



Anne Ring Petersen

Worlding and Storying Forced Displacement

Contemporary Art and Refugee Experience
in Denmark

[transcript]

Postmigration Studies

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Editorial

The postmigration discourse gains ever more interest, not only within the social sciences, and expresses a resistant practice in the production of knowledge – a perspective both critical and optimistic. That attitude of mind is of central importance for reflection on postmigration phenomena and their complexities. The prefix “post-” does not simply designate a chronological state of coming after, but rather an overcoming of past ways of thinking, a new enterprise of thinking through the entire field of studies in which discourse on migration is embedded – in other words: a contrapuntal interpretation of social relations. In the radical abandonment of the customary separation between migration and being settled, migrant and non-migrant, an epistemological turn is occurring. The “postmigrational” thus functions as an open concept for examining social situations of mobility and diversity. It renders fractures, ambiguity, and marginalized memories visible that should not be situated on the periphery of society but express central social conditions. Creative reinterpretations, new inventions and theoretical discourses increasingly associated with this concept – postmigration art and literature, postmigration theater, postmigration urbanity and plans for life – signal a new, inspiring point of view. With the series “**Postmigration Studies**”, we seek to shed new light on this idea and its trailblazing relevance for critical research on migration and society viewed from a range of different perspectives - and to invite further exploration of this focus in social inquiry.

The series is edited by Marc Hill and Erol Yildiz.

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Acknowledgements

My interest in how forcibly displaced people are represented in contemporary art and how art can foster a deeper understanding of refugeedom germinated in 2010–2014. At that time, I served as the leader of the Danish-based but transnationally connected *Network for Migration and Culture* and was engaged in co-organizing several international conferences on the interrelationship between migration, culture and the arts, including the conference *Displacements: Forced migration and the arts* held at Aarhus University in 2013. However, what transformed the burgeoning interest in forced displacement that I developed from listening to the many eye-opening presentations at the conferences into a long-lasting engagement with the topic was an artistic and activist initiative emerging from the Danish art scene. With the arrival in Europe of hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Syrian Civil War during the 'long summer of migration' in 2015, the need to understand how Europe hosts refugees became urgent. This refugee situation led many artists and cultural workers across Europe to initiate art projects about refugeedom, most notably participatory projects with refugees and asylum seekers.

In Denmark, the most enduring and important project was the community centre Trampoline House in Copenhagen. In 2015, I attended the opening of its embedded gallery CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics. The tireless efforts of the sprawling community of Trampoline House and CAMP to develop dignified ways to interact with and represent people with a background of forced displacement provided the decisive impetus for writing this book. I owe this community a huge debt of gratitude, especially Tone Olaf Nielsen, Frederikke 'Fred' Hansen and Morten Goll, who have generously shared their insights with me over the years.

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Prologue: Voices and borders

With the prospect of an estimated 200 million refugees worldwide as a result of climate change and armed conflicts, with resurging irregular migration across the Mediterranean Sea after the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2023), and with more than eight million displaced Ukrainians registered in Europe one year after Russia's military intervention in February 2022, it is evident that the question of how refugees are hosted and represented in Europe is not only an urgent one but a persistent one.¹ In addition, the debilitating conditions that formerly applied to a few groups, such as the inhabitants of Palestinian refugee camps, living for decades in a state of permanent temporariness and civic limbo, are now shared by more and more people across the world. Forgotten or hidden out of public sight in camp-like accommodations, they become what environmental studies scholar Rob Nixon has termed *unimagined communities* (Nixon 2011). Paradoxically, this invisibilization is taking place in parallel with an opposite development. Thanks to surveillance technologies and the media, the movements of asylum seekers and irregular migrants into and across Europe are intensively imaged and spectated, forming the basis of dominant aesthetic dispositions. As performance studies scholar Emma Cox has observed, these aesthetic dispositions manifest in different 'representational domains'. Although they are not co-constitutive of one another, they can nevertheless be interlinked as 'aestheticized traces of Europe's "migrant crisis"' (Cox 2017, 479).

A core idea of this book is that art is a representational domain that plays a crucial role in making such unimagined communities come into appearance within the public spaces of civil society, thanks to art's dual capacity for facilitating processes of self-representation, worldmaking, and community-building among the forcibly displaced, *and* for communicating their experiences and perspectives to other members of civil society in nuanced and engaging ways. *Worlding and Storying Forced Displacement: Contemporary Art and Refugee Experience in Denmark* aims to analyse and contextualize the important but under-researched contributions by

1 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.).

contemporary artists from Denmark to the representation of refugees and forced migration. It engages, therefore, primarily, but not exclusively, with art-based projects and artworks that have emerged from or been exhibited on the Danish art scene in the 21st century.

Now, what is special about this material? Although the individual artists and collectives behind these projects and works have taken very different approaches to refugeedom and employed radically different means of representation, and although some of them engage with international contexts, the majority have responded to the country's political climate in which an endless series of tightenings of asylum laws has won support not only from anti-refugee right-wing parties but also from the majority of politicians in the Danish Parliament, the 'Folketinget'.

A powerful demonstration of art's dual capacity for supporting forcibly displaced people and deepening the understanding of forced displacement and refugeehood in host countries is the adaptable, site-specific public art installation *MUTE* (2000–) by the Syrian-born, Berlin-based artist and cultural activist Khaled Barakeh. In 2022, *MUTE* was shown in three different public spaces in Denmark.² On the UN's Refugee Day on June 20, 2022, Barakeh made an intervention in Christiansborg Slotsplads, the public square in front of the Danish Parliament, titled *MUTE – A Muted Demonstration* (Barakeh c2022, n.p.). On June 23, *MUTE* was presented on the square in front of Mariakirken ('Maria's Church') in the Copenhagen district of Vesterbro, where it formed part of Barakeh's exhibition inside the church, entitled *Khaled Barakeh: Design of Necessity*. Finally, *MUTE* was incorporated into *RE:ACT Human Rights*, a three-day programme focusing on art and music as engines of activism, organized as a part of the annual Roskilde Festival – one of Europe's largest music festivals, and visited by approximately 135,000 people in 2022.

2 *RE:ACT Human Rights* was a collaboration between Rapolitics, the Danish Institute for Human Rights and Roskilde Festival. For an introduction to the exhibition at Mariakirken, including a video interview with Barakeh, see <https://www.folkekirken-vesterbros.dk/khaled-barakeh/> (accessed November 9, 2023). For an interview with Barakeh including video footage of the exhibition outside the church, see Melanie (Dejlige Dage), *Interview with Khaled Barakeh – MUTE – A Muted Demonstration, June 23, 2022*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEl6-ecVvVk> (accessed November 10, 2023).

Fig. 1: Khaled Barakeh, *MUTE – A Muted Demonstration*, mixed media installation at Christiansborg Slotsplads, the square in front of the Danish parliament, Folketinget, June 20, 2022. © the artist.



The 49 figures in *MUTE* were all dressed in ordinary clothes that had been donated by Syrian activists living in diaspora. The clothing served not only as bodily imprints of displaced Syrians, creating an eerie sense of embodied presence in corporeal absence. It also recalled the tactical use of neutral, dark clothing by Syrian protestors back in Syria, enabling individuals to blend anonymously into the crowd to avoid capture by the state security forces. Interestingly, the space between the figures also enabled curious passersby to walk among them. Dressed in everyday clothes, the figures became part of the spectacle in front of the Danish Parliament, conveying the impression of a waxing and waning group of protestors to those who walked past and saw the installation from a distance.

What attracted the attention of spectators was thus not so much the neutral clothing or the presence of a group of protestors in a square where demonstrators gather regularly to visibilize and voice their critique and shout their demands at politicians, but, rather, the upsetting discovery that the figures had been 'decapitated' and were, as Barakeh has explained, 'reconstructed to look inside the bodies bringing back all the memories, traumas, and anguish' (Barakeh 2022, n.p.). As part of this reconstruction, the necks of the figures were transformed into a horn or bodily megaphone, serving as a powerful symbolic amplifier for sounding muted political voices. It is important to understand that this was not a critical protest addressed to the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria, who had brutally

silenced the country's political opposition in the wake of the so-called Arab Spring, until his regime was brought to an end in 2024,³ but was first and foremost a call to European publics and a summoning of the communities of Syrians living in exile. In his account of how this work came about, Barakeh emphasizes that it originated on European soil: 'The motivation for *MUTE* was born after 2015. The newly arrived Syrians shifted their protests to German streets using the same words and gestures they had developed in the peaceful protest movement that began in Syria.' Put differently, *MUTE* grew from the experience of being forcibly displaced and from the diasporic attempt 'to find one's bearings and belonging in European space and to build a community in exile' (Barakeh 2022, n.p.).

Fig. 2: Khaled Barakeh, MUTE – A Muted Demonstration, mixed media installation at Christiansborg Slotsplads, the square in front of the Danish parliament, Folketinget, June 20, 2022. © the artist.



MUTE was first shown in front of the Higher Regional Court in Koblenz, Germany, on April 23, 2020, where Anwar Raslan and Eyad Al-Gharib, two former officials of Bashar al-Assad's security apparatus, were being charged with crimes against humanity. Due to the restrictions on social gatherings during the surge of

3 The beginning and end of the Arab Spring varies across countries. The Encyclopedia Britannica dates the popular uprising from December 2010 to 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Spring> (accessed December 9, 2024).

the COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020s, activists and the families of detainees and the disappeared were prevented from attending the court proceedings. *MUTE* was created as an artistic response to the way in which the precautions against the pandemic barred the Syrians from being present in court and making their ongoing struggle for justice visible in their new social and political context in Germany. *MUTE* gave them a very visible presence outside, but adjacent to, the courtroom. This presence was amplified when *MUTE* was joined by members of the organizations Families for Freedom and the Caesar Family Association. Both organizations are advocates for the rights of individuals detained, disappeared and tortured by the Assad regime and other parties involved in the conflict. On the second day of the exhibition, members of these organizations appeared at the site, showing pictures of missing family members and sharing their personal stories, thereby creating 'their own testimony, which could not be shared within the strict confines of the ongoing trial' (Barakeh 2022, n.p.).

