gaza's population consisting primarily of refugees were internally displaced,[9] many for multiple times, in a military onslaught so disastrous to civilians that Israel has been accused of genocide and causing irreparable damage to Palestinian communities and environments (Casciani 2024). During the conflict, international media have been prevented by Israel from entering and reporting from Gaza, but firsthand experiences with the unimaginably desperate situation in Gaza have nevertheless been communicated to the world community online. For example, Hassan Morajea, the Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) regional access advisor in Deir al-Balah, shared this update on 6 August 2024, at a time when NRC estimated that recent Israeli relocation orders had reduced the size of its unilaterally designated 'humanitarian zones' in Gaza from 20 per cent to 14.5 per cent:

> In Gaza, there is nowhere for people to go; fleeing to somewhere with shelter is not an option. The streets are uninhabitable, crowded with people using anything that will offer some semblance of a roof over their heads, even if that is in a damaged building scarred with holes, and destruction around them. It's shocking to see people living in ruins, but that's what's happening here in Gaza, because there is no other option. There aren't open fields to even set up a tent. There aren't even tents for them to set up. […] The hostilities must end. There needs to be a sustainable ceasefire. Flows of goods, both humanitarian and commercial, need to be allowed to come through to deflate the extremely high prices and support people in their recovery.[10]

Susan M. Akram, the international human rights scholar, argues convincingly that the failure of the international society to find durable solutions has much to do with the exceptionalism already appointed to Palestinian refugees in the 1951 Refugee Convention, which recognized that the UN shared in the responsibility for the plight of the Palestinians displaced in the *Nakba* of 1948 (Akram 2002, 40). During the drafting process of the Refugee Convention of 1951 and the Stateless Convention of 1954, Palestinian refugees were discussed extensively, and it was generally held that their case was unique and of such a particular concern that the UN established 'a separate and special protection regime for them' (Akram 2002, 40). Briefly explained, the Refugee Convention of 1951 adopted an *individualized* definition of 'refugee'. In contrast, the framework for Palestinian refugees was based on a *collective* definition of

9 United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA), 'Occupied Palestinian territory', updated July 31, 2024. https://www.unfpa.org/occupied-palestinian-territory.

10 Norwegian Refugee Council, 'On-the-record update #7 on situation in Gaza, Palestine', August 6, 2024. https://www.nrc.no/news/2024/august/on-the-record-update-7-on-situation-in-gaza-palestine/ (accessed May 20, 2025).

Palestinians as a people under the auspices of two special UN agencies of which only one remains in place today, UNRWA. UNRWA's mission is to provide its beneficiaries with basic subsistence (food, clothing, shelter, education), but offers no protection of the wide range of human rights and fundamental freedoms that the 1951 Refugee Convention and UNHCR were supposed to guarantee (Akram 2002, 38–39, 42). As a result many Palestinian refugees, especially those who live in the Middle Eastern region, are left in the precarious situation of a 'protection gap' with neither a state nor the 1951 Refugee Convention to protect them and negotiate a durable solution to their displacement and statelessness (i.e. repatriation, inclusion in the host country or resettlement in another country) (Akram 2002, 42–45).

The fact that no solutions have been found in the decades that have passed since Akram published her analysis in 2002 is evident from international lawyer Francesca P. Albanese and former Chief of UNRWA's Ethics Office Lex Takkenberg's reconsideration of the problem in 2021. They conclude that the enduring statelessness of many Palestinians is a key element of their continuous displacement:

> For many Palestinian refugees, displacement has become a fact of life rather than something exceptional. Not only are they not allowed to return to their original 'homes' and lands within Israel as recommended by resolution 194, on the basis of international law as it stood in 1948, but many of them have not been able to integrate fully and enjoy all fundamental human rights in their host countries. While significant numbers acquired Jordanian citizenship, and small numbers may have acquired the citizenship of countries further afield, the majority of Palestinian refugees remain stateless. (Albanese and Takkenberg 2021, 5, see also 22)

Visual representations and the construction of refugees as figures of crisis

Gatrell's theory of refugeedom as embedded in cultural and social worlds circumscribed by legal, political and humanitarian frameworks is undergirded by a wide-ranging comparative historical examination of displacements across the world in the 20th century. This magisterial transnational study solidifies Gatrell's conclusion that forcibly displaced people belong within the mainstream rather than at the margins of history. At the same time, his critique highlights the shortcomings of a humanitarian approach so overly focused on victimization and deprivation that it often overshadows the resourcefulness inherent in refugee experience (Gatrell 2013, 283 and 286).

Art – and visual representations and tropes in general – have played a key role in this. Oftentimes, refugees are positioned as victims and figures of crisis, thereby exacerbating this tendency. As Ana Carden-Coyne, Chrisoula Lionis, Angeliki Roussou

and Charles Green observe in their seminal study *Understanding Displacement Aesthetics: History, Art and Museums*, the construction of the 20th-century refugee regime was intertwined with visual tropes common to humanitarian photography, the media, UN agencies and visual art, generating a limited discussion that reduced displaced persons and refugeedom to a problem to be solved (Carden-Coyne et al. 2026: 41, 132)

An example is the World Refugee Year 1959–60, which Gatrell analyses. It was initiated in 1958 by conservative British politicians and journalists who managed to gain the support of the UN for a campaign to draw attention to the predicament of the world's refugees, especially those Europeans displaced by the Second World War and still living in camps, as well as refugees in the Middle East and Hong Kong. The then UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Auguste Lindt, explained that the aim was to 'attract public attention to refugees as a social and humanitarian problem on a strictly nonpolitical basis', to generate goodwill, mobilize financial resources for organizations improving their wellbeing and make unwilling states more willing to contribute to durable solutions, including permanent resettlement (Lindt, quoted in Gatrell 2013, 114).

The World Refugee Year was conceived as an imaginative campaign, characterized by the use of specially commissioned documentaries, plays, exhibitions, advertising and postage stamps depicting the 'refugee world' (Gatrell 2013, 114). Gatrell recounts how the fake 'refugee camps' that were set up in London, Geneva, Manchester and other cities to highlight the conditions in which refugees were forced to live were extremely popular with visitors. Photography was also harnessed to add to the drama of displacement an '*iconography of predicament*' (Gatrell 2013, 114, italics added).[11]

Since the 1990s, the term 'humanitarian photography' has been used to refer to the mobilization of photography in the service of humanitarian initiatives across state boundaries. Much of the scholarship on humanitarian photography has taken its cue from the American writer and public intellectual Susan Sontag's book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) and is centred on what Sontag describes as the modern age's camera-mediated knowledge of war. This knowledge has been transmitted by photographs, film and video footage depicting 'the pain of others' and turning the viewer into 'a spectator of distant calamities' (Sontag, quoted in Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 2). In their editors' introduction to *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, the historians Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno shift the focus to the historical origins of the visual tropes of human suffering and humanitarian relief. They trace the conflated histories of humanitarianism and photographic technologies which emerged and evolved in tandem in the second half of the 19th century, eventually making photographic 'evidence' instrumental in transforming suffering

11 For an example of a World Refugee Year Exhibit and the 'iconography of predicament', see: https://media.un.org/photo/en/asset/oun7/oun7648445 (accessed May 20, 2025).

into humanitarian crisis and campaigns (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 4). Yet, as Fehrenbach and Rodogno note, humanitarian photographs are not just 'evidence' but also *moral rhetoric:* a visual discourse making an affective appeal to viewers for compassion towards human beings in distress and a persuasive argument about the urgency of helping 'needy' victims, thereby motivating the perceived need for humanitarian intervention (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 6, 8).

Fehrenbach and Rodogno observe that, by the early 20th century, a visual repertoire focusing on the human body as vulnerable, under threat, in pain or recovery (thanks to humanitarian intervention) had become established and has remained surprisingly stable, as indeed has 'the mandate' – expressed by the image, framing, caption and text – for viewers to recognize their moral 'duty' to address 'the pain of others'. The reason for this continuity is probably that this rhetoric has proved 'surprisingly effective over the long run in engaging the emotions and opening the purse strings of their viewing publics' (Fehrenbach and Rodogno 2015, 16).

The historian Kevin Grant's study of humanitarian photography between around 1900 and 1960 supports the perception that the visual tropes of such photography have a long history. He traces them back to the missionaries' usage of photography as part of abolitionist campaigns against slavery in early-20th-century Congo and Australia (Grant 2017, 3, 6). Grant's study shows that the visual tropes established by Christian missionaries continue to structure humanitarian photography, but its connotations changed with the establishment of what Gatrell terms the 'international refugee regime', with its organized programmes of professional humanitarian assistance devised by secular nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations. While the tropes established by missionaries were founded on 'imperial principles of Christianity and commerce' and a patronizing faith in the Western 'civilizing' mission, the international refugee regime came to rely on 'liberal internationalist principles of human rights and development', argues Grant. At the same time, the anti-slavery movement lost out to refugee relief as the refugees superseded enslaved people as 'the privileged humanitarian subjects', and priority was given to a new conception of national rights to culture and concerns about refugees as a threat to collective security (Grant 2017, 1). Yet Grant's visual material indicates that the secular turn did not necessarily leave all religious organizations behind, nor did humanitarian photography lose all of its religious significance (Grant 2017, 20).