The artwork also sent a broader political and ethical message to the public about the right to voice, visibility and cultural citizenship of displaced people. Thus, it is no surprise that, since 2020, Barakeh's installation has moved across regional and national borders and into other political contexts, including the 2022 intervention in public spaces in Denmark. Since 2015, Denmark has not only introduced a strict control and deterrence policy towards refugees but has gradually rolled out one of the strictest and most controversial laws on immigration in the entire European Union (henceforth, EU). It reached its lowest point in June 2020 when the Udlændingestyrelsen (the Danish Immigration Service) launched the so-called 'Damascus Project' to speed up the processing of approximately 900 Syrian refugees from Damascus (and later also 350 refugees from the neighbouring area) in order to assess whether their residence permits could be revoked. The result became evident in the spring of 2021, when 453 Syrian refugees with protection through the asylum system had their residence permits withdrawn, or were denied an extension with reference to a perceived improvement in the security situation (Rytter et al. 2023, 13). This withdrawal reflected a wider change, accurately described by refugee studies scholar Martin Lemberg-Pedersen as 'the ongoing transformation of the Danish asylum system from one of protection to one of temporariness and deportation' (Lemberg-Pedersen 2021, 19). Notably, Denmark and Hungary were the only countries that assessed it would be safe enough to send refugees back to these areas and ignored the numerous international and national protests and warnings. The revocations created fear and uncertainty, not only among Syrians but also among other refugee groups in Denmark. This led to demonstrations across the country, where a section of the Danish population took to the streets to protest in solidarity with the refugees (Rytter et al. 2023, 10). That Barakeh's *MUTE – A Muted Demonstration* was intended as a critical intervention into this political situation is evident from the press release, which included this statement by the artist:

Today, we stand in solidarity with all refugees and displaced peoples globally. Asylum is not an issue restricted to any one country or continent, as the devastating flight of Ukrainians – with two million people becoming refugees in only two weeks – has recently shown. *MUTE* remembers the oppression that led to the Syrians' mass displacement, including to their current European homes. It reminds audiences that refugees are made: driven out of their homes and communities by acts of violence and persecution that the international community must act to prevent.

Finally, *MUTE* demands an end to the forced deportations of all refugees and vulnerable persons from Denmark or any other country. [...] Syria is not a safe country for the return of refugees, a necessary truth that *MUTE* re-asserts at the heart of public space in Denmark. It takes up the creative legacy of the Syrians' protest, and invites Danish voices to join them, in reminding governments that the right to seek asylum is inviolable.⁴

Thus, in the Danish context, *MUTE* added to its original call for social justice for the victims of Assad's political persecution and barbaric warfare a claim to the right of Syrian refugees to remain in safe countries and not be deported back to Syria. Despite the muteness of the artwork, it asserted, through powerful visual means, the inextricable connections between 'here' (Europe) and 'there' (Syria), and between past and present, at the core of the experience of forced displacement and exile.

The performance studies scholar Emma Cox has used the concept of procession developed in theatre studies as a tool to analyse the appearance of 'refugee bodies' and the European mediated experience of the refugee situation in 2015, when the ongoing civil war forced more than a million refugees to flee Syria and seek asylum in Europe. Cox coins her own concept of 'processional aesthetics' to establish an *aesthetic* perspective on this historical event. The concept of processional aesthetics is similar to cultural theorist Mieke Bal's influential concept of migratory aesthetics, in the sense that both scholars use the term 'aesthetics' to refer to sensory bodily experience and the representation of human experience, not to designate a specialized area of the fine arts and art theory (Cox 2017; Bal 2007a). This broad understanding of aesthetics that embraces the many different forms sensory experience can assume is helpful when engaging with art on forced displacement, because it often blurs the boundaries between art, social practices, activism and political activity as well as coalition and community building.

Cox uses the term 'processional aesthetics' to theorize a mode of envisioning and representing refugees that makes the abject mass and movement of people 'repre-

4 Khaled Barakeh, quoted from 'Khaled Barakeh: MUTE – A Muted Demonstration. 20. juni, 2022 kl. 08–20, Christiansborg Slotsplads', press release by the curator Matthias Borello, June 14, 2022.

sentational'. When a wave of refugees is described metaphorically as a procession, refugees are projected into 'a visual and spectatorial paradigm' as 'figures who enter public space through processional collectivity' (Cox 2017, 478). Processional aesthetics is thus,

[...] a mode of looking and responding [...], within the context of narrative and photographic representation, chiefly within news media, and in collective embodied responses via processional pro- and anti-migrant practices, including community marches, walks, parades, religious ceremonies, and performance art. (Cox 2017, 479)

Among her examples, Cox includes Ernest Hemingway's characterization of Greek refugees during the Greco-Turkish War in 1922 as 'A Silent, Ghastly Procession', as well as media images of large groups of Syrians waiting at train stations and walking along motorways, or in solidarity processions, and the German activist collective Centre for Political Beauty's 2015 performance intervention *Die Toten kommen* ('The Dead are Coming') (Hemingway, in: Cox 2017, 478; see also 489–492). Accordingly, processional aesthetics can be understood as a mode of representation that situates refugees as objects for scrutiny by the non-displaced, and moves refugees into the societal domain of *biopolitics* with its social and humanitarian concerns and its public debates – at least at the level of representation. As Cox notes, 'procession' is central to the visual economy associated with refugee transit and border-crossing in the spheres of media and surveillance, as well as other representational domains.

It could be added that a processional aesthetics can be used purposefully in artworks such as *MUTE* to make an unimagined community come into appearance in public. Although Cox's definition might leave the impression that processional aesthetics is all about the spectators' framing of and ethical response to refugees, she does not rule out the possibility that a processional mode of representation may also express the agency of refugees and migrants. Processional formations of people can, therefore, also be seen as 'claim-making collectives' and 'strategic formations wanting to be seen' (Cox 2017, 480), which is exactly the mode of looking and responding that *MUTE* encourages. In Cox's understanding, processional aesthetics is a kind of interaction between migrating/claim-making and spectating bodies. Without the co-presence of the bodies in procession and without spectating bodies, there is no processional aesthetics. One of the strengths of Barakeh's installation is that it enables these two types of bodies to merge, as viewers can position themselves both physically and imaginatively as one of the bodies in the group of refugees/protectors – potentially evoking feelings of empathy and solidarity.

Fig. 3: Nermin Duraković, *Our Border*, video installation, 2022, installed at the exhibition *Forbindelser – danske kunstnere fra det tidligere Jugoslavien* ('Connections – Danish Artists from Former Yugoslavia') at SMK (the National Gallery of Denmark). Courtesy: the artist.



In contrast to the aesthetics of embodiment deployed by Barakeh, Nermin Duraković's single-screen video installation *Our Border* (2022) invites the viewer to share the disembodied bird's eye view of a drone-borne surveillance camera. The work formed a monumental entrance to the group exhibition *Forbindelser – danske kunstnere fra det tidligere Jugoslavien* ('Connections – Danish Artists from Former Yugoslavia') shown at SMK (the National Gallery of Denmark) in 2022. The exhibition featured artists who had all made their mark on the Danish art scene. Like Duraković, most of them had come to Denmark with their families in the early 1990s, when many people fled the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mišković and Østergaard 2022, 2). In *Our Border*, video footage of the Plješevica mountain is projected onto a slanted wall that mimics the scale and slopes of the mountain, which is located on the border with Croatia and close to the city of Bihać in the northwestern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this border town with about 60,000 inhabitants, a large number of refugees and migrants, primarily from Syria and Afghanistan, have been detained on their journey to the EU country in which they wish to apply for asylum. When Croatia became a member of the EU in 2013,

this national border also became one of EU's geopolitical outer borders. As the title suggests, it is therefore also 'our border' – a deterritorialized Danish border.

A distinguishing feature of the Plješevica border is the use of advanced technologies, with an impassable zone designed to prevent clandestine entry into the EU.⁵ The footage for *Our Border* was shot about a decade after the EU implemented, in 2013, an extensive surveillance network, named the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR), in order to systematize the surveillance of migration and to optimize the tracking of irregular migration especially. The network uses a variety of technologies for surveillance, such as CCTV footage, drones, satellite remote sensing, reconnaissance aircraft and thermal camera systems, to secure the borders – or in EUROSUR's own words, 'for the purpose of detecting, preventing and combating irregular migration and cross-border crime, and contributing to ensuring the protection and saving the lives of migrants'.⁶ In other words, EUROSUR was designed to serve the dual objective of control and protection. The network was devised to strengthen the exchange of information and operational co-operation between EU member states, and, as the curator and scholar of photography Louise Wolthers recounts, made each of them 'responsible for compiling all relevant data, analysing and interpreting it, deciding what to share and with whom, and creating a coherent "national situational picture"' and thereby using technology to produce 'criminalized bodies' (Wolthers 2015, 115–116).

Duraković's use of drone surveillance technology mimics *and* critically subverts the border surveillance system by publicly revealing situational pictures that should not be publicly accessible. In *Our Border*, a low hum accompanies the camera as it navigates around the security system at the border crossing to remain undetected and record what usually remains undocumented. For four minutes, the camera slowly traces the barren zone that has been created by removing vegetation along the borderline to ensure the visibility needed to survey the area and to better monitor and stop the many migrants and refugees who attempt to enter the EU on a daily basis, with, for some, a fatal outcome. This reinforcement of the border is akin to the many border walls that have been built around the world in recent decades and is thus reflective of a pervasive violent border and migration regime (Casey 2015). Like these walls, the broad hostile zone translates the abstract borderline of

5 As described in the transcript of Duraković's statement on *Our Border* made for the video introduction to the artist in the *Forbindelser* exhibition (Mišković 2023, vol 2, appendix 2, p. 17).

6 Quoted from the EU's official website on Migration and Home Affairs, 'European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR)', https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/european-border-surveillance-system-eurosur_en (accessed January 4, 2024). See also Ross 2022, 94; Wolthers 2015, 114–115.

geographical maps into a material 'object' in physical space. The border has become an aesthetic, experiential phenomenon and thus a potential material for artmaking.

As the observant curator of the *Forbindelser* exhibition, Tijana Mišković, notes in her subtle reading of *Our Border*, this work is expressive of a double consciousness, founded in Duraković's diasporic position between Danish and Yugoslav culture as well as the artist's critical view on the dual logic of this national/European border:

According to this logic, the artist's former homeland ends where his current homeland begins. It is an interesting juxtaposition and contrast. The artist's focus on the border as a phenomenon enables a broader reading of the work. [...] The border can be understood as a geographical marker between two countries, but also as an ethical boundary of what migration policies we as Europeans are willing to accept. (Mišković 2023, vol. 1, p. 170)⁷

But there is more. Mišković reflects on the inextricable connections between 'here' (Denmark) and 'there' (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and between past and present – connections that are also key to Barakeh's *MUTE*. *Our Border* juxtaposes Duraković's experience of the 'narrative of migration' in the context of the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s with the narratives shaping contemporary perceptions of flight and migration. As Mišković explains, the reactivation of personal memory and a sense of shared experience are central to the work and provide its political message with leverage:

At the time, the artist and his family were fleeing the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and crossed the border that refugees from the Middle East are trying to cross today, basically for similar reasons: in search and hope for safety and a better life. For the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, many of whom were refugees themselves only a few decades ago, seeing new waves of refugees must be a kind of *déjà vu*. This repetition across time should trigger a new perspective, one that transcends the specificity of individual situations in order to see the problematic in a wider context. It is as if Duraković's landscape attempts to do just that: to lift our gaze so that the artificially created border stands out as the only motif in the work. (Mišković 2023, vol. 1, p. 170)

To conclude, both Khaled Barakeh's *MUTE* and Nermin Duraković's *Our Border* indicate that some of the art on forced displacement and refugeedom emerging from the Danish context is of general relevance to the study of how contemporary art engages with the predicament of refugees and the border and asylum policies of Europe.