The fact that the news media perpetuate a visual typology construing refugees as a 'problem' has been convincingly substantiated in the media and communications scholars Lilie Chouliaraki and Tijana Stolic's thorough study of what they term 'the visual regimes of the news'. They demonstrate how imagery revolving around refugees as victims and a threat dominated the ways in which European news media covered the 2015 arrival of Syrian refugees, turning refugees into 'a fundamentally ambivalent media figure' associated with features such as massification,

passivization, bodies-in-need, vulnerability, facelessness, criminalized agency and agentive malevolence/potential terrorists (Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017, 1164–1165 and 1172; see also Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017). Similarly, the political scientist Alice Massari's study *Visual Securitization: Humanitarian Representation and Migration Governance* confirms that transnational humanitarian NGOs' visual depictions of displacement contribute to exacerbating the news media's reduction of refugees to abstract symbols of victimhood and threat, although Massari emphasizes that a different dynamics is at play at a micro-level since relief agencies also seek to empower the beneficiaries of assistance and go beyond traditional humanitarian visual communication depicting refugees in terms of helplessness and victimhood:

> Images of overcrowded boats in the Mediterranean Sea, refugee camps, improvised shelters along the migration routes, children and families in need, and people stranded behind fences and walls have come to constitute a powerful reminder of today['s] conditions of global displacement. While visual representation is certainly media-driven today, more than ever, it is humanitarian organizations – and NGOs in particular – who while doing their relief work produce the great bulk of the images presented to the public that contribute to shape our understanding of the refugee issue. (Massari 2021, 1–2; see also 3)

Situating art on refugeedom in a Danish context

Border politics and the movements of forcibly displaced people across nation-state borders constitute an important context for this present study. However, its focal point is not so much the experience and circumstances of uprooting, flight and border-crossing as the resettlement, life and (self-)perception of refugees and asylum seekers in the receiving country. With the exception of Chapter 6 on the displacement(s) of the Palestinians, the receiving country in question is Denmark.

Accordingly, it should be mentioned that forcibly displaced individuals and communities are rarely imagined and represented in national politics and mainstream media as communities that form part of Danish society.

Recent Danish governments – the Social Democratic government (2019–2022) and the 'coalitional' centre-right SMV government succeeding it in December 2022 – have proposed to externalize and outsource the whole asylum procedure to a 'third country' in Africa. Thus, in February 2021, the Social Democratic government sent out a legislative proposal for public consultation from a range of civil society actors and organizations. It aimed at externalizing asylum processing and refugee responsibilities away from Danish territory to stop the granting of the right to stay on Danish territories. Instead, asylum claimants were to be exported by establishing an extraterritorial detention centre for asylum seekers in one or several unnamed

countries – a model reminiscent of Australia's offshore detention camps in Nauru and Papua New Guinea (Lemberg-Pedersen et al. 2021, 10, 46–48). If asylum were to be granted, the claimants would gain protection status in the country where the extraterritorial accommodation was located.

In April 2021, a joint statement issued by the Danish Foreign Ministry and the government of Rwanda revealed that the two governments were negotiating a bilateral agreement including 'the establishment of a program through which spontaneous asylum seekers arriving in Denmark may be transferred to Rwanda for consideration of their asylum applications and protection, and the option of settling in Rwanda' (Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Rwanda and Denmark 2021). As Lemberg-Pedersen observed at the time, '[t]he proposal aims at shutting down Danish authorities' processing of asylum claims, and granting of stay for refugees, on Danish territory'.[12] Although the proposal encountered predictable and severe criticism from numerous scholars, journalists, citizens and organizations concerned about the protection of refugees and the violation of their human rights, a bill enabling the externalization of asylum was passed in the Danish parliament in June of 2021. This led the newspaper *Politiken* to conclude in their editorial that Denmark had ended up as a 'scare story' and 'a caricature of the rich' (Politiken 2021; Thobo-Carlsen 2021).

At the time of writing (March 2025), these plans to externalize Danish asylum processing to Rwanda have been abandoned. Together with 14 other EU countries, including Austria and the Netherlands, the centre-right SMV government has instead been pushing for a pan-European system for a more efficient deportation system, including an externalization solution either in North Africa or a prospective EU country such as Albania, where Italy has already built centres for asylum-seekers awaiting decision and for rejected asylum-seekers awaiting deportation (Axelsson 2024; H.D. Nielsen 2024). The 2021 Rwanda plans nevertheless reflect what cultural studies scholar Anna Meera Gaonkar has described as 'the sweeping depth of problematization of the migrant figure' in Denmark, as they expose 'the affective intensity at play in relation to the future-oriented fear of a larger influx of climate refugees from the Global South' (Gaonkar 2022, 146).

The externalization rationale is not new, and neither is the 2021 proposal an isolated case. As early as 1986, the Danish conservative government at the time suggested establishing extraterritorial 'processing centres' during a session

12 Lemberg-Pedersen 2021, 7. The Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration. *Forslag til Lov om ændring af udlændingeloven (Indførelse af mulighed for overførsel af asylansøgere til asylsagsbehandling og indkvartering i tredjelande)*. [Law to reform the Aliens Act (launching the possibility to transfer asylum seekers to case processing and residency in third countries)], 2021. UUI Alm. Del. Bilag 73, page 5. Available at: https://www.ft.dk/samling/20201/almdel/uui/bilag/73/index.htm (accessed March 20, 2025).

of the UN's Third Committee – an idea that was resolutely rejected as lacking solidarity (Lemberg-Pedersen 2021, 14). In 2004, a similar scheme was proposed in an EU context by the Italian and German governments, supported by many European countries, in particular Denmark and the Netherlands. The proposal, which was never realized, was 'to transfer asylum seekers to centres in North Africa to process their asylum applications and, in case of rejection, to return them to their country of origin directly from there' (Morano-Foadi and Malena 2024, 67). In the wider Western sphere, well-known instances of externalization practices are the fiercely criticized Australian Pacific Solution involving camps on Nauru and Papa New Guinea (2001–2007), and the US's extraterritorial processing in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba since the 1990s (Morano-Foadi and Malena 2024, 69; Tan 2021, 46–48). Although such externalization policies have been much criticized for transferring responsibility to other states in order to direct asylum seekers and refugees elsewhere, and for breaching international law and compromising the human rights of vulnerable people, in the 2020s, such politics are increasingly gaining traction in Europe, and Denmark's policies and proposals have become inspirational models for other EU countries.

In April 2022, one year after Rwanda and Denmark's joint statement, and at a time when the Danish government was still negotiating with Rwanda (Høj 2022), the British government announced similar plans to externalise borders in a memorandum of understanding.[13] Such plans had been in the making for some time. As Mattias Tesfaye, the then Minister of Immigration and Integration in Denmark's Social Democratic government, explained in an interview about the Danish plans in November 2021, ministers from other Nordic and European countries were showing increasing interest in 'the Danish model' outside the official meetings: 'Several ministers have said to me, "If I could, I would".' Tesfaye specifically mentioned that '[t]he British government is more in agreement with us. Their policy proposals are very similar to ours' (Hvilsom 2021). The memorandum was adopted within the framework of the UK's 2022 Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda, also known as the UK-Rwanda arrangement, and constitutes an attempt similar to the Danish to establish permanent camps for asylum seekers in Rwanda. In a study concluded in January 2023, Professor of Law and Migrants Sonia Morano-Foadi and scholar of constitutional law Micaela Malena argue that the UK-Rwanda arrangement is symptomatic of wider shifts in border policies that not only challenge the concept of territorial asylum and the border

13 On 14 April 2022, the UK Home Office published the policy paper 'Memorandum of Understanding between the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the government of the Republic of Rwanda for the provision of an asylum partnership arrangement' detailing the aims and legal aspects of the agreement. It was updated on 6 April 2023. (UK Home Office 2022).

landscape but also weaken the state's responsibility to fulfil international obligations beyond its territory and jurisdiction and make asylum in a European country increasingly inaccessible for persons in need (Morano-Foadi and Malena 2024, 67 and 76). [14] It should be added here that shortly after a new Labour government took office in July 2024, Prime Minister Keir Starmer confirmed that his government would not proceed with the controversial partnership with Rwanda. This decision was welcomed by UN human rights experts as a step toward restoring the UK's responsibility for processing asylum claims domestically. However, in March 2025 the treaty had still not been formally dissolved, although the UK has ceased all plans to implement it.[15]

Ahead of the European Parliament elections in June 2024, the largest group in the Parliament, the European People's Party (EPP), incorporated into their political manifesto the idea of externalization of asylum in EU countries to third countries.[16] Concurrently, Italy was putting a controversial 2023 agreement with the non-EU country Albania into practice by starting the construction of a reception centre in the Albanian coastal city of Shëngjin and an asylum centre and a deportation centre in the nearby town of Gjadër, allegedly to speed up the processing of asylum applications (Bjørck 2023, 2024). In March 2025, when the Italian government was still

14 The agreement was brought before the UK High Court, which concluded that '*the overall scheme* was lawful, and that the UK government could relocate asylum seekers to Rwanda. According to the High Court, the two governments have agreed to provide proper standards of refugee status determination in Rwanda, thus complying with their legal obligations. The legal arguments substantiating the unlawful nature of the UK-Rwanda arrangement were rejected by the High Court, including those raised by UNHCR – who intervened before the High Court both orally and through written observations. However, it is important to note that *all the individual decisions on the cases* were referred by the High Court back to the Home Secretary for a new assessment of the circumstances of each applicant to determine whether the relocation to Rwanda should take place or not. An appeal of the High Court decision has been launched with the Court of Appeal. The final outcome of this litigation is still unknown at the time of writing (January 2023), but it is likely to continue to the Supreme Court and potentially to the ECtHR.' (Morano-Foadi and Malena 2024, 75; emphasis added).