7 All quotations from Danish and German language sources have been translated by the author.

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 Kasperek 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 Kasperek 2017, 58–60; see also Hess and Kasperek 2019).¹

1 Hess and Kasperek'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 Kasperek 2017, 60). Hess and Kasperek 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 Kasperek'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 Kasperek 2017, 60).

According to Hess and Kasperek, 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 Kasperek 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 Kasperek 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 Kasperek conclude, have remained high ever since (Hess and Kasperek 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 Kasperek 2017, 60; Lahav and Guiraudon 2000).

Hess and Kasperek 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 Kasperek 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

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 Kasperek 2019, 4–5). Thirdly, an internal mobility regime for asylum seekers has been introduced, resulting in 'the transformation of a *route* into a *corridor*' (Kasperek 2016, par. 1). Hess and Kasperek 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 Kasperek 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.' (Kasperek 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. Kasperek 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. (Kasperek 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 Kasperek 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.

Kreichauff 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*' (Kreichauff 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' (Kreichauff 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 (Kreichauff 2018, 4).

Returning to Hess and Kasperek's analysis, they identify 'a humanitarization of the border' as the fourth paradigm or change to the European border regime (Hess and Kasperek 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 Kasperek. *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.unpfa.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 Garden-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 (Garden-Coynne 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 refugees 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

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- 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; Björck 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' (Bublitzky 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 (Bublitzky 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 *world-making 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.

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 activism'. 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

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 *remaking*:

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 Dirckinck-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

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/farzshad-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 interest 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/women>

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.

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 longstanding 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 Ćirkinagić and Vladimir Tomić all invite reflections on how violence and loss can be commemorated, and how visual art can story memories of war, displacement, waitness 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.

1. Making worlds, telling stories, claiming voice: theoretical considerations

Before introducing the key concepts of this study – worldmaking, storytelling, voice, cultural citizenship, postmigration and postmigrant society – let us recall the argument that forms the backbone of this book. Artistic and curatorial practices wield significant potential in the *formation of cultural citizenship* among refugees and asylum seekers as well as in deepening the comprehension of refugeedom within host countries. Artists and curators can mobilize art's capacity for creating worlds and stories, i.e. for *worldmaking* and *storying*. In this study, these key concepts are understood within the overarching framework of *representation*, a multilayered and capacious term that denotes the imagining and portrayal of refugeedom, the practice of speaking *for* and *with*, the provision of access to participate in society, to have a voice and to self-representation.¹ Representation and voice, I want to argue, are integral to cultural citizenship, and in the visual arts, worldmaking and storytelling offer powerful ways of supporting the formation of cultural citizenship.

Worldmaking and worlding

Let us start with *worldmaking*. To begin with, the suffix ‘-ing’ shifts the world from a being to a doing, a generative process that sets up a world (Palmer and Hunter 2018, n.p.). Worldmaking and worlding are both concepts used within the realm of social theory, cultural theory, philosophy, anthropology, sociology and cultural

1 ‘Representation’ is a key concept and multifaceted discourse in art history and art theory. Theories of ‘representation’ abound, not only in these areas but also in fields such as philosophy, political theory, anthropology, literary studies, cultural studies, visual studies, film and media studies, photography studies, gender studies, postcolonial studies, critical race and whiteness studies, and beyond. To venture into this rich and ramified theoretical legacy and the long tradition of critique of representation and the usage of various modes of representation for critique and subversion is beyond the scope of this study. Seminal contributions to the field include: Mirzoeff 2011; W.J.T. Mitchell 2005; Hall 2003; Summers 2003; W.J.T. Mitchell 1994; Barthes 1977.

studies, but also in more specialized areas such as postcolonial studies, art history, feminist materialism and ecofeminism. Both worldmaking and worlding denote a particular blending of the material and the semiotic that dismantles the boundaries between subject and environment (Palmer and Hunter 2018, n.p.). Whilst related and sometimes conflated, these terms emphasize various aspects of how societies construct and understand their realities. ‘Worldmaking’ refers to the processes through which individuals and groups construct their social realities, including their beliefs, norms, values, symbols, institutions and infrastructures. It involves the active creation and shaping of the world as it is perceived and understood by individuals and communities. Worldmaking thus hinges upon processes of *representation*, as seen, for instance, in the creation of myths, rituals, art, literature and other kinds of cultural production: they can all be seen as acts of worldmaking that imbue meaning and significance into social and cultural life.

My understanding of worldmaking is indebted to art historian Marsha Meskimmon’s thoughts on art’s potential as a means of worldmaking. She posits that art has an extraordinary potential for imagining anew the world as we know it. My analyses draw on Meskimmon’s profound insight into how art’s ‘materialising force’ can be used to express imaginaries and engender the inclusive yet critical public spaces necessary for transversal dialogues to take place (Meskimmon 2017, 34; see also Meskimmon 2011, 192–195; Petersen 2023, 102). As the philosopher Nelson Goodman pointed out in *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978), the basic substance of worldmaking is always a ‘remaking’ of pre-existing worlds, and it is fundamentally connected with knowledge production: there is no human world without words and other forms of representation. ‘A world is built out of others’, argues Goodman, ‘[w]orldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already at hand; the making is a remaking’ (Goodman 1978, 6–7).

The meaning of ‘worlding’ deviates slightly from that of ‘worldmaking’ and refers to the practices and processes through which individuals and communities actively engage with and *inhabit* the worlds they have made. It involves not only creating worlds but also living within them, negotiating their meanings and navigating the social relations embedded within them, all of which produce a sense of belonging to those worlds – strong and flourishing, weak or troubled. Worlding manifests itself perhaps most conspicuously in the ways meaning and power relations are produced and enacted through everyday practices and social interactions, involving, amongst other things, language usage, dress codes, cultural practices and social gatherings – which can all be seen as acts of worlding that shape and buttress particular identities, social realities and ‘memberships’ (as in identification and a sense of belonging with a community).

In postcolonial studies, the term ‘worlding’ was first introduced and developed into a critical tool by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who used it to explain how colonized space is transformed into ‘the colonized space’ for the ‘natives’ by their colonial

masters through representational practices such as cartography, writing and travelling around the colonized territory. In 'The Rani of Simur: An Essay in Reading the Archive', Spivak argues that the British colonizers engaged in 'worlding' the Indian native world for the colonized inhabitants. Through the power to imagine, record and control, the colonizer forced native Indians to invest their own imagination and desires in the colonized space according to the colonizer's representation, and they eventually came to see their native land and own world as imagined by the Other: 'He [the colonizer] is worlding *their own world*' (Spivak 1985b, 253; emphasis in the original). Arguably, Spivak's analysis of 'worlding' in the colonial regime finds an uncanny infrastructural parallel in how today's European border and migration regime, the global refugee regime and the political and media discourses serve as an apparatus of representation that instils in refugees and asylum seekers a perception of themselves as they are imagined by the Other, i.e. as victims and threats. The art projects discussed in this book provide counter-narratives, i.e. alternative narratives that subvert or question the narratives imposed by domination, thereby interrupting this imposed 'worlding' of the worlds of forcibly displaced people. Borrowing the cultural studies scholar Roger Bromley's words, each one of these projects is 'a bid to force recognition from those in power' (Bromley 2021, 84).

The notion of 'worlding' has also been used as a new materialist lens on human–non-human enmeshment (Palmer and Hunter 2018, n.p.). In her influential book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Donna Haraway has reimaged such processes of human–non-human worlding by introduced the fictive *n*-dimensional space, 'Terrapolis'. Etymologically, this mongrel word combines the Latin *terra* for earth with the Greek *polis* for city or citizens, and designates a world of mutual relations and interdependencies in which 'companion species' (a category which enables Haraway to refuse human exceptionalism without invoking posthumanism) engage in ongoing processes of 'becoming with' one another. Here, nature, subjects and objects are not pre-existing entities but come into being through their 'intertwined worldings' (Haraway 2016, 13). Importantly, in the present context, for Haraway, *worlds and stories are interlinked*: worlding is also storying, and Haraway's Terrapolis is both a world and a story, a feminist 'speculative fabulation' (Haraway 2016, 10).

Synthesizing Nelson Goodman's insight that worldmaking is always a remaking, which starts from the worlds already at hand, with ecofeminism – in particular Haraway's theories of embodied knowledge, epistemic location, response-ability and 'entangled worldmaking' – Marsha Meskimmon has developed the concept of worldmaking into an eye-opening perspective on art's imaginative and affective potential. I draw on her compelling argument that art's potential for worldmaking and ability to participate in processes of social change have important implications for rethinking normative and dangerously exclusive constructions of citizenship beyond the nation-state (Meskimmon 2020, 53; see also 2, 19–20, 73). Meskimmon suggests that

worldmaking, both in and beyond the arts, can support the process of building and rebuilding a sense of belonging to the world. Meskimmon's eminent, historically contextualized analysis of Sheila Levrant de Bretteville's public art project in Los Angeles, *Biddy Mason: Time and Place* (1989), produced with the non-profit organization The Power of Place, provides a model example of art's ability to 'materialize a mode of worldmaking'. Here, Meskimmon demonstrates how a work of art about a 19th-century enslaved woman, who won her freedom in court and became a pillar of the germinating African American community in Los Angeles, may establish 'a new and different discursive space' for imagining 'worldmaking belonging as an ongoing and perennial process of *dwelling with others*' (Meskimmon 2020, 66; emphasis added). Meskimmon's analysis and theorization of the connection between worldmaking, inhabiting (i.e. worlding), belonging and art thus offer important clues to why art's worldmaking ability is so often harnessed in art projects concerned with forced displacement and other forms of fragile existence.

In sum, both worldmaking and worlding involve the active construction and negotiation of social realities and a 'becoming with'. On the one hand, the meaning of 'worldmaking' is inclined towards the active, creative construction of these realities, and this process involves the creation and interpretation of cultural production, narratives and systems of signs that give coherence to social life. 'Worlding', on the other hand, emphasizes the embodied, affective, performative and relational lived experience and the practice of inhabiting and engaging with a world. Importantly, both worldmaking and worlding must be understood as open-ended. They are 'ongoing and perennial' processes influenced by historical, cultural, social and environmental contexts and the changes they undergo. Lastly, but importantly, the scholarship discussed here is a strong support for the claim that representational practices are vital instruments of worlding, from colonial archives (Spivak 1985b), to the arts (Goodman 1978, 5, 11–12, 18; see also Meskimmon 2020, 53), to storying the world otherwise in order to enable us to inhabit it differently, in intertwinement with our 'companion species' (Haraway 2016, 10). Coupling this discourse on worldmaking and worlding to the discourse on prefiguration in social movement studies, Chapter 3 will unpack the novel idea of art as a space for prefigurative worldmaking, or as I term it, an art of prefiguration.