15 Government Tracker / Migration, 'Has the Government scrapped the Rwanda migration agreement?'. *Full Fact*, March 13, 2025. https://fullfact.org/government-tracker/ending-rwanda-agreement/ (accessed June 27, 2025). See also the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' press release 'Experts Welcome Announcement to end UK–Rwanda Asylum Partnership', *OHCHR* July 10, 2024. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/experts-welcome-announcement-end-uk-rwanda-asylum-partnership (accessed June 27, 2025).

16 'We will conclude agreements with third countries to ensure that asylum seekers can also be granted protection in a civilised and safe way. We want to implement the concept of safe third countries. Anyone applying for asylum in the EU could also be transferred to a safe third country and undergo the asylum process there. In the case of a positive outcome, the safe third country will grant protection to the applicant on-site.' (The European People's Party 2024; see also Møller 2024)

trying to adjust its contested centres so that they could be legally approved, the European Commission put forward a proposal for 'return hubs' intended to accomplish what Italy, the UK and Denmark had so far had to give up. Responding to growing hostility towards irregular immigration across Europe and the fact that only one in five asylum seekers actually leave the EU after a return decision – a situation that the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyden, and the newly appointed Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, the Austrian Magnus Brunner, deemed unacceptable – the Commission proposed to introduce a genuine European return system (European Commission 2025; Vasquez and Genovese 2025; Bjørck 2025). A key feature of the proposal is precisely the establishment of so-called 'return hubs' in third countries outside the EU with the possibility of retaining rejected asylum seekers for two years, or until they can be returned to their home country.

The reasons for this withdrawal from international obligations and these attempts of states to evade their responsibility towards asylum seekers seem obvious. After the COVID-19 pandemic subsided, irregular immigration into Europe has been on the rise, with the increase in migration on the deadly routes across the Mediterranean Sea being a particular cause of concern. Another cause of concern was the arrival in Europe of eight million displaced Ukrainians in the first year after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 to wage a protracted and devastating war, not only against Ukraine but against 'the West'.[17] Add to this the warnings from experts on climate change and migration that global warming may soon bring the number of refugees up to an estimated 200 million people worldwide (Haas, Castles, and Miller 2020, 36–40). This fear of a real or imagined increase in the numbers of refugees and irregular migrants has fuelled right-wing anti-immigration populism in many European countries, leading even centre and left-wing parties to advocate stricter border, migration and asylum policies in order to maintain the support of their voters and prevent radically nationalist and racist right-wing parties from gaining the upper hand.

The present study explores what contemporary artists and art institutions can do to somehow mitigate this 'poly-crisis', and how artists, curators and other cultural workers have stood in solidarity with refugees and displaced peoples and worked

17 According to the UNHCR, as of February 15, 2023, almost a year after the war began, 8,072,198 displaced Ukrainians had been registered in Europe, representing 18 per cent of their country's population (Stoquer 2023, n.p.). The number peaked in the first months after the Russian invasion, and since then the pattern of displacement has become more complex. In a factsheet of Ukrainian population movements dated February 2024, UNHCR estimated that by September 2023, more than 900,000 Ukrainian refugees had returned to their place of origin and remained for at least three months in Ukraine, and an additional 298,000 refugees had returned to an area different from their former homes (UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe 2024, 3).

against political stigmatization and social injustice. A preliminary answer to the general question of art's potential must start with the premise that it resides in art's capacity for *representation*, which encompasses the multifaceted meanings of this contested term. Next, it must acknowledge that the multiform representation of art is invaluable in showing where the keys to recognition and coexistence lie. Artworks and art institutions can contribute to launching critical counter-discourses and give voice and visibility to forcibly displaced people. They can bring people together and provide platforms that assist invisibilized bodies in coming into appearance as empowered subjects. When deployed in activist and political contexts, art can also help to challenge questionable policies and galvanize protest by transforming critical sentiment into powerful expressions (verbal, visual or performative). Just as importantly, artworks can serve as a catalyst for empathy. When empathy is coupled with perspective sharing and a sufficient level of historical contextualization, artworks can, as Christine Ross has convincingly argued and demonstrated, speak to and move citizens and audiences in receiving countries, thereby helping those who have not experienced flight and refugeedom themselves to better understand the predicament and claims of refugees and asylum seekers – which might lead to solidarity and political action for 'migratory justice'.[18] This is not the place to expand on the extensive critical discourse on empathy, but an introductory note on Ross's theory of empathy is in order because I will return to it in Chapter 6. Ross emphasizes that empathy is fundamentally ambivalent by characterizing it as a *pharmakon* (both poison and remedy). Despite considerable reservations about the uses and abuses of empathy, she argues that empathy is necessary in art, particularly in art on migration and refugeedom, as a means of instilling in audiences a sense of *prosociality* that might lead to solidarity and political action. Ross concludes that 'the works' inventiveness lies in their exploration of empathy as a coexistence essential to migratory justice while allowing its ambivalence to evolve. Ambivalence is never simply expunged or controlled, and the prosociality of empathy, if it is to emerge, emerges from within that very ambivalence.' (Ross 2022, 178) However, Ross insists that empathy cannot be prosocially effective without perspective sharing, or historical contextualization. I seek to write from an approach based on empathy, as defined by Ross, with an emphasis on historical contextualization and attention to the self–other distinction and the potential prosociality of the engagement with the other (through art).

Socially engaged art adds to art's representational potential a social and agential dimension. Artists and artworld professionals can contribute to not only building solidarity and forging alliances, but also to bringing refugees, asylum seekers and

18 For an elucidating, comprehensive interdisciplinary review of the theoretical literature in the field and some in-depth analyses of how artists have sought to make empathy productive, see Ross 2022, chapters 6 and 7.

their host communities together, thereby creating opportunities for interaction and perspective sharing that can potentially change people's mindset.

The objective of this book is to examine the significant but under-studied contribution to these endeavours by contemporary artists and curators active in the Danish art scene. Accordingly, the book translates the general question of art's agency into a series of historically and geographically specific questions. How have contemporary artists portrayed refugeedom and facilitated the appearance of people of refugee backgrounds in Danish public spheres and spaces? Which projects have facilitated such openness to newcomers, and how have citizens and non-citizens participated in these projects in ways that help transform understandings of citizenship and belonging? What is Danish art's special contribution to the understanding of the predicament of refugees, to easing the unresolved tensions between refugees and hosting communities, and to the integration of refugees into Danish society? And why is this contribution critical to the development of civic coexistence in the 21st century? The answers to these questions can be encapsulated in a single yet multilayered term: *representation* – the portrayal and *imaging* of refugee experience, the practice of speaking *for* and *with*, the provision of *access* to participation in society and in particular to 'voice' and self-representation.[19] Thus, representation is crucial to the formation of *cultural citizenship* (*medborgerskab*). This book argues that because artistic and curatorial practices are imaginative, powerful and multifaceted means of representation, they can support the formation of cultural citizenship among refugees and asylum seekers as well as deepen the understanding of refugeedom in host countries. They do so by activating art's capacity for creating *worlds* and *stories*, i.e. *worldmaking* and *storying*.

The Danish material is extraordinary and internationally relevant because it has been created in the friction-filled environment of a country with one of Europe's strictest sets of immigration and asylum laws. The breadth of material will support

19 My use of the term 'imaging' echoes Stuart Hall's observations on the political power of images in his essay 'Blue Election, Election Blues', published in 1987 as a response to the historic election of Margaret Thatcher for a third term as Prime Minister of the UK. Hall stressed that images are not trivial things but participate in politics: 'In and through images, fundamental political questions are being posed and argued through. We need to take them more seriously than we do.' Hall went on to stress the important role that images play in shaping the way people envision themselves and the future: 'How else can you discuss what Britain and the British people are to become, except in terms of broad images? The future has to be imagined – "imaged", to coin a word' (Hall 2017, 240). Hall is suggesting that images (in all media) must be understood as actively creating an imaginary, and that it is important to be attentive to the fact that political/politicized imagery is not just a matter of presentation, but also of ideology. I owe the reference to Hall's use of the term 'imaged' to the visual studies scholar Sarah Samira El-Taki.

my claim that although art cannot prevent humanitarian refugee crises, it is a potentially strong card with regard to the representation of refugees. This main postulate originates in my long-term engagement with the artistic and curatorial projects of CAMP and Trampoline House, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. A profoundly moving experience for me was my first visit to Trampoline House – a Copenhagen community centre for refugees, asylum seekers and citizens – to attend the opening of its art space CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics in 2015. Ever since, I have followed and had an ongoing dialogue with the founding curators, Tone Olaf Nielsen and Frederikke 'Fred' Hansen, on their work; and the questions of how refugees and asylum seekers are represented in Denmark, and what ethical responsibility art has for countering stigmatizing policies and media representations, have never left me. The fact that Trampoline House was invited to participate in the globally influential art quinquennial, documenta fifteen, in Kassel in 2022 indicates how central art was to their attempts to find new dignifying ways of representing refugees and to build cultural citizenship and a new sense of belonging. It is also indicative of the fact that major art projects about refugeedom emerging from the Danish art scene have contributed to this endeavour.

The arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Syrian Civil War during the 'long summer of migration' in 2015 led many artists and cultural workers across Europe to initiate participatory projects with refugees and art projects about refugeedom. As this study demonstrates, in Denmark, such projects have contributed to transforming unimagined communities and subjectivities into imagined ones, and to criticizing what is described below as a paradigm shift in Danish immigration policies, linked to the wider European border and migration regime and the ways in which movements across 'our borders' have been regulated.

Refugees in art: Literature review

As already mentioned in the discussion of key terms, recent critical studies in art on forced displacement have tended to distance themselves from the discourse on 'exiles' in art, preferring instead the politicized terms 'refugee' and 'displaced person' and incorporating insights from political and social science research, especially from critical migration studies, border studies and refugee studies.

Internationally, refugees in art have increasingly become a topic of book-length studies, co-authored books and reports, as well as anthologies. Like the present study, *Understanding Displacement Aesthetics: History, Art and Museums*, by Ana Carden-Coyne, Chrisoula Lionis, Angeliki Roussou and Charles Green, focuses on the reception and resettlement of refugees. It stands out not only as a co-authored book that brings art history and cultural history together to examine both historical and contemporary artistic practices, but also for its groundbreaking identification

of the intersectional barriers facing forcibly displaced artists in the art industries and art institutions of the receiving country, distinct from those encountered by migrant artists, such as language proficiency, access to education and economic precarity. Thus, like Feyzi Baban and Kim Rygiel's report *Living Together: Fostering Cultural Pluralism through the Arts*, *Understanding Displacement Aesthetics* is a model example of how interviews and sociologically-oriented methods can be used to open new avenues of research and help uncover social barriers to artists of refugee backgrounds and the transformative social potential of collaborative art projects with refugees (Baban and Rygiel 2018).

Looking at the field broadly, three main areas of interest are apparent. The first is concerned with how refugees are biopolitically produced as enemies to justify the enforcement of borders, and with the dehumanization and destruction of vulnerable lives; the second highlights refugee agency, resilience and worldmaking; while the third engages with refugee memories and counter-memorialization.

In the first group, scholars have focused on victimhood and what Christine Ross, in her magisterial study *Art for Coexistence: Unlearning the Way We See Migration*, has termed 'the necropolitics of twenty-first-century migration'. Transforming Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics or 'death-worlds' into an analytical scalpel (Ross 2022, 26–29), Ross's book goes a long way towards developing and updating the critical approach to the visual representation of mobile lives affected by economic and political crises introduced by T.J. Demos in his authoritative study *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis*. Demos shows how contemporary artists have used documentary practices to interrogate injustices towards migrants and creatively envision new possibilities for social justice and a politics of equality from within the aesthetic domain (Demos 2013). In a similar vein, and with a focus primarily on the Mediterranean, Federica Mazzara's *Reframing Migration: Lampedusa, Border Spectacle and the Aesthetics of Subversion* explores how art and activism have become platforms for subverting dominant narratives of irregular migration, specifically around the island of Lampedusa – the point of entry for many refugees seeking protection in Italy and other EU countries (Mazzara 2019).

The second area of interest focuses on participatory artist-run refugee projects, foregrounding the voice, agency and resilience of refugees and activists (Lionis, forthcoming; Sharp 2024; Baban and Rygiel 2020, 2018). A general concern in these studies is refugees' worldmaking and worlding. This interest links the exploration of forms of collaboration and agency with the more widespread study of artists' life in exile or in diaspora, artistic representations of exilic longing for lost homes and the creation of new homes, i.e. worldmaking (Dogramaci et al. 2023; Photiou and Meskimmon 2021; Dogramaci et al. 2020).

The third area of interest that I would like to highlight pursues questions of the preservation and representation of refugee memories and histories. Celeste Ianniciello's *Migrations, Arts and Postcoloniality in the Mediterranean* identifies changes

in the practices and narratives of memorialization linked to migration experiences, and examines how the transcultural memory of the Mediterranean region is articulated by contemporary art practices and museum projects, including the temporary exhibition *With the Objects of the Migrants* (2013) in the Museum of Migration in Lampedusa (Ianniciello 2018). In *Counter-Memorial Aesthetics: Refugee Histories and the Politics of Contemporary Art*, Verónica Tello makes a useful theoretical contribution to the study of how refugeedom and lives lost during flight can be commemorated by coining the concept of 'counter-memorial aesthetics'. It refers to the use of montage techniques to preserve the otherwise vanishing images, voices, memories and histories of refugees which are often neglected by the institutions tasked with preserving national heritage and history (Tello 2016; see also Petersen 2017, 53–54).

Lastly, but importantly, it should be stressed that many scholars seek to avoid the compartmentalization of the condition of refugeedom from other forms of displacement and migration with deep roots in the histories of the downfall of empires, in postcolonial struggles for independence, settler colonialism, forced population exchange and environmental disaster (Ross 2022; Bublatzky et al. 2024a). The education studies scholar Frauke Schacht, for example, uses the term *FluchtMigration* ('flight-migration') to establish a research perspective that acknowledges the impossibility of making a clear-cut distinction between 'real refugees' and 'genuine migrants' (Schacht 2021, 11, 15).

Because clear-cut distinctions between irregular migrants and refugees/asylum seekers cannot be made, these vulnerable groups are often grouped together and linked to Giorgio Agamben's figure of bare life in the discourses of contemporary art (Petersen 2017, 53). This approach is apparent in the key studies by Ross, Demos, Mazzara and Iannicello already mentioned, and it has been further consolidated in Cathrine Bublatzky, Burcu Dogramaci, Kerstin Pinter and Mona Schieren's *Entangled Histories of Art and Migration: Theories, Sites and Research Methods* (Bublatzky et al. 2024a). This co-edited volume originated from the research network 'Entangled Histories of Art and Migration', which brought together 16 German-based scholars with international peers to develop sustainable transdisciplinary engagements with global migration and art. The 34 contributors examine representations of and practices of representing the stories of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and exiles, primarily from the 20th and 21st centuries, and they cover art practices, architecture, activism, museums/exhibitions, reception of art, education, and more. In the co-authored introduction, the editors survey the broader field of art-related and visual studies in the entanglements of art and migration. Their outline confirms the general impression that this germinating transdisciplinary field – described elsewhere by Dogramaci as a 'migratory turn' (Dogramaci 2019) – has now established itself precisely as a field. Bublatzky et al. situate their volume within this field as a contribution to 'a fundamental change in understanding the ambiguity of migrant

positions' (Bublatzky et al. 2024b, 6). However, the editors also conclude that the various strands of research that make up the field where art studies intersect with migration and refugee studies still lack proper infrastructural co-ordination and institutional platforms for sharing knowledge and co-developing new methodologies. As such, it differs from the neighbouring fields of postcolonial and transcultural art history and exilic research, which have become institutionalized areas within art history (Bublatzky et al. 2024b, 4).

Turning to the Danish material and contemporary context, it is evident that it has been neglected both nationally and internationally. Apart from Tijana Mišković's PhD dissertation (Mišković 2023), which has a select focus on Danish artists from the former Yugoslavia, research is sparse. A few research articles have been published on Trampoline House and CAMP (S.D. Nielsen and Petersen 2021; Siim and Meret 2020) and the work of Larissa Sansour (Muller 2024; Downey 2019), along with scattered articles and catalogue essays on other individual artists such as Danh Vo (Masters 2012; Fassi 2010), Nermin Duraković (Wedel-Brandt 2015) and Ismar Čirkinagić (D.R. Jørgensen 2008).

This book thus positions itself in the burgeoning field of international research on art and forced migration, which, as described above, draws on critical migration studies, border studies and refugee studies. It adds to this array of critical studies new knowledge of an understudied area: contemporary art from Denmark and its engagement with refugeedom and refugee politics. The objective is not only to add case studies of understudied material but also to break new methodological ground in art history by looking at representations of and by refugees through the framework of refugeedom developed in the field of history by Gatrell et al. Here, I do not only draw on Gatrell's theory; I am also indebted to the work of Ana Carden-Coyne, Chrisoula Lionis, Angeliki Roussou and Charles Green, as they were the first to adapt Gatrell's concept of refugeedom to art history in their interdisciplinary study, *Understanding Displacement Aesthetics: History, Art and Museums*.