Narrative and voice

I move on now to the idea of storying and its close relative, narrative – concepts that have primarily been developed in literary studies and narratology. Thanks to literary and cultural theorists such as Mieke Bal and Roger Bromley, to whom I return

below,² these areas of study have also been opened up to the study of non-textual material and applied as analytical lenses across many different fields. Thus, Mieke Bal's endeavour to 'make the case for narrative's omnipresence in culture' has served as a methodological guiding light for the present study (Bal 2021, ix).³ In literary studies and narratology, narratives are understood as systems of signs that create coherence and significance through the arrangement of these elements. In doing so, they create a story. Narratives need a medium to materialize, which can encompass oral, written and visual media. The range of media which afford storytelling are not confined to traditional formats such as novels or films, but not all media are amenable to narratology's literature-based terminology. This is the case for visual art not based on film/video. Mieke Bal's general distinction between three layers of meaning of a narrative is helpful here. Bal uses the common word *text* as a medium-independent term for the different media or systems of signs through which a narrative materializes, i.e. 'to indicate artefacts in any medium' (Bal 2021, 7). The text is the material carrier of a *story* – the content of the text. A story produces 'a particular manifestation, inflection and "colouring" of a *fabula*' (also known as a plot). A *fabula* is 'a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors'. The three layers are thus intimately interconnected, as the text inflects the story, and the story inflects the *fabula* (Bal 2021, 4).

In contemporary visual arts, narrative extends beyond text-based or linear storytelling. It encompasses how visual elements are arranged to suggest a sequence of events (i.e. a *fabula*) but also how visual elements can evoke memories – often in fragmentary glimpses – or convey complex socio-political or personal themes. Visual narratives can be explicit, as in a series of images that depict a storyline, sometimes even incorporating text as in cartoons and graphic novels, for example – or implicit, where the narrative is inferred through the often non-linear interaction of symbols, motifs, abstract means and the viewer's interpretation, as is the case

2 In addition to Mieke Bal's influential classic study of narratology and its transferability (Bal 1985, 2021), other important contributions to the transfer of insights from literary studies to cultural and visual studies include Barthes 1977; Bromley 2000; W.J.T. Mitchell 1994.

3 Mieke Bal is also the editor of another seminal contribution to the study of narrative beyond the medium of literature: the four-volume publication, *Narrative theory: Critical concepts in literary studies*, first published in 2004. The first volume considers a range of theoretical models for the analysis of narrative style; the second is dedicated to theories and exemplary analysis of larger artefacts, emphasizing plot and structure; the third volume transfers narratological tools to the domain of politically and socially oriented critiques of culture; and the fourth introduces interdisciplinary methods that facilitate the application of narrative theory to objects not traditionally considered primarily narrative (Bal 2007).

with much installation art.⁴ Mieke Bal, who is also a video artist and often uses her own works to explain her theoretical points, provides deep insight into the temporality of visual narratives, especially the tensions and incongruous encounters between different temporalities and moments in time that video narratives and cinematic experiments can stage, thanks to their rich potential for exploiting what Bal terms ‘the fundamental messiness of chronology’ (Bal 2021, 103). In Chapter 6, I will return to Bal’s thoughts on temporal complexity and use her concept of *heterochrony*, which refers to the idea that time is not linear and single-stranded but multiple and heterogeneous (Bal 2021, 100–101), to explore refugee narratives of trauma, loss and waiting in which the articulation of time is key.

Mieke Bal’s concept of *focalization* is also helpful as a tool for reading visually oriented texts such as films and video installations. Borrowing the term from the visual domain to incorporate it into narratology to replace what literary scholars call ‘perspective’ or ‘point of view’, Bal defines focalization as ‘a narrative inflection of imagining, interpreting, and perception that *can*, but need not, be visual “imaging”’ (Bal 2021, 37–38). Bal’s narratological three-level structure (text, story, *fabula*) is modelled on fiction in literary form, and she cautions against transferring it uncritically without thinking through how these levels sit within other media (Bal 2021, 7). This point also applies to the concept of focalization. Bal herself suggests that a set of differences between linguistic and visual texts should be considered. Firstly, focalization is the actual content of the text, so if a text consists of visual signifiers – lines, dots, light and dark, spatial effects, etc., not forgetting composition – the focalization is ‘already a subjectivized, interpreted content’. Secondly, linguistic narrative has an external focalizer who can embed an internal narrator-focalizer in the narrative text. By contrast, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, visual narrative usually depicts such an internal focalizer. Because they are ‘figured’ or ‘imaged’, Bal argues, ‘the reality status of what such internal focalizers see differs according to the imagined vision of the external focalizer who embeds them’ (Bal 2021, 14).

Also relevant to this book’s exploration of the storying of refugeedom is Bal’s observation that memory can be understood as ‘a specific form of focalization’. Memories are often aspects of stories, conveying events from a character’s past that are thoroughly shaped by the character’s perception and imagination. As memories are often multitemporal as well as multidirectional, memories in narrative ‘texts’ often complicate the sense of history as a chronological sequence of events and unsettle any expectation of a linear, coherent narrative (Bal 2021, 6–7).

With a view to the polyphonic discourse and heterogeneous material examined in this book, a narrative can be defined broadly as the organization of events,

4 For comprehensive, theoretically informed studies of installation art and how artists use space and viewer interaction to construct narratives, see Petersen 2015; Bishop 2005. For a narratological consideration of video art and video installation, see Bal 2013, 2021.

experiences and settings into a structured and meaningful representation which may, but does not have to, involve characters, and which is not necessarily linear and straightforward but more likely fragmented. Because of its capacity to 'express' fragmentation and the silences of what is too traumatic to be told, contemporary visual art and media are particularly adept at 'recounting' refugees' stories, as explained by Bromley in his book on narratives of forced mobility in contemporary culture. Bromley's primary objects of analysis are the narrative media of fiction films, novels, memoirs and documentaries. His interest in narrative includes not only how filmmakers and writers seek to act as 'critical historians' to produce narratives about displacement that critique power and give expression to 'those who have been abused' and offer 'an alternative legibility' (Bromley 2021, 72–73), but also the asylum system's demand for *credibility*, i.e. that the often traumatized claimants are capable of narrating a convincing and coherent story about personal persecution and flight that fulfils the criteria for the granting of asylum. Here, Bromley turns to cultural memory and trauma studies, and more specifically to *The Trauma Question* (2008) by Roger Luckhurst, who describes trauma as 'anti-narrative' and 'a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge' (Luckhurst, quoted in Bromley 2021, 75). Looking at Fernand Melgard's award-winning documentary *La Forteresse* (2008) about the claimants and staff in a Swiss centre for registration and processing of newly-arrived refugees and migrants, Bromley effectively uses the interviews the staff carry out with claimants to show how narratives of traumatic experience are marked by incoherence and gaps, making it virtually impossible for some claimants to produce the required verifiable and accurate account of the events leading to their asylum claim (Bromley 2021, 75–76).

The term 'storying', on the other hand, is commonly used to refer to the *process* of constructing or interpreting stories from events, experiences or visual stimuli. Storying is an active and dynamic process that emphasizes the creation or reconstruction of meaning through the act of storytelling. In literary and cultural studies, storying is associated with the ways in which individuals and cultures use stories to make sense of the world, often highlighting the role of narrative in identity formation, cultural memory and social communication. In contemporary visual arts, storying can be considered the practice of crafting narratives through visual media, or the process by which audiences engage with visual works to produce their own narratives. As Marsha Meskimmon has pointed out, storying, especially storying with and through art, is not merely reflecting the world, but part of its making: 'Storying is intimately intertwined with how we come to know, imagine and inhabit a world in which many worlds fit [...]' (Meskimmon 2023, 9).

Both 'storying' and 'narrative' are intimately connected to the multifaceted concept of 'voice', bridging fields such as literary studies, cultural studies, post- and decolonial studies, critical race studies, along with feminism and activism. Across these disciplines, 'voice' serves as a powerful metaphor for agency, identity, and the

articulation of perspectives and claims to recognition, especially those of marginalized groups. Basically, 'voice' refers to the expression of an individual or collective identity through language and narrative, or other forms of communication. In literary studies, 'voice' typically denotes the distinct style, tone and perspective of a narrator or character within a text. Here, and in cultural studies, voice can, for instance, be examined through the critical lens of who is given the opportunity to narrate within certain power structures, how this affects the story's meaning, and how the text reflects issues of both power and representation (Hall 2003; L. Ahmed 2012).

Listening to the stories of others requires openness to the other. As regards the stories of refugees, Roger Bromley suggests that identification based on precarity may also play a part: 'Refugees symbolise precariousness, a liminality, which serves as an unsettling, unwelcome reminder of how many lives in the privileged West are now also potentially remaindered. Refugees occupy the borderland between abandonment and value now shared by many.' (Bromley 2021, 7–8)

'Voice' takes on a broader, more politicized meaning in fields that sometimes intersect with activism, including cultural studies, post- and decolonial studies, critical race studies and feminism (particularly Black and transnational feminisms with their focus on amplifying voices that have been historically silenced or marginalized, and also within white feminism) (Moya 2011; Spivak 1985a, 1985b). Here, voice represents the act of speaking out, particularly by those who have been historically subjugated, and it may serve as a tool for empowerment and advocacy: voice is about reclaiming agency and asserting presence in public and cultural discourses. It is often linked to the struggle for recognition, rights and justice, where marginalized groups use voice as a means of resistance to challenge dominant narratives, expose inequalities and to end the silencing and demand change. The centrality of voice to such struggle is captured well in the Black lesbian feminist writer Audre Lorde's famous assertion 'your silence will not protect you', highlighting the importance of speaking out as a form of resistance and survival.⁵ However, when seeking to recentre and analyse marginalized voices, it is important to bear in mind that the circumstances in which a person or group enacts voice co-construct the voice, and that voices are always mediated. This is crucial when discussing refugee voices – also the mediated forms they assume in artist-led projects, given the highly regulated and exclusionary orders in which refugees find themselves, especially in the early phase of flight, reception and asylum seeking. In *Refugee Voices: Performativity and the Struggle for Recognition*, media and cultural studies scholar Rob Sharp pays acute attention to these constrictions in his

5 The phrase 'Your silence will not protect you' comes from Audre Lorde's essay titled 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action' (1977); the essay is included in several of her books, e.g. the collection of essays *Sister Outsider* (1984) (Lorde 2019, 30).