Methodological considerations

In contradistinction to Carden-Coyne et al.'s *Understanding Displacement Aesthetics*, the present book does not aim to study the inequalities and barriers of work in art institutions, yet contextualization is equally paramount to its aims as it sets out to analyse a plurality of representations of refugeedom and displacement, with critical attention given to how each of them was shaped, mediated, restricted, amplified or silenced by external circumstances. Accordingly, the book starts from the observation that refugeedom is a cultural and historical construct shaped by people who carry their experience of forced displacement and the baggage of their pasts with them to a different sociocultural environment and set of conditions,

but also by a contemporaneous refugee regime (cf. above). Taking 'refugeedom' as its overarching framework, the book puts forward the idea that *worldmaking* and *storying* are the crux of the aesthetic and knowledge practices through which artists engage with refugee experiences of fleeing, refuge, resettlement and claim(s)-making. Here, I am in conversation with Marsha Meskimmon's book *Transnational Feminisms and Art's Transhemispheric Histories: Ecologies and Genealogies*, which likewise focuses on 'worlds' and 'stories' as central to art's histories – or, in Meskimmon's terms, *ecologies* and *genealogies*.[20]

In addition to artistic *portrayals of life worlds* (of refugees) this book looks at *worldmaking with art* (especially unmaking and remaking) and introduces the novel idea of art as a space for prefigurative worldmaking. As regards *stories*, much of the Danish material reflects art's capacity for creating refugee narratives (about, alongside, by, with) and bringing storytelling back to its fundamental role of reorganizing past experiences into meaningful patterns and imagining future potentialities. Within the unifying frame *representation, worlds and stories*, this book analyses the thematic, aesthetic, ethical and political aspects of works that address refugeehood, created by artists with or without a refugee background, such as Nermin Duraković, Vladimir Tomić, Maja Nydal Eriksen, Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind, and those involved in CAMP and Trampoline House.

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20 Meskimmon 2023, 1, 7–9. Seeking to capture planetary scales and multiple dimensions of human and nonhuman existence and coexistence from a decolonial, ecocritical feminist perspective, Meskimmon's post-anthropocentric concepts of ecologies and genealogies are both theoretically complex, multiscalar and multidimensional. Her usage of the term *ecologies* is related to the environment – 'from anthropogenic environmental destruction, to social justice and ecological activisms'. But it also goes beyond that to connect to 'ecological thinking and the development of ecologies of knowledges' as 'multi-epistemic practices of thinking' (Meskimmon 2023, 7). As regards *worlding* and *worldmaking*, Meskimmon's objective (like that of this author) is to turn away from 'one world thinking' – the lingering heritage of the European imperial projects – towards 'thinking with and through a world of many worlds, or a pluriverse' (Meskimmon 2023, 10). Meskimmon's focus on *genealogies* springs from her longstanding transnational feminist interest in how counter-narratives of gender can be generated from 'excavating histories and mining archives', and how 'practices of genealogies', i.e. stories and storying, can facilitate an engagement with residues from the past, traces and absences that materialize as nonlinear, palimpsestic and multidimensional narratives (Meskimmon 2023, 8) – an approach to storying of relevance to this book. It is, however, important to be attentive to the differences. Meskimmon's broad conceptualization of worlds/worlding and stories/storying differ from the 'anthropocentric' way these concepts are used in this book to frame issues of human displacement and refugeedom specifically. While her study is oriented towards philosophy and speculative theory, 'thinking the world through the scalar logic of the planet and the cosmos, a scale of thought that refuses the dominance of human agency, [and] resists conceptualizations through anthropocentric forms of history' (Meskimmon 2023, 8), my study, due to the nature of its topic, finds much support in anthropocentric forms of history and social science research.

Especially in the aesthetic realm, understanding the message and contribution of art on refugeedom entails reading artistic projects closely in their sociopolitical context. For this reason, this book does not attempt a broad mapping but offers in-depth case studies of some of the most powerful contributions, distributed across a range of different media and aesthetic practices and displayed or 'operating' in radically different kinds of sites, thus reaching different types of people, as already demonstrated by the works discussed in the Prologue. In general, I have prioritized projects by artists and curators who have dedicated several years to grappling with the topic of refugeedom, or whose endeavour unfolds across a series of works. Obviously, there are other artists and projects that deserve to become the subject of art historical study. For a start, one could mention the early works of the internationally renowned artist Danh Vo, reflecting on the story of his own family who arrived as 'boat refugees' from Vietnam to Denmark in the 1970s. Elements of their story are incorporated in works such as Danh Vo's *Oma Totem* (2009) and *Das Beste oder Nichts* (2010), which weave stories of the arrival and settlement of displaced Vietnamese into contemporary art and the history of Denmark and Europe.[21] Another remarkable example of how artists can use their own family history of displacement to combine reflections on the experience of forced displacement and resettlement with a revision of the history and culture of the receiving country is the work of the Copenhagen-based artist Yvette Brackman. A particularly noteworthy example is her 2024 research-based exhibition *Salon de Refusés* at SMK (the National Gallery of Denmark), in which she used her Jewish-Russian family's experience of antisemitic persecution (in Russia) and exile (in the US) as a lever for the exploration of the marginalization of Jewish women artists in Danish art history writ large by demonstrating that the history of Jewish artists in Denmark was not represented as such in the SMK collection, with its strong national focus. This historical exhibition could be said to offer a model of the work on artists with backgrounds of forced displacement that needs to be undertaken, as Brackman identified gaps in the collection and tried to fill them by 'unfolding new stories and by adding relevant works' to the collection.[22]

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21 I have written on Vo's early works in a migratory perspective elsewhere, in Petersen 2017, 166–174.

22 Yvette Brackman, quoted in the press release 'New Installation by Yvette Brackman: *Salon des Refusés*', SMK April 11–September 8, 2024, https://www.smk.dk/en/article/ny-installation-af-yvette-brackman-salon-des-refuses/ (accessed March 20, 2025). Juliette Meyer Willumsen's *Inkwell with Four Female Figures* (1896), Marie Henriques's *Landscape from Southern Europe* (1891) and Ville Jais-Nielsen's *Nature Morte* (1913) were donated to SMK by Brackman when the exhibition closed. I thank SMK's Chief Curator and Senior Researcher, Peter Nørgaard Larsen, for this information. Email to the author December 2, 2024. Previously, Brackman had amplified the silenced voices of Denmark's mostly forgotten women and minoritized artists in her collaborative performance *General Assembly with Medium* in the 2023 exhibition

A study of the Tehran-born, Copenhagen-based artist Farshad Farzankia's expressionist paintings is also warranted. Farzankia came to Denmark with his parents in 1989 at the age of nine from war-torn Iran, after the family had stayed temporarily in Turkey, Bulgaria and Cyprus (Rasmussen 2018). A distinct sense of exilic longing is felt in many of his heterogenous, multilayered paintings, which feature symbols of both personal and political significance, such as migrants' shoes and the red tulip of the Islamic revolution, alongside ancient Persian symbols like roses, birds and human figures. Moreover, sculptural assemblages made of wooden sticks and boxes, small paintings of faces and spraypainted tyres reminiscent of life belts (such as those included in his 2024 show *We Watchin* at the Copenhagen gallery, Andersen's) enhance the sense of precariousness and homelessness conveyed by Farzankia's paintings.[23] As the artist has explained, artmaking is for him a way of reconnecting with the world that is lost – worldmaking as *re*making:

> I experienced it very specifically when I was little, and we fled from our home in Tehran to Denmark. I could not understand it. As a refugee, you never understand it, because there is no logical explanation why you can't go home. You are lost in the world. I know I'll never go home. But in my studio, I'm close. (Farzankia 2018)

The broader concern with refugeedom and Danish/European refugee politics is evident in the fact that many artists, whose work primarily focuses on other subjects, have created maybe one or a few pieces addressing refugeedom. Kathrine Dirkinck-Holmfeld and Amr Hatan's two-channel video installation *Zamakan (TimeSpace)* (2019), for example, explores how affect can enable memories and sensations from the country of departure to come alive in the present. The installation seeks to express, through its filmic techniques, an awareness of coexisting sensations and simultaneous dimensions, which the artists suggest is 'a vision privileged to exiles' (Dirckinck Holmfeld, Hatem, and Mroueh 2021, 285). Interestingly, the project was created through the Copenhagen cultural venue and café Sorte Firkant ('Black Square'), which the artists co-initiated in 2016, together with filmmakers, writers and cultural producers from Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq who came to Denmark between 1980 and 2015. They were all part of a larger informal network around Sorte Firkant, and many were part of the Arab left and participated in the Palestinian struggle. However, entry points to the Danish cultural scenes proved

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Frie hænder ('Free hands') at the Copenhagen exhibition venue Den Frie Udstillingsbygning. In this performance, Brackman assumed the role of a medium summoning the spirits of twelve former members of the artist association Den Frie Udstilling (all important for posterity, but not all included in the national history of Danish art) in commemorative texts read by twelve contemporary artists and curators.

23 Farshad Farzankia, 'We Watchin', https://www.andersenscontemporary.dk/farshad-farzankia-we-watchin (accessed March 20, 2025).

difficult to find, including funding, as their works were perceived as not speaking to a 'Danish audience'. *Zamakan (TimeSpace)* pushes back against this perception and seeks to show how the artists' works and personal archives possess a transcultural relevance and 'might contribute to expand what is commonly understood as "Danish" collective memory' (Dirckinck Holmfeld, Hatem, and Mroueh 2021, 284). This ambition is quite similar to the intent of the participatory art project *100% FREMMED?* ('100% FOREIGN?') (2016–2019), analysed in Chapter 4.

Another artwork that should be mentioned is the artist group Superflex's almost allegorical meditation on Europe's fortified borders and its role in the 2015 refugee situation in their film work *Kwassa Kwassa* (2015).[24] Four years later, Superflex followed up with *Western Rampart* (2018), another film on fortified borders and how they can be penetrated, this time using the historical ramparts of Copenhagen (S.D. Nielsen 2019b, 65). It was created for curatorial studies scholar Sabine Dahl Nielsen's important research project and exhibition *Transit* (2019) at KØS Museum of Art in Public Spaces, located south of Copenhagen. *Transit* brought experiences of refugeedom to public attention by showing several topic-relevant works in its broader exploration of transit zones and migratory movements. Also included in *Transit* was the writer and performance artist Madame Nielsen's installation *A Parallel world based on the bildungsroman The Invasion – A Stranger in the Flow of Refugees, which is in turn based on a journey on foot among refugees along the Balkan route in October and November 2015* (2018). As the descriptive title indicates, this was a photo-, sound- and text-based versioning of Madame Nielsen's novel *The Invasion – A Stranger in the Flow of Refugees* (2016), which charts Madame Nielsen's passage from one site of transit to another alongside the refugees on the Balkan route, and how her status as a traveller and tourist enables her to cross borders smoothly with her 'wine-red EU passport' without being subjected to violence, humiliation and the demands on refugees to pay for crossing the same borders illegally (S.D. Nielsen 2019b, 183). In contrast to Madame Nielsen's focus on the refugees' journey and their arrivals at train and bus stations, temporary pick-up points at refugee camps and the constantly changing contact points of human traffickers along the routes through Europe, the poet and sound artist Pejk Malinovski created the virtual reality work *This Room* (2018) for *Transit*, a work that homed in on how the many refugees arriving in Denmark in 2015–2016 were housed in camps that had been set up quickly in former prisons, hospitals, schools, camping grounds and temporary structures. Having grown up near a camp for asylum seekers in the 1980s and making friends with Turkish, Iranian and Palestinian children living there, Malinovski wanted to spotlight the involuntary state of transit and limbo they were subjected to while being squeezed together in small rooms with bunk beds. Malinovski's installation allowed two visitors at a time

24 Superflex, *Kwassa Kwassa*, https://superflex.net/works/kwassa_kwassa (accessed December 2, 2024).

to sit on a bench in a claustrophobic room, wearing a VR headset presenting a fictional reconstruction of such surroundings and with a soundtrack assembled from audio recordings made by the artist of refugees recalling their memories of transit sites and rooms where they have waited for asylum. By blurring the boundaries between the documentary and the fictional, *This Room* thus laid bare the stressful and sometimes traumatizing living conditions of refugees (S.D. Nielsen 2019b, 58–59; 2019a). *This Room* conveyed an almost physical sense of the psychological stress and anxiety asylum seekers endure. As such, it is related to Nermin Duraković's *(Re)arranging* (2009/2015), an installation with furniture from a Danish asylum centre, to which I will return in Chapter 5.

Malinovski's *This Room* can be linked to the developments in another narrative medium. Internationally, and also in Denmark, there has been a growing interested in co-creating and publishing comics based on refugee experiences, especially since the arrival of the Syrian refugees in 2015. Products of activist art, journalism and ethnographic work, these graphic narratives portray the routes and limbo of asylum-seeking individuals, as well as the emotional and psychological effects of forced migration, thereby contributing to shaping collective imaginaries of displacements. 'Camps' are common settings drawn and narrated in these comics, where they are rendered not only as sites of control but also as sites for the emergence of agency and resistance. An apt example resulting from a collaboration between rejected asylum claimants, professional illustrators and activists is the graphic novel *Fortællinger fra Kærshovedgård* ('Kærshovedgård Stories'), which narrates and visualizes the individual stories of eight rejected asylum claimants in a Danish deportation centre (Adi et al. 2023).

In addition, there have been important contributions by visiting artists, such as Khaled Barakeh's *MUTE* (2022), introduced in the Prologue, and the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's *Soleil Levant* (2017), made specifically for the façade of Kunsthal Charlottenborg. This monumental installation packed 3500 orange life jackets retrieved from the Greek island of Lesbos into the art gallery's façade windows facing Nyhavn, one of Copenhagen's most busy and popular tourist destinations – a site epitomizing the voluntary movement of people (Ross 2022, 187; Arffmann 2017). Basel Abbas and Rouanne Abou-Rahme's exhibition *The Song is the Call and the Land is Calling* in 2024 should also be mentioned. Spread over two Copenhagen venues, the Glyptotek museum and the Copenhagen Contemporary art centre, this was part of a three-year partnership between the institutions, addressing the wider question of how the untold and silenced stories transmitted over generations by migrating people and travelling objects of cultural heritage should be told, and who has the right to tell them. More specifically, Abbas and Abou-Rahme's exhibition explored the profound connection between cultural heritage and identity and how to hold on to and activate the power of cultural heritage under colonial occupation and forced displacement. Informed by their own upbringing in communities across

Ramallah, Jerusalem and Galilee, their primarily video and soundbased practice is deeply rooted in the history of Palestinian lives and identity and is committed to assembling an ever-growing visual and sonic archive that engages with and reimagines Palestinian heritage, telling stories about loss and the consequences of the Israeli occupation, but also of resilience, hope and a sense of community. The collective memories, histories and resistance of forcibly displaced Palestinians, their connection to the land and their desire to return to reclaim it was compellingly expressed, especially in the video work *And yet my mask is powerful* (2016–2018), in which a group of young Palestinians return to the ruins of some of the villages that were destroyed when the state of Israel was founded, looking for traces of an eradicated past in the living archive of the landscape where resilient cactuses mark the sites of depopulated villages (Glyptoteket 2024; Abbas and Abou-Rahme 2024). Although it did not manifest on the Danish art scene but in the occupied Palestinian territory of the West Bank, the collaborative art project *People's Museum Birzeit* (2008–2009) should also be mentioned. Initiated by the Copenhagen artist-run space YNKB, it took an activist approach to channelling funds from the Danish Art Foundation to Palestinian artists to help create a local folklore museum for the people in the town of Birzeit and collect items that would tell the stories of some individuals and remember the history of this specific town where many of the residents are refugees from the 1948 *Nakba*. Created as a peaceful form of resistance against the ongoing Israeli occupation, this project was an act of hope.[25]

An evolving project that stands out for its singularity is Eliaya Mesayer's work centring on the imaginary state *Illiyeen* – a state for the stateless. Bringing together fact and fiction, the political and the poetic, the project involves her own heritage as a stateless woman of Bedouin origin born in Kuwait who did not obtain Danish citizenship until 2020 at the age of 32, but it also draws on pre-Islamic notions of alchemical transformation, especially Abu Musa Jabir ibn Hayyan (721–815) (Albrethsen 2021, n.p.; see also Luna and Albæk 2019, n.p.). In the artist's understanding, '*Illiyeen* is a non-specific geographical location. It is a state of nowhere and a nation of everywhere. It is a state of being.'[26] *Illiyeen* is perhaps best understood as a conceptual manifestation emerging from the artist's poems, performances, songs, installations and exhibitions to form an ongoing commentary on the founding symbols and rituals of nationhood and citizenship that hovers on

25 The members of the People's Museum working group were the Danish artists Pelle Brage Andersen and Laurids Sonne from Parfyme, Kirsten Dufour, and Finn Thybo Andersen from YNKB (Outer Norrebro Cultural Bureau), and the Palestinian artists Hosni Radwan and Haneen Masri. A book documents the project, see The People's Museum Working Group 2012, 16–17. I thank Eva la Cour-Nielsen for the reference.

26 Eliyah Mesayer, announcement of her performance with composer Angel Wei Bernild of Illiyeen's 'National Anthem' at SMK, November 12, 2020. Posted on Instagram, October 9, 2020.

the threshold between the political and the poetic. Initiated in 2020, by 2023 *Illiyeen* had its own postal service with stamps, Illiyeen uniforms and a national anthem, which premiered at a performance in November 2020 at the National Gallery of Denmark, SMK (Albrethsen 2021, n.p.). The political aspect of Mesayer's work springs from her own upbringing as a stateless person in Denmark, which hampered her access to education. In 2020, she set up the Mesayer Foundation to offer advice to stateless persons applying for Danish citizenship, as well as financial aid sourced either from art auctions organized by Mesayer or by having her gallerists pay 40 per cent of their profits from selling her work to the Foundation, thereby redistributing means from those who are sufficiently affluent to purchase art to support for transforming stateless subjects into citizens (Albrethsen 2021, n.p.; see also Daugaard, Schmidt, and Tygstrup 2024b, 2). Like Abbas and Abou-Rahme's exhibition, *Illiyeen* and the Mesayer Foundation have close links to the topic of Chapter 6: the forced displacement and statelessness of the Palestinians.