fieldwork-based study of two British community centres in Cardiff and Tyneside. Building on significant cross-disciplinary evidence, Sharp asserts that social exclusion continues after a refugee has been granted asylum, and that ‘the media is a powerful route through which this occurs. More than one study has shown that manifestations of hostility and abuse towards migrant groups can be attributed to how media form public opinion’ (Sharp 2024, 3). Sharp refers to a major study by the media and communications scholars, Lilie Chouliaraki and Rafal Zaborowski, of how the European media covered the 2015 refugee crisis, focusing on how refugees were narrated in the news and how their voices were contextualized. They found that the European news media performed a ‘symbolic bordering’ through a linguistic practice that worked in tandem with the European territorial borders. The media regulated the symbolic construction of refugees and ‘managed’ the voice of refugees through a hierarchical distribution of voice that caused ‘a triple misrecognition of refugees as political, social and historical actors, thereby keeping them firmly outside the remit of “our” communities of belonging’ (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017, 613; see also 15). This is backed by Pries and Bohlen’s assessment from 2024 that, compared to other social groups capable of lobbying and making claims in the political systems, ‘forced migrants themselves have little or no voice at national or international level; at best they have civil society organizations raising their voice’ (Pries and Bohlen 2024, 23). Evoking Hannah Arendt’s understanding of the very ‘act of speaking’ as a political act in its own right, Chouliaraki and Zaborowski stress the gravity of this misrecognition of refugees:

Voice is, we have argued, instrumental in endowing the refugee with personhood and historicity – and hence with the potential for recognition. Who speaks and in which capacity, or “voice as narrative”, defines whether and how their words will be listened to in publics as the words of an equal, or “voice as value”. [...] The marginalization of refugee voice [...] works by ignoring the stories of those it does not already regard as part of “us” while, in doing so, it reconstitutes and re-legitimizes their exclusion. (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017, 629–630)

Building on Bal and Bromley – both exemplars of how deep insights can be gleaned from coupling narratological and migratory perspectives – Chapter 4 will demonstrate that, like literature, visual art can be a powerful tool for storying a *new belonging* and producing *genealogies of ‘where we came from’* (Bal 2021; Bromley 2000, 2021)

Although my book focuses on a different cultural arena than Sharp’s study, my argument nevertheless runs parallel to his compelling one that “new” forms of refugee voice, mediated by organizations beyond mainstream media, mainly in the charitable, cultural and human rights sectors, are more important than ever’ (Sharp 2024, 3). Like Sharp’s case studies, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this book examine participatory projects and the opportunities they offer refugees for representing

themselves through what Sharp designates *creative mediation*, i.e. various forms of assisted or mediated self-representation that often prioritize the participant's sensorial, emotional or subjective experience, and which may provide 'critical, opportunities to counteract more mainstream exclusions of voice' (Sharp 2024, 4). Moreover, Sharp seeks to answer a critical question that is also pertinent to my case studies: 'Numerous participatory projects promise refugees a voice, but to what extent do they actually fulfil this promise? [...] We cannot simply assume, that by virtue of their stated benevolent purposes, that these projects work in the way they claim.' (Sharp 2024, 4–5)

Sharp is primarily interested in voice through refugee self-representation in the contexts of creative projects, so he coins the term 'performative refugeeeness' to explain how refugees might negotiate the expression of their voices and the complex and often contradictory opportunities they have for voice within exclusionary social systems (Sharp 2024, 13). It is Sharp's contention that the interrupted, affective, messy and ephemeral voices of marginalized individuals and groups can shed nuanced light on the links between voice and the narration of the self – i.e. giving an account of one's life and its conditions through storying (Sharp 2024, 5–9). Building on the critical theorist Laurent Berlant's influential book *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Sharp suggests that an intimate public's process of 'listening together' can produce a kind of affective 'pre-emptive intensity' and 'social mutuality', providing opportunities for feelings of solidarity. However, Sharp adds that in such contexts, silences may also occur as 'a form of political protest' that rejects the conditions on which voice is offered normatively or refuses to speak on particular topics to contest the construction as primarily a refugee (Sharp 2024, 11–12). Thus, Sharp's concept of performative refugeeeness – i.e. of the construction and reconstruction of the subject (as a refugee) through 'the citation and repetition of discourses, which it repeats or breaks from in various ways'⁶ – rests upon a conceptualization of voice as not univocally empowering, but also disruptive and disrupted, collective, ambiguous and sometimes hesitant.

Gatrell et al. add to Sharp's concern about the constrictions on refugee voices a consideration of the adaptability of refugees to the international refugee regime. Seeking to recentre refugees in modern history by recovering and analysing their voices, Gatrell et al. scrutinize letters and petitions sent to authorities within the refugee regime, such as the League of Nations in interwar Europe and the UNHCR after the Second World War. They conclude that the 'rhetoric' of these letters 'demonstrates that refugees proved adept at absorbing the language of the refugee regime and projecting it back as a means of legitimating their claims' (Gatrell et al. 2021, 85).

6 Sharp 2024, 12. Sharp's concept builds primarily on Judith Butler's influential conceptualization of performativity, which draws on John L. Austin's similarly influential theory of performative speech acts (Butler 1991; Austin 2020).

Importantly, the authors argue that it was not only the regime that gave structure to refugee voices but also the sociocultural environments and diaspora networks in which refugees were embedded: 'Each expression was shaped, limited, enhanced, mediated, modified or silenced by external circumstances' (Gatrell et al. 2021, 92). Notwithstanding this, the authors also emphasize that refugees who enact voice are resourceful people who know how to solicit the advice and assistance needed to navigate the system (Gatrell et al. 2021, 86). Both Sharp's and Gatrell et al.'s observations clearly indicate how unwise or premature it would be to make a straightforward correlation between the articulation of unmediated 'voices' and unconditional individual or collective empowerment.

Voice and cultural citizenship

In the context of this book, it is important to understand that 'voice' plays a crucial role in theories and practices of citizenship, especially when moving beyond legal definitions and the rights afforded to individuals by a state to consider instead citizenship as a lived experience, a cultural practice and a form of social and political engagement – or what some scholars term *cultural citizenship*. Scholars in citizenship studies have expanded the legal definition to incorporate these broader contexts and have coined helpful terms to distinguish what the feminist social policy scholar Ruth Lister terms 'substantive' citizenship from 'formal' legal citizenship. Similarly, the sociologist Rogers Brubaker has emphasized that informal ways of belonging are significant for the formation of citizenship: 'Nation membership in an informal sense [...] is administered not by specialized personnel but by ordinary people in the course of everyday life, using tacit understandings of who belongs and who does not, of us and them. These everyday membership practices of identification and categorization, and of inclusion and exclusion, are often at variance with codified forms of official, formal membership.' (Brubaker 2015, 134) It could be added that these sociocultural practices also encompass artistic and activist practices of solidarity with refugees and migrants that may well be at variance with the official *denial* of formal membership.

Lister's distinction between formal and substantive citizenship addresses the tension inherent in the concept of citizenship: a person may be formally included but socially and culturally excluded, or vice versa (Lister 2003, 43; see also Petersen 2023, 10). The concept of citizenship thus operates on different cultural, social and legal levels to govern the understanding of who belongs to society in ways that create not only citizens but also non- or partial citizens. This is very much the case for social outcasts and foreigners, especially refugees and irregular migrants. To draw attention to the existence of different modes of citizenship internal to the nation-state, Lister introduces the twin concepts of *citizenship* and *denizenship*. Whilst citizenship

denotes legal and political membership of a state, denizenship refers to those who do not have formal citizenship in their country of residence but a legal and permanent residence status (Lister 2003, 49; see also Schinkel 2010).

In a comprehensive literature review, the anthropologist Alejandro I. Paz notes that citizenship has, since the 1990s, been developing into a major subject in anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, political theory and sociolinguistics. In these fields, the exploration of citizenship largely plays out along two dominant lines of inquiry: the first centres on the mutual recognition of citizens as citizens; and the second, the interpellation by state apparatuses of citizens, denizens and even non-citizens (Paz 2019, 78). The contrasting accounts of 'cultural citizenship' by anthropologists Renato Rosaldo and Aihwa Ong have been particularly influential in thinking 'citizenship' and 'culture' together, and in shaping how studies in citizenship have evolved along the lines of *mutual recognition* versus *interpellation* (Paz 2019, 79). Rosaldo's concept emerged as part of his attempt to address how Latinos sought inclusion through public recognition in the US context, and to overcome the limitation of concepts such as assimilation, pluralism and citizenship *tout court* in foregrounding 'the struggles of subaltern populations to have their public culture recognized as a means to act as citizens' (Paz 2019, 80; Rosaldo 1994). Interestingly, Rosaldo specifically mentions artistic and cultural events, such as the unveiling and/or struggle over art in public space, as an example of 'a classic act of cultural citizenship', and the participation in such events as capable of transforming people who occupy subordinate social positions from 'voiceless vulnerable individual to full-fledged citizen' (Rosaldo 1997, 36–37). In contrast to Rosaldo's understanding of cultural citizenship as the demand of disadvantaged subjects for full citizenship, Ong is more interested in enforced assimilation processes and how they impose on minoritized subjects ways of belonging that are dictated by dominant cultural criteria. Accordingly, Ong uses Foucault's theories of power and biopolitics to examine the range of technologies and sites of power involved in constituting the personhood of deserving citizens, while simultaneously marking and excluding those who did not match the norm. Acutely aware of the complexity of becoming a citizen, she defines cultural citizenship as '*a dual process of self-making and being made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society*' (Ong 1996, 738; emphasis added).

Recognition and interpellation, top-down practices of disciplining and bottom-up practices of empowering subjects are obviously not mutually exclusive but should, rather, be seen as interwoven and sometimes competing processes of shaping individual and collective citizenship. This was demonstrated by the sociologist Gerard Delanty's study of how the 21st century has seen practices of 'disciplinary' citizenship rolled out in the UK – as well as in many EU Countries, including Denmark – involving, amongst other things, citizenship classes with tests on language, history and culture for immigrants wishing to apply for citizenship.

As Delanty points out, this ‘governmentalization’ of citizenship risks reducing learning citizenship to individual learning of ‘the official values of the polity and as interpreted by public officials’ (Delanty 2010, 599). While acknowledging that such policies can be beneficial and can enhance mutual recognition in culturally diverse societies – a point also stressed by the sociologist Jan Pakulski (Pakulski 1997) – Delanty argues that individual learning processes do not automatically convert into a collective learning, i.e. ‘cultural’ citizenship, because collective learning processes operate on different levels. Cultural citizenship as a learning process involves common experiences, forms of cultural translation and discourses of empowerment. As Delanty explains, the capacity and power to create meaning and construct narratives by gaining control over the flow of information and cultural processes are important components of cultural citizenship as an active process (Delanty 2010, 602). Both the ‘disciplinary’ learning of the country’s civic values and citizenship and the informal learning processes of ‘cultural’ citizenship are therefore important to the formation of citizenship in plural European societies that are being (re)shaped by global immigration (Delanty 2010, 598–601).

Delanty’s distinction between the disciplinary and the cultural aspects is illuminating, as is Paz’s distinction between recognition and interpellation as dimensions of substantive citizenship. Returning to Ong, she foregrounds the interpellative power of state institutions to establish the normative personhood of deserving citizens. Ong uses the term *cultural citizenship* to refer to ‘cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory’ (Ong 1996, 738). In the context of this book, it is important to understand that this interpellative power is also exercised by the migration, asylum and integration regimes of the EU and its member states that suspend rights for some groups.