The question of the representation of displaced Ukrainians on the Danish art scene must also be addressed here. Unlike the Syrian exodus, the displacement of the Ukrainians in 2022 following the Russian invasion, has not figured much in Danish exhibitions. Artists from Ukraine seem to have preferred European metropolises such as Berlin and Paris to Copenhagen. Robin Frederiksen, curator, art consultant and project leader of the Displaced Artists Network, founded to support displaced Ukrainian artists and curators in Denmark, has corroborated my impression that few works on the Danish art scene engage with the displacement of the Ukrainians and the war in Ukraine, except those created by the Ukrainian artists themselves. Frederiksen suggests that one reason might be that the war has attracted so much media and political attention that it has not been considered necessary. Another reason might be that the so-called 'Ukrainian Law' of March 2022 bears negatively on the artists because all displaced Ukrainians are forced to seek permanent employment, so 'it has been a real challenge to create space and time for artistic expression'. Through the Displaced Artists Network, Frederiksen has been in contact with about 20–30 artists from Ukraine who have temporary residency in Denmark. Among the few visual art examples, she mentions their collaboration with the Ukrainian curator Tamara Palienko on the group exhibition *Beauty Will Save the World* at Frederikshavn Art Museum in 2023, and the exhibition *Women Fleeing War*, with portraits of displaced Ukrainian women and children by the Danish documentary photographer Kristine Fryd and a soundtrack by the sound artist and musician Sophia Swager who resides in Denmark and has been part of the Displaced Artists Network.[27]

27 I thank Robin Frederiksen for sharing her knowledge in an email to the author, January 8, 2025; see also Frederiksen 2023. For the Displaced Artists Network, see their bilingual website in English and Ukrainian: https://www.displaced-artists.net/ (accessed January 15, 2025). For Kristine Fryd's series of portraits *Women Fleeing War*, see https://www.kirstinefryd.com/wome

This long, open-ended list of examples suggests two things. It demonstrates that art on refugeedom belongs within the mainstream rather than at the margins of art history, just as forcibly displaced people belong within mainstream history, as Gatrell has argued (Gatrell 2013, 283). The list also indicates that, in a Danish context, the study of art and refugeedom is only in a nascent stage as this material has never been studied as a part of a larger international history about artistic responses to forced displacement, refugeedom and asylum policies. This book cannot cover everything, and it does not attempt to provide a survey, but I hope that the field of exploration I have outlined will be taken up by others and revised, refined and advanced further in empirical and historical groundwork as well as theoretical and methodological contributions.

As Gatrell et al. point out, examining the perspectives of refugees is 'a difficult undertaking, methodologically and ethically', particularly in regard to 'the marginalized position they occupy in contemporary society and politics' (Gatrell et al. 2021, 74). The fact that the voices and representations of refugees in art are often mediated, not only by other agents but also by institutional structures, further complicates the matter. Gatrell et al. suggest using Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of polyphony to foreground refugee voices and to raise awareness of the fact that the articulation of 'refugeedom' is not undertaken by 'subaltern' displaced subjects alone, but is, rather, a discourse produced by a *plurality* of unequally positioned actors scattered in time and space (Gatrell et al. 2021, 93).[28] In other words, understanding representations of 'refugeedom' in art as a polyphonic discourse allows for a bringing together of diverging forms of artistic and curatorial practices by, with and about displaced people. Thus, it enables me to accommodate the significant differences of perspective, materiality, positionality, artistic idiom, etc., that are a feature of the heterogeneous material from Denmark.

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nfleeingwar (accessed January 15, 2025). For Frederikshavn Kunstmuseum's exhibition *Beauty Will Save the World*, 2023, see https://frederikshavnkunstmuseum.dk/udstilling/beauty-will-save-the-world/ (accessed January 15, 2025).

28 In Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding, polyphony is a tool to foreground the dialogical and multiperspectival nature of texts. It refers to texts in which every character is treated as independent and as 'a fully-weighted ideological conception of his own' (Bakhtin, quoted in Gatrell et al. 2021, 90). In relation to displacement, it is important to note that polyphony produces inclusions and exclusions as it privileges some voices and marginalizes others. Nevertheless, argue Gatrell et al., as 'a method of doing research' that examines the interrelationship between voices, 'polyphony' can help recover marginalized voices and serve as a means of countering the prevalent conceptions and images of 'refugees as helpless and speechless victims', or as 'a threatening and "alien" presence', exploring instead not so much how refugees appear in the world, as the media often do, but 'how the world appears to a refugee and how the refugee appears to himself and herself' (Gatrell et al. 2021, 93).

An implicated subject: On positionality

A final remark on methodology concerns my own situated perspective and implication in the histories and contemporary conjunctures examined in this book. This book draws inspiration from the feminist critique of the notion of objectivity in research and its insistence on the primacy of the partial perspective (Haraway 1988; Moya 2011; Riis 2024). It also adopts the framework of political implication laid out by the Holocaust and memory studies scholar Michael Rothberg, who has introduced the concepts of the 'implicated subject' and 'implication' as a way of addressing political responsibility for past and present injustices beyond the categories of victim, perpetrator and bystander. 'Implication' shares the sense of 'folded-togetherness' with the term 'complicity'. However, 'complicity' carries with it a strong suggestion of legal wrongdoing, whereas the term 'implication' is a more capacious term that suggests different states and forms of being involved (Rothberg 2019, 13):

> Implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles. (Rothberg 2019, 1)

Rothberg insists on the historical specificity and positionality of all implicated subjects, but he also identifies and theorises three broad categories: the descendant, the beneficiary and the perpetuator. These categories are abstractions that serve analytical purposes. They describe neither human essences nor specific persons (Rothberg 2019, 8).

The descendants Rothberg has in mind are primarily descendants of victims, perpetrators or bystanders – the intergenerational carriers of trauma and the memories and effects of a difficult past. In the context of this study, it should be noted that cultural production which grapples with traumatic events is often created by second (and subsequent) generations digging into their family's or community's history as 'latecomers' to histories of forced displacement and heirs to narratives of 'how we got here'.

Rothberg defines the figure of the beneficiary as a person whose wellbeing in the present order is contingent on the historical suffering of others and contemporary inequalities in an age of global, neoliberal capitalism (Rothberg 2019, 14). It should be added that these include the inequalities produced by the European border and migration regime and the international refugee regime. Building on Bruce

Robbins's 2017 study of the beneficiaries of global economic inequality, *The Beneficiary*, Rothberg suggests that the discourse on beneficiaries fosters recognition 'that our well-being is contingent on others' suffering and impoverishment and that the world is connected by "causal and therefore moral relationships"' (Rothberg 2019, 16). He emphasizes that Robbins's general point cannot be extended to all cases, for instance, genocide and the diasporic nationalism frequently found in transnationally displaced communities: 'Diasporic nationalist subjects don't (just) benefit from links to their homelands (or purported homelands). They help to *perpetuate* nationalist projects that are based on the subordination of others.' (Rothberg 2019, 17; emphasis in the original) In Rothberg's terminology, diasporic nationalists are therefore 'perpetuators' of a particular order rather than its beneficiaries. In fact, in Rothberg's understanding most people are perpetuators. As citizens and taxpayers, we are willing or unwilling perpetuators who bear a political responsibility for our country's policies, including the injustices they cause (Rothberg 2019, 145). However, he is adamant that positionality is fluid not fixed, and that we shift in and out of implication depending on context (Rothberg 2019, 211 note 43).

While conducting research for this book, I was aware of my position as a Danish citizen and an EU citizen without a background of forced displacement, as well as my implication in the topic as a beneficiary of the regimes and policies described above, especially as someone who also benefits from inclusion in the category of whiteness. I was thus attentive to the fact that I hold a privileged position in relation to the people and artists with a background of forced displacement whose work and representation is explored in this book. As (almost) all the works of art discussed in this book have been exhibited in Denmark, I also belong to the intended audience that the works seek to address (or, if the works are created with several types of audiences in mind, I belong to at least one of them). In many ways, my position is representative of a significant part of the art audience and public to which these exhibitions were addressed. Put differently, most art exhibition goers (in Denmark and beyond) will be implicated subjects, and many artists deliberately address their audience as such by encouraging people to think about collective responsibility among those positioned as implicated subjects.

The recognition of how I was myself folded into the topic I was studying inevitably led to the question: What is my responsibility as a researcher exploring the 'representation' of refugees in contemporary art from Denmark? My critical perspective on Danish and European refugee and migration policies is already apparent above, as is my awareness of the negative impact of the stereotypical representation of refugees in media and humanitarian discourses. An important part of my responsibility is, therefore, to shed light on artistic counter-discourses and critiques of Danish migration and asylum policies. In doing so, I hope to fulfil another obligation, which is to unravel the alternative worlds and stories that

artistic representations of refugeedom harbour, and to spotlight the agency and resilience of the forcibly displaced people with which the art projects are concerned.

Lastly, but importantly, my understanding of the researcher's responsibility is underpinned by Rothberg's insight that one can use one's positionality (implication) as an analytical and critical potential. Rothberg argues convincingly that the framework of implicated subjects can open up a space for building coalitions across identities and groups – which is confirmed by my case studies in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. The framework holds this potential because of its ability to do two things simultaneously that 'stand in tension with each other: it both draws attention to responsibilities for violence and injustice greater than most of us want to embrace and shifts questions of accountability from a discourse of guilt to a less legally and emotionally charged terrain of historical and political responsibility' (Rothberg 2019, 20). By foregrounding the 'impurities' of all identities, the framework of implicated subjects encourages affinities between differently positioned subjects and helps foster recognition of collective responsibility, potentially leading to 'new versions of collective politics' (Rothberg 2019, 21). Rothberg argues that such an implicated politics must take part in what Robbins has termed 'the paradox of empowered dissent' because it needs 'the input of those who are empowered (that is, who *are* beneficiaries) and yet who also dissent from and even denounce the system that empowers them' (Robbins, quoted in Rothberg 2019, 21).

These brief reflections on my position are intended to contribute to the transparency and accountability of this study. As Rothberg notes, acknowledging one's implication is a necessary step in refusing 'violent innocence'. Yet, it is also important to understand that implication is a complex matter, and that 'most of us feel torn by our relation to divergent, intersecting histories' (Rothberg 2019, 19). Probably none of us are able to fully penetrate and unravel our own implication in regimes of control and domination, past and present. Moreover, extensive 'auto-ethnographic' self-reflection also risks becoming a kind of narcissism or solipsism that keeps the privileged subject at the centre of the analysis (Rothberg 2019, 19). This is not what is needed at a time when artists, art workers and audiences around the world are increasingly calling for contemporary art to respond to current crises of displacement. The sixtieth edition of the Biennale di Venezia in 2024 provided clear evidence of this development. Its theme 'Foreigners Everywhere – Stranieri Ovunque' was conceived by the Brazilian curator and director of the São Paulo Museum of Art, Adriano Pedrosa. A world rife with various crises concerning the movement and existence of people across countries, nations, territories and borders formed the backdrop of this prestigious international event. Accordingly, it focused primarily on artists who are themselves diasporic, exiled, immigrants, refugees, foreigners in the country/countries where they live and work, or belong to marginalized Indigenous peoples. When unpacking the theme in the Biennale's guidebook, Pedrosa linked it specifically to the situation in Europe and around the Mediterranean Sea, as

well as the surging numbers of forcibly displaced people across the world. Crucially, Pedrosa did not use Rothberg's term, but he used the title 'Foreigners Everywhere' to indicate that 'wherever you are, you will always encounter foreigners – they/we are everywhere', thus making it crystal clear that as regards the movement and displacement of people we are *all* implicated subjects with a collective responsibility (Pedrosa 2024, 54).

The Biennale di Venezia is the world's oldest biennale and distinguishes itself from other art biennials by combining a curated international group exhibition with a plethora of national pavilions, typically showcasing one or more prominent artists from the nation-state in question and pivoting on whatever theme the artist(s) and curator(s) find most interesting. A striking feature of the 2024 biennial was that many of the national pavilions took their lead from Pedrosa's exhibition theme, thereby contributing to the Biennale's concerted but multifaceted collective response to displacement and estrangement. This response included a petition by the group Art Not Genocide Alliance (ANGA) protesting against Israel's concurrent killings and mass displacement of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza strip. The alliance and its supporters demanded that Israel be excluded from the Biennale, and that the Israeli Pavilion should not open – a decision ultimately taken by the exhibiting artist Ruth Patir herself. Furthermore, in the Biennale's opening week, pro-Palestine demonstrations were held in front of the Israeli and American pavilions (ANGA 2024). As *The Art Newspaper*'s reporter Melissa Gronlund noted, '[t]here was no discernible attempt from the Venice Biennale organisers to stop the protests, and most of the visitors looked on or joined in' (Gronlund 2024, n.p.; see also Movius 2024; Small 2024).

Chapter overview

Worlding and Storying Forced Displacement: Contemporary Art and Refugee Experience in Denmark is not a survey text. Whilst the book draws its case studies from a wide range of art projects and artworks, it does not profess 'historical coverage' or aim for a unifying master discourse, as if that were possible or even desirable. Instead, this study is guided by the imperative to hear *diverse* stories of displacement told by multiple voices. It also prioritizes close attention to the specificity of the selected objects of analysis and the historical and political contexts in which they originated. That said, the book's chapters do form a kind of narrative arch.

While this Introduction has presented the book's general theoretical and methodological framework, as well as providing a historical introduction to the Danish political context and artistic material, Chapter 1 proceeds to unpack the set of key concepts that serve as analytical perspectives throughout the subsequent chapters: worldmaking, storying, voice, cultural citizenship, and lastly, but

importantly, postmigration and the concept of a postmigrant society, which is used here to characterize Danish society of the 21st century. After the first chapter has set the stage, Chapters 2 and 3 home in on the newly arrived and the early phase of refugee settlement, in which many end up being housed in camps for asylum seekers for years. These twin chapters address the complicated question of the place of asylum seekers and refugees in postmigrant societies and examine how artists and curators have grappled with it. Each chapter focuses on a collaborative participatory project that has evolved and ramified over a period of several years, continually attracting new participants and audiences. Chapter 2 is a case study of how some artists, curators and volunteers committed themselves to welcoming precarious 'newly arrived' refugees and migrants in Trampoline House (2010–2020) in Copenhagen, and its embedded art space, CAMP / Centre for Art on Migration Politics (2015–2020). Chapter 3 follows Trampoline House's extraordinary journey from its local environment to its participation in the fifteenth edition of Documenta in Kassel, Germany (2022). Chapter 4 moves on to consider artistic representations of the next phase of integration into postmigrant society. This chapter focuses on 'those who stay', exploring how the art project *100% FREMMED?* tells stories about the worldmaking processes of individuals with refugee backgrounds who have settled in Denmark since the 1950s. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 also consider what kind of future the art projects under study enable us to envision, thereby providing some answers as to how living together in difference might be envisioned. Central to all these chapters is the feminist concept of transversal politics, also to be introduced in Chapter 1. More specifically, Chapter 3 will link transversal politics to the idea that such a coalitional politics of solidarity can also be a prefigurative politics, while Chapter 4 will link transversal politics to the idea of a civic ethics from the perspective of the refugee.

The last two chapters move beyond issues of 'integration' into the national community and the artworld to consider works by artists who have a longstanding engagement with refugeedom and who have become part of the established national and international artworld. The highlighting of established artists reflects who is likely to get to tell stories of migration and displacement. As Ross notes, in the majority of cases, those who get to tell the stories of citizens-on-the-move, refugees and survivors, are mainly the professional artists. Many of the artists grappling with migration and displacement are themselves either former refugees or immigrants, or children of immigrants; many live between countries or are binationals, or are citizens of European or North American countries who 'have established long-standing relationships with people in a state of migration' (Ross 2022, 231–232). As Ross's in-depth analyses convincingly demonstrate, intercultural relations and an awareness of deep history have made these artists particularly responsive to issues of migration, displacement and refugeedom, and determined to transform their response into aesthetically compelling forms.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore art's potential to narrate individual and collective memories of displacement and 'archive' refugee heritage. In different, yet interrelated ways, these chapters examine how 'travelling' or 'transcultural' memories can be leveraged by artists to foster empathy in audiences and enhance historical understanding. While the previous chapters focus on collaborative and participatory art projects, Chapters 5 and 6 examine object- and image-based art practices, primarily those involving lens-based media. Chapter 5 explores works revolving around the cultural memories and diasporic position in-between of Danish artists born in and displaced from Yugoslavia during the Yugoslav wars from 1991 to 2001. The selected works by Alen Aligrudić, Nermin Duraković, Ismar Čirkinagić and Vladimir Tomić all invite reflections on how violence and loss can be commemorated, and how visual art can story memories of war, displacement, waithood and origin.

Chapter 6 reflects the fact that most of this book was written over the time period of Israel's most recent military intervention into Gaza, leading to Israel being accused of genocide of the indigenous Palestinian population.[29] Continuously in the news, the unfolding disaster in Gaza 'spilled over' into European societies, sparking new protests, solidarity demonstrations and activist interventions, as well as reigniting racist and antisemitic violence. The Gaza conflict has turned virtually everyone into implicated subjects, generating deep rifts and serious political antagonisms, and has left many people in despair, including university students, also at the University of Copenhagen, with activists from 'Students Against the Occupation' setting up a protest camp in May 2024 in front of the Faculty of Social Science, and, in cold November, indoors at the Faculty of Humanities where I am based. While the former was allowed to stay on the university's premises for several weeks, the latter was closed down by the Rectorate on the very same day. Rector Henrik Wegener explained the decision in the University's newsletter, describing the act as an 'unacceptable activism, which to an unreasonable extent interferes with our daily operations, brings external political issues into the university without a sense of proportion – and makes our campuses unsafe for students and staff' (Wegener 2024).

It felt necessary, both in a local and a global perspective, to let this 'external political issue' spill over into this book by adding a last chapter about Palestinian refugeedom, even if only a small number of resettled Palestinians have a connection to Denmark, and the majority are internally displaced within the occupied Palestinian territories or live in refugee camps in neighbouring Middle Eastern

29 See the statement on the genocide in Gaza by the UN's Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, Francesca Albanese, on 26 March 2024: 'There are reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating the commission of the crime of genocide has been met.' (UN News 2024).

countries. Chapter 6 focuses, therefore, on the work of Kent Klich and the duo Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind. These artists have been chosen for their long-lasting engagement with Palestinian forced displacement, and, in Kent Klich's case, in Gaza specifically. That most of their works predate the recent conflict in Gaza underscores the long history of Israeli occupation and armed Israeli–Palestinian conflicts. Expanding on the question of empathy addressed in Chapter 5, Chapter 6 reads Klich's works as a kind of counter-memorialization that invites responsible empathy, whereas Sansour and Lind use the speculative genre of science fiction to speculate on the past as well as possible Palestinian futures. Finally, the Conclusion looks at Tina Enghoff and Kent Klich's collaborative project *In the Past We Made History*, from 2025, which sums up most of the key themes addressed in the art on refugeedom that has materialized on the Danish art scene in the past 15 years.