By contrast, Rosaldo emphasizes the potential of mutual public recognition to overcome exclusions and differentiations, as well as of public acts of communication to mobilize sympathy and solidarity (Paz 2019, 79–80). Many of the art projects discussed here resonate with Rosaldo’s approach as they centre on refugees as protagonists to make them subjects of visibility and voice. As Paz reminds us: ‘We should take care not to forget that even highly marginalized subjects communicate as citizens.’ (Paz 2019, 87)

The concepts of voice and cultural citizenship could thus be productively thought through together. The English term *cultural citizenship* and the Danish term *medborgerskab* are often used in the discourse on democratic participation in culture and society. They are among the concepts that have been introduced to address the broader sociocultural practices of citizenship (Delanty 2010; Pakulski 1997; Villumsen, Rugaard and Sattrup 2014). *Medborgerskab* can be translated as ‘co-citizenship’. As opposed to the ‘cultural’ inflection of the English term, the Danish

term highlights coexistence, participation in society and mutual recognition within a committed community, rather than the interpellative power of state institutions emphasized by Ong, although the disciplinary dimension is obviously not absent from Danish practices, including cultural institutional practices. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the 2014 publication *Rum for medborgerskab* ('Space for Cultural Citizenship'), which resulted from a collaboration between ten museums and cultural institutions exploring how these institutions could 'contribute to cultural citizenship in their exhibitions, performances, education and organization' and provide 'democratic spaces for learning' (Villumsen 2014, 9). Notably, the publication was prefaced by the then Minister of Culture, Marianne Jelved, who stressed the educative and transformative potential:

Art and culture can pose new questions to our ways of understanding life, society and human relationships. In doing so, museums and cultural institutions can create the framework for the democratic experiment where citizens have the opportunity to challenge and be challenged by particular understandings of our time. They can open up new ways of seeing and acting in the world. (Jelved 2014, 8)

Cultural citizenship, or *medborgerskab*, must be seen, then, as a generative component of substantive citizenship comprising both mutual recognition and interpellation by state apparatuses. As such, the concept is a helpful lens that enables me to consider two distinct levels as intertwined: 'cultural citizenship' can bring into focus the sociocultural and discursive marginalization of people denied full substantive and/or formal citizenship rights in a democratic culture. At the same time, the term refers to the many and differentiated ways in which citizens, denizens and non-citizens can access and participate in the 'cultural life' of society, including the arts, and the way they contribute to sometimes consolidating and sometimes challenging hegemonic notions of citizenship – or as Ong would have it, the normative personhood of deserving citizens.⁷ In this context, 'voice' becomes a key component of how individuals and groups articulate their rights, assert their identity, express their membership in a community and engage in the public sphere. Thus, to speak and be heard is an essential component of the practice of citizenship and of active participation in a democratic society. In the next chapter, I will return to Jan Pakulski's understanding of cultural citizenship as linked to claims for cultural rights for minoritized groups, symbolic presence, dignifying representation and recognition without marginalization. What is important to the overarching framework of this study is Pakulski's points that cultural rights

7 I have elaborated on the concept of cultural citizenship and art's potential elsewhere; see Petersen 2023, 11–12.

are more in the form of negotiated claims than institutionalized, or even legal, entitlements. The granting of rights is thus often the outcome of political struggle:

The bestowing and granting of rights should be viewed as a complex process, in which the content and scope of *claimed* rights for protection, recognition, provision, etc., on the one hand, and the content of rights that are *recognised* as legitimate by the state and effectively *sanctioned* on the other, may differ. In fact, asymmetry between claimed and sanctioned rights is more typical than is close correspondence. [...] In processual terms, claims to rights are made by important actor-claimants and these are then negotiated and re-negotiated by elites and through public fora. (Pakulski 1997, 73; see also 77)

As the quote indicates, Pakulski's theorization of cultural citizenship has a certain emphasis on governmental processes and state recognition (or lack thereof), which is why he stresses the power of elites. What is interesting with regard to a study of the power of the arts, is that he places equal emphasis on public fora, which is also where people encounter the arts. To conclude, in this study the term *cultural citizenship* is used to refer to how citizenship is enacted at a sociocultural level and to the ways in which the arts partake in the construction and dissemination of hegemonic notions of citizenship and civic norms, as well as harbouring a critical potential for subverting such hegemonic structures by seeking to rethink and transform the norms and practices of cultural citizenship that constantly draw and redraw the boundaries between insiders and outsiders. It is argued that in so doing, art can play a formative part in fostering a more inclusive sense of cultural citizenship and of belonging as a citizen.

A postmigrant framework

An important stepping stone to the present volume is my book *Postmigration, Transculturality and the Transversal Politics of Art* from 2024. It unpacks a framework of postmigrant thought and develops a concept-driven approach to art and migration that also form the theoretical backbone of this study. *Postmigration, Transculturality and the Transversal Politics of Art* was dedicated to the slow work of interdisciplinary transfer of postmigration and migration studies to art history and to developing conceptual tools for cultural analysis of visual art, along with other forms of cultural production. The present study is first and foremost committed to exploring refugeedom as a planetary 'matter of concern' (Latour 2004) in a specific national and regional context, while also drawing on and adding new analytical perspectives to the methodological and conceptual groundwork of its predecessor. *Worlding and Storying Forced Displacement: Contemporary Art and Refugee Experience in Denmark* can

be read together with the earlier volume, but also entirely independently from it. To facilitate the latter form of reading, this section briefly introduces some key definitions necessary for the independence of this volume.

Postmigration – or in German, *das Postmigrantische* – was first harnessed as a critical term on the Berlin cultural scene around 2005, primarily by people engaged in so-called postmigrant theatre (Langhoff 2012; Sharifi 2020). Around 2010, it gained ground in German academia from where it quickly spread to academic environments abroad, especially in northern Europe but also France and the UK, along with Canada, i.e. countries whose populations – like Germany – were struggling to accommodate the slow but profound societal changes that immigration from many corners of the world had brought about since the end of the Second World War. *Postmigration* quickly became a travelling concept in the humanities and social sciences and an extraordinary enabler of productive transdisciplinary dialogues that have breathed new life into many of the longstanding critical discussions revolving around ‘migration’. One of the markers of what must now be considered a distinct field of *postmigration studies* is precisely its transdisciplinary character.⁸

A general distinction can be made between three common ways of using the concept of *postmigration* as a scholarly lens or methodology through which to examine migration-related issues and phenomena, referring to *actors*, *societies* or *perspectives*, respectively. These can be understood as three discursive strands of postmigrant thought emerging from German scholarly debates. The concept is used, firstly, to refer to subjects – usually long-settled immigrants and descendants of these immigrants. In the scholarly discourse, they are often designated ‘postmigrant generations’ (Yildiz and Hill 2017; Yıldiz 2010), a label which reveals that refugeehood, exile and the subjectivity of displaced persons has hitherto held a marginal position in postmigration studies, although I would argue that postmigrant methodologies have a significant potential to address such matters.

Secondly, the term refers to a societal condition. The conceptual shift of emphasis from a *postmigrant generation* to a *postmigrant society* that took place in the early 2010s involved a significant methodological change – from singling out a social group, to widening the analytical perspective to encompass complex transformations in society affecting many different groups, both with and without a migrant heritage. The concept of a postmigrant society, most comprehensively theorized by the political scientist Naika Foroutan in her book *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft: Ein Versprechen der pluralen Demokratie* (‘Postmigrant Society: The Promise of a Plural

8 The following account is based on Petersen 2023, the Introduction (pp. 5–9) and Chapter 1. Influential contributions to the theorization and study of postmigration and postmigrant societies include but are not limited to: Sievers 2024; Schramm, Moslund and Petersen 2019; Foroutan 2019a; Foroutan, Karakayalı and Spielhaus 2018; Yıldiz and Hill 2015.

Democracy') (Foroutan 2019a), is based on an ethical stance that understands migration to be a structural characteristic of society, thereby countering the widespread misconception that migration is an exceptional and recent form of social existence. Thus, the prefix 'post' is not intended to historicize the fact of migration, as migration is obviously ongoing and not at all 'over'.

Accordingly, the sociologists Vassilis S. Tsianos and Juliane Karakayalı have defined *postmigrant society* as referring to 'the political, cultural and social transformations of societies with a history of post-colonial and guest worker immigration', i.e. societies 'structured by' past and present experiences of migration (Tsianos and Karakayalı 2014, 20). Also contributing to the relevance of a postmigrant understanding of society to a study of contemporary art on refugeedom are the transitional implications. *Postmigrant society* designates a plural society still very much in the making, struggling to divest itself of old Eurocentric, colonial and monocultural structures (Petersen 2023, 7). The collective process of coming to terms with globalization- and migration-induced transformations to society is a difficult one, so postmigrant societies are conflict-ridden and highly polarized societies – and matters related to 'migration' constitute one of their most controversial and conflict-prone areas. Yet, Foroutan is adamant that they also generate new alliances defending plural democracy. In addition to such new alliances, Foroutan associates the 'interaction dynamics' of plural democratic societies with struggles for recognition, negotiations of sociocultural norms and structures, along with ambivalence and antagonisms as sociocultural features resulting from pervasive hybridization and pluralization processes and the backlash they generate (Foroutan 2019a, 60).

As pointed out by the anthropologists Regina Römhild and Manuela Bojadžijev, the initial generational, actor-oriented approach entails a risk of 'migrantizing' the individual or group under study, even when the laudable objective is to afford visibility and recognition to those labelled as 'migrants' (or 'refugees'). Römhild and Bojadžijev argue that the pitfalls of migrantization invariably introduce a hierarchical separation between 'us' and 'them', which can only be avoided by adopting a perspective that declares all members of society to be somehow affected by migration (Bojadžijev and Römhild 2014, 18–19). Recalling Michael Rothberg's concept of the implicated subject, this means that all members of society are implicated in the postmigrant condition (obviously in diverse ways, and with different outcomes).

Römhild's guidelines on postmigrant analytical approaches are tremendously helpful for the study of elitist forms of cultural production such as the fine arts. In her influential article 'Beyond the Bounds of the Ethnic: For Postmigrant Cultural and Social Research', first published in German in 2013, Römhild uses the term *migrant* as an inclusive category comprising both 'voluntary' and 'forced' migration, in order to make some general methodological points. She argues that migration studies conducted as 'research about migrants' – often with an emphasis on those

living in the social ghettos of the underprivileged – risk producing a ‘migrantology’ that merely reproduces the divide between majority and minority. She suggests ‘a shift in perspective that would “demigrantise” migration research while “migrantising” research into culture and society’ (Römhild 2017, 70). To bring about this critical shift, she recommends two strategies: *studying up* and *studying through*. *Studying up* would require a social expansion to include groups of privileged migrants in the overall picture, such as transnational professionals, mobile creatives and students – all of which include artists, it could be added (Petersen 2017, 85–112). This shift would need to be coupled with a heightened attention to the hierarchy of forms of (im)mobility and (im)mobile subjects. *Studying through* should start from society’s negotiation of migration instead of making migration and migrants themselves the object of study, thereby shedding light on society’s institutions, policies and cultural practices, etc., from the perspective of migration and the diversity it produces (Römhild 2017, 71–72). In a similar vein, the social anthropologist Janine Dahinden has argued that the topic of ‘migration’ should be integrated ‘transversally’ into other disciplines, and that scholars should develop a ‘reflexive attitude’ by first studying the broader social and cultural processes and then move on to examine and assess the role of migration and ethnicity within them (Dahinden 2016, 2212–2213 and 2220). Although I concur with Römhild and Dahinden’s overarching strategy to shift the emphasis onto society at large to avoid ‘migrantization’, I also acknowledge that the ambition of this book to examine art on refugeedom arguably requires a certain focus on displaced people, including artists who have a background of forced displacement themselves that somehow surfaces in their artistic practice. So the ‘migrantizing’ focus on generations, groups and individuals cannot be completely avoided.

Thirdly, in conjunction with the conceptualization of postmigration as a common cipher for the many ways in which migration plays into the sociocultural pluralization and polarization of democratic societies, postmigration has also evolved into a diversified set of analytical perspectives, each inflected by the needs in the specific field where the postmigrant perspective is used. When the concept is used as a critical lens to study specific phenomena, such as visual art or theatre emerging from postmigrant contexts, it must be coupled with concepts and analytical tools that are operational in the field in question (Petersen 2023, 9). Lastly, it should be mentioned that in recent years, a fourth approach is beginning to take shape, especially in the institutional arena of museums, in the field of history, and in curatorial, museum and heritage studies, where professionals, often in dialogue or collaboration with citizens of migrant backgrounds, have begun to trace, collect and write – or if necessary, rewrite – the histories of migration that have previously been considered marginal to the established narratives of national history. In Europe, this germinating genealogy thus works towards the recognition of the historical roles of labour, of postcolonial and forced migration (Petersen 2023, 48–49).

To conclude, these four strands of critical postmigrant thought and the methodologies associated with them all centre on matters of concern to contemporary plural democratic societies. Accordingly, I understand 'postmigration' to be what the anthropologist David Scott has called a *problem-space* – that is, a specific historical period with its own 'ensemble of questions and answers' (Scott 2004, 3–4). A problem-space generates its own discourses and generates a particular horizon of goals to be achieved. The concept of a problem-space resembles the concept of a *historical conjuncture* as developed in cultural studies as a tool for doing conjunctural analysis. Both concepts imply that a contextual consideration of the historical configuration and the social circumstances is paramount to gaining a critical and profound understanding of the object under study. They also require a methodological self-reflexivity which acknowledges that the questions asked (and by implication, the theoretical frame within which the questions are formulated) determine which conjuncture or problem-space presents itself to the analyst (Petersen 2023, 7).

Crucial to the present study is the understanding that research into migration and integration (also of refugees) forms part of what Dahinden calls 'the nation-state migration apparatus' and routinely adopts the 'national container' as the principal reference system for empirical research and theorization. Oftentimes, this 'methodological nationalism' becomes a blind spot, along with the fact that the distinction between migration and non-migration is ultimately the *raison d'être* of migration studies. Furthermore, the field's selective focus on 'migrants' has the unfortunate side-effect of contributing to normalizing the discourse of migration-related difference, which makes ethnic categories so powerful in everyday life (Dahinden 2016, 2209–2210).

As Dahinden explains in her insightful analysis, historically, the migration apparatus is inseparable from 'the logic of the modern nation state and its institutional and categorial effects'. An institutional state migration apparatus (in Foucault's sense, comprising an ensemble of discourses, institutions, rules, laws, administrative measures and scientific statements) developed and was, from the beginning, entangled with the nation state and nationalism. The very idea of migrants as different from citizens, and 'the perceived need for nation states to manage this difference' by measures such as border controls, visa regimes and migration and integration laws, was institutionalized by nations as they institutionalized themselves as states. Importantly, this apparatus was, and is, not only structural but also linguistic and ideological. Dahinden explains:

Such state infrastructure, however, does not merely regulate mobility in a technical sense; it also creates the label 'migration' and other migration-related categories. The category of 'foreigner', for example, only makes sense within a nation-state logic, namely in dialectic with the term 'citizen'; the label 'migrants'

solely acquires significance in relation to 'non-migrants'. And the category 'people with a migration background' can only be thought of in relation to a supposedly natural multi-generational rootedness within a national territory. (Dahinden 2016, 2209)

Dahinden's analysis suggests that nationalism involves a politics of closure that constructs and codes the national culture as coherent through taxonomies of racial, ethnic, cultural and national difference, which draw the internal and external boundaries of culture and identity. How, then, can art function and operate against such a powerful politics of closure? And how can the limitations of the 'national container' be minimized when studying the relations between displaced people and the country where they have resettled? A postmigrant perspective is helpful here, thanks to its potential to dismantle the binary between migrants and non-migrants, majority and minority, and to open them up towards each other, emphasizing entanglements alongside frictions. However, due to the national orientation of the postmigrant perspective, it has to be coupled with a transnational perspective that is responsive to the logic of objects and people (including artists) on the move. It can open up the 'national container' and address the ways in which forced displacement and migration bring the national enclave into close proximity with the wider world. While a postmigrant perspective tends to focus on issues and phenomena related to the transformative impact of immigration on a nation state, a transnational perspective aims to expand, transgress or decentre national space.⁹ A transnational perspective, and the transcultural perspective that is often integral to it, makes it possible to look beyond the nation-state, to explain how art travels and to examine translocal connections, networks and forms of exchange, collaboration and solidarity.

For the purpose of this study, the general terminology of postmigration should be supplemented with a few concepts drawn from my book *Postmigration, Transculturality and the Transversal Politics of Art*. The concept of postmigrant public spaces is particularly helpful when examining what art – both so-called public art and participatory and activist projects – can accomplish in the public arenas of postmigrant societies. Public spaces are defined broadly here and understood to comprise both material and symbolic dimensions and various forms of public discourse, dissent and protest. They can be physical as well as media spaces, and I would include institutions such as museums despite the economic barrier of entrance fees. The concept of postmigrant public spaces refers, then, to sites of dissent and democratic participation where the conflicts of postmigrant societies are negotiated, while at the same

9 For a more elaborate discussion of the difference between the two perspectives and why the postmigrant perspective needs to be coupled with a transnational perspective, see Petersen 2023, 64–65, 89–95.

time marking its theoretical foundation in postmigrant thought by indicating that its analytical lens on public space is 'postmigrant' (Petersen 2023, 165).

I understand postmigrant public spaces to be plural and sometimes conflictual, and at other times convivial domains of human encounter shaped by former and ongoing (im)migration in an interplay with new and old forms of nationalism and racism. In their capacity as public spaces, they can accommodate multiple publics and counterpublics. Building on the ideas of the literary scholar Michael Warner, I suggest that a public is not a preformed audience, nor a clearly defined community. A public 'exists *by virtue of being addressed*'; that is, a public is 'a special kind of virtual social object enabling a special mode of address' (Warner 2005, 67, 55; emphasis in the original). Put differently, publics come into existence by being addressed, for example by an artwork or a participatory art project. As publics and counterpublics are not coterminous with public spaces, postmigrant or otherwise, they can be seen as protean formations of participants that exist and coexist within them (Petersen 2023, 190).

The concept of the postmigrant imaginary is related to the collective images of society, self and world that are circulated in postmigrant societies, and shared in its public spaces. I have developed this concept in a dialogue with writings by Kobena Mercer, Ato Quayson, Girish Daswani, Vijay Mishra, and others, who have theorized transcultural imaginaries as boundless, or theorized diasporic imaginaries as those of ethnic diaspora groups with a mindset moored to the country of origin. The postmigrant imaginary, as I define it, is never unbounded and never pure; it is the product of people living together in a country where different groups of migrants have settled, and where people live in proximity to difference. Hence, the postmigrant imaginary does not exist prior to the transformative contact in the receiving country and its conditions of 'throwntogetherness' (Massey 2005, 149).

When exploring refugeedom, it is important to note that the postmigrant imaginary does not substitute the diasporic imaginary. It coexists with it. However, in contradistinction to the diasporic imaginary, the place that matters most in the postmigrant imaginary is 'here', not 'there'. Historical narratives generated from within a postmigrant imaginary concern the historical struggles and genealogies that have produced the multi-ethnic society, not the various places from which its inhabitants hail. Thus, in contrast to the diasporic imaginary, co-ethnic identification is not constitutive of the postmigrant imaginary because it is not structured by affiliations to discrete ethnic communities, but by new transversal alliances. Furthermore, the postmigrant imaginary does not set itself against the national; on the contrary, it actively seeks to renegotiate, redefine and pluralize national affiliations while at the same time setting itself critically against the nationalist monologic version of collective belonging (Petersen 2023, 100–103). In this book, the concept of the postmigrant imaginary is a springboard to the idea

of an anticipatory or prefigurative politics central to the arguments pursued in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Any work of art harbours an *implied mode of reception*, shaping the way the audience or recipient is addressed. For this reason, works of art can sometimes make us look at the world differently by aligning our perception with the mode of attention and alternative perspective they convey (Tygstrup 2017, 150). Thanks to art's potential for *imagining and imaging otherwise*, they can even help us envision what the current transformations of society and the planet may lead to, by mobilizing art's 'prefigurative' potential to create blueprints of society (Petersen 2023, 9–10). As Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will demonstrate, one way of doing this is by gesturing towards a society in which refugees and asylum seekers are not regarded as outsiders to society but as fellow citizens and denizens living within it.

A feminist intersectional lens is indispensable to my case studies. As the art projects discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 exemplify, an anticipatory or prefigurative politics of refugee rights is often a transversal politics stemming from solidarity between people who are positioned differently in society in regard to citizenship, social and cultural privilege, racialization, access to public platforms, likelihood of being heard, and so on. The feminist concepts of transversal politics and epistemic communities are particularly helpful in addressing the challenge of explaining how initiatives by artists, activists and cultural professionals can build coalitions with individuals of diverse positionalities and group affiliations, who by responding to these initiatives' 'address' become part of their public or a circle of committed participants. These concepts were first developed by feminist theorists in the social sciences such as Alison Assiter and Nira Yuval-Davis. Through Marsha Meskimmon's outstanding work on transnational feminisms (Meskimmon 2020, 2023), I have entered into a dialogue with the work of Assiter and Yuval-Davis. Meskimmon's aesthetically inflected use of the concepts of transversal politics and epistemic communities has transformed these social science concepts into what Mieke Bal has called 'travelling concepts' (Bal 2002), making feminist inroads into art history and cultural analysis not unlike those made by the concept of infrastructure that has gained momentum in these fields in recent years (Daugaard, Schmidt, and Tygstrup 2024a). What these three concepts share, I would argue, is a critical potential to examine and describe the role that artists and cultural professionals play in the building of coalitions and social movements committed not only to feminist agendas and gender issues but also to other struggles for social justice, climate justice and profound institutional and structural change.

An awareness of epistemic location and political positionality is central to the concept and practice of transversal politics as they are based on the idea that everyone speaks from somewhere to somewhere else, and that compatible values and affective solidarities can nevertheless cut across differences in positionings and identity. Meskimmon links this understanding closely to the proposition that

transversal politics can be a mode of coalition-building that engenders networks and environments of knowledge-sharing, i.e. epistemic communities, beyond essentialized identities and traditional party or identity politics. Importantly, she stresses that they can act materially to change the social imaginary (Meskimmon 2020, 7, as well as 1, 31, 40, 105; see also Yuval-Davis 1999, 96; Petersen 2023, 132–133, 136). Both concepts will be further unpacked in Chapter 2's analysis of postmigrant coalition-building. For now, let it suffice to say that the term *postmigrant transversal politics* is used in this book to designate a transversal politics that centres on a common cause connected to the problem-space of postmigration, and more specifically, the struggle for refugee justice and equal access to cultural citizenship for people of refugee backgrounds in a plural democratic society.

'Placing' refugees in postmigrant societies

Any study of art that takes migration and refugeedom as its subject should be thoroughly historically contextualized. In continuation of the introduction to postmigrant thought and postmigrant societies, this section considers the question of how to understand the place of refugees in European postmigrant societies. After some overarching remarks on European responses, I consider what has been described as a 'paradigm shift' in Danish refugee policy.

In a seminal study of how EU member states responded to the 2015–2016 increase in refugees seeking protection in Europe, the German sociologist Ludger Pries makes the following observations on how immigration and asylum policies have shaped and will continue to shape the self-perception, ethics and policies of Europe:

How Europe and the international community will deal with the challenges of refugees and their protection will affect the future of the people directly concerned but also in the longer term the self-conception of the EU as a political project. It will define for the twenty-first century, if and how global society and its nation-states stick to the humanitarian commitments they defined during the twentieth century. Especially in the German case, the massive welcoming and the clear signal to the refugees that they had arrived safely in Germany also opened a historic window for society to arrive at a more sustainable concept of itself. Many people, especially younger persons and those with migration roots, declared that this was the first time they felt proud of the country they lived in. (Pries 2018, 2)

Pries suggests that 21st-century international migration, whether 'voluntary' or 'forced' migration, should be understood not only as a spatial movement but also as a transnational social movement, directing demands at the country of

reception and the international community. Pries describes this social movement as transnational, to stress that it is characterized by an increase of social relationships, networks and social spaces that cut across several nation-states (Pries 2018, 5). The German-based, Syrian-born artist Khaled Barakeh's installation *MUTE – A Muted Demonstration*, representing a group of Syrian protesters and displayed in 2022 in front of the Danish Parliament (see the Prologue), is an example of how an artistic practice can be linked to such transnational social movements and their claims. As Pries explains,

These movements of migrants and refugees do not direct their demands and expectations towards the ruling elites of their own countries in the first place but towards the international community and, first of all, the rich countries. When their demands for social participation, recognition and dignity cannot be fulfilled in their countries of origin, they turn towards those powers that make corresponding promises of participation and about which they have reliable information. The reconstruction of the refugee movement of 2015 shows that it was much more than the spatial movement of desperate individuals. In fact, it is a complex network with the refugees at its centre, who are – in spite of their difficult position – interconnected actors capable of taking decisions. (Pries 2018, 47)

Parallel to the German 'welcome culture', albeit on a smaller scale, Denmark saw civil society volunteers get involved in more or less spontaneous collections of clothes and money, with food schemes and transport of asylum seekers, etc. (Rytter et al. 2023, 31–32; M.B. Jørgensen and Olsen 2020). By contrast, on a governmental level, the response in Denmark was rather different from that of Germany. The policy of changing Danish governments has been to limit the access to asylum. In their introduction to the 2023 anthology *Paradigmeskiftets konsekvenser. Flygtninge, stat og civilsamfund* ('The Consequences of the Paradigm Shift: Refugees, State and Civil Society'), the anthology's editors, anthropologists Mikkel Rytter, Sarah-Louise J. Mortensen, Susanne Bregnbæk and Zachary Whyte, outline the major changes to Danish refugee policies. In 1983, the Danish government passed a very liberal Immigration Act and Denmark was seen as a model country championing human rights and humanist ideals. In the intervening four decades, however, it has had some of the most restrictive refugee laws in Europe. It has become difficult to obtain asylum and family reunification, and Denmark has attracted international criticism with the decision to revoke Syrian residence permits. Moreover, there have been various symbolic 'celebrations' – such as when the former Minister for Immigration and Integration Inger Støjberg (then the Liberal Party *Venstre*) had a 'tightening counter' set up on the Ministry's website, counting the increasing number of legal tightenings implemented during her time as minister.

Rytter et al. are, therefore, right to conclude that ‘since 1983 there has been a gradual pendulum swing from one extreme to the other’ (Rytter et al. 2023, 13). They argue that a virtual paradigm shift has taken place in Danish refugee policy since 2015, comprising a range of legal and administrative changes which all pursue the objective to minimize the number of people seeking asylum in Denmark. This culminated in February 2019, with the introduction of the new law L 140 and the resulting changes to the Immigration Act, the Integration Act and the Repatriation Act. This law shifted the decades-long focus on integrating refugees into Danish society to a repatriation agenda. As a general rule, residence permits for refugees and family reunification must now be revoked, or not extended as soon as possible, unless this conflicts with Denmark’s international obligations. The political ambition to repatriate refugees to their country of origin was clearly signalled by the removal of the word ‘integration’ from the Integration Act, replacing it with ‘repatriation and self-sufficiency’ (Rytter et al. 2023, 9).

Already in February 2019, when L 140 was adopted, the Refugee Appeals Board and the Danish Immigration Service had opened up the possibility of revoking Syrian refugees’ residence permits based on the new rules for revocation and a fresh (and later controversial) country report on the security situation in Syria.

In August 2020, the Ministry of Immigration and Integration opened The Danish Return Agency (*Hjemrejsestyrelsen*), responsible for the processes and logistics of repatriation. Less than a year later, in June 2021, Denmark’s first Repatriation Act came into force. As explained in the Prologue, the consequences of these changes became apparent in the spring of 2021 when 453 Syrian refugees had their residence permits revoked or were denied extension, due to what was seen as an improved security situation in the Damascus area. These revocations also spread fear and uncertainty among other refugees. The situation led to demonstrations across the country, where a section of the Danish population took to the streets in solidarity with the refugees (Rytter et al. 2023, 9–10).¹⁰ Khaled Barakeh’s *MUTE – A Muted Demonstration* was intended as a critical intervention into this political situation.

Rytter et al. conclude that the legal and administrative changes have profoundly transformed the relationship between refugees, the state and civil society. Without

10 As Rytter et al. note, a significant component of this situation is that the number of asylum applicants who have their residence permit revoked is relatively low, and even less are actually deported: ‘Some of the refugees referred to departure centres end up disappearing on their own. A report from Refugees Welcome states that “of the 653 people who had left Kærshovedgård during the centre’s first three years, 74 had left or been deported, 78 had been granted a residence permit, and 419 were registered as no-shows”. It is assumed that those who did not show up have either gone underground in Denmark or have travelled on to another European country in the hope of having their case and protection needs assessed there.’ (Rytter et al. 2023, 32)

necessarily referring to them explicitly, many of the artworks discussed in this book in effect respond to this change of policy and the transformation from a sociopolitical climate of hospitality to one of inhospitality:

The paradigm shift refers to both concrete legislation and a symbolic change in attitude. A key point here is that the communicative and symbolic parts of the paradigm shift are crucial to both its political goals and its consequences. Overall, we understand the paradigm shift as a political attempt to actively mobilize temporariness and uncertainty as part of Denmark's deterrence policy towards refugees. [...] This has created a tension between the part of the Danish reception policy that seeks to integrate refugees and, for example, help them find work, and the part that prioritizes providing relatively poor conditions for refugees to deter other migrants from heading for Denmark. One of the innovations of the paradigm shift is the way it upsets that balance and effectively incorporates large parts of integration policy into deterrence policy. (Rytter et al. 2023, 11)

For refugees in the country, the most palpable effect of this policy has been the pervasive sense of precariousness resulting from all refugee residence permits being made temporary and subject to reassessment every one to two years. As the sociologist Stinne Østergaard Poulsen has suggested, the previous 'linear' movement towards a permanent residence permit has been replaced by temporal 'loops', where refugees are repeatedly being returned to the starting point and kept in uncertainty about whether they can stay in Denmark and with their everyday lives transformed into a hybrid stage between asylum and integration (Poulsen 2023, 47–49).

The idea of temporary protection was, however, already introduced in the 1990s with the adoption of the so-called 'Yugoslav Law' for the approximately 20,000 Bosnians seeking refuge in Denmark. In Chapter 5, we will return to some of the artists who, like Nermin Duraković (see the Prologue) have a background in the Yugoslav diaspora. As regards asylum policies, there are some important learning points from that time. The insecurity resulting from temporariness until they were granted residence was stressful for many refugees, both individuals and families, and it subsequently turned out to be exceedingly difficult anyway for Bosnian refugees to return after the end of the Yugoslav Wars. They were often stigmatized as traitors because they had fled the country, and oftentimes their homes had been demolished, their possessions stolen or their houses taken over by new residents. As Rytter et al. have said, the history of the Bosnian refugees demonstrates 'Danish society's ability to accommodate and incorporate new groups of citizens who, over time, become a fully integrated part of Danish reality' (Rytter et al. 2023, 21).

Worldmaking denizens and the postmigrant condition of togetherness-in-difference

To grasp the nature of citizenship in situations when permanent residence and legal citizenship are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain, it is helpful to turn to Marsha Meskimmon's experimental concept of the worldmaking denizen as an antidote to the misconception that non-citizens are not part of the society in which they live and are forever deemed strangers and outsiders. Meskimmon uses the term *denizen* as a tool to rethink citizenship beyond the nation-state. For her, and for Ruth Lister, the term denotes a long-time resident who has developed a mutable but enduring sense of belonging to a new country and community through processes of worldmaking, but who may not hold legal citizenship in the receiving country or have cut all ties with their country of origin – an expat, for example, or an exile or refugee (Meskimmon 2017, 25; see also Meskimmon 2011; Petersen 2019, 369). The speculative figure of the 'worldmaking denizen' thus bends the notion of the national citizen in new ways by underscoring how the subject comes into being through performative dynamics and intersubjective relations to others (Petersen 2019, 378).

Seen from Meskimmon's feminist-materialist perspective, denizenship is centred on embodied, intersubjective activities of belonging where differences are acknowledged but not perceived as fixed. It is an open-ended process of finding one's place in the world rather than a status (which would limit the meaning of 'denizen' to its legalistic reference to naturalized or resident persons with lesser rights than citizens): 'As a process, worldmaking denizenship focuses on participation and the continual action of making oneself at home through different collectivities able to be formed and changed in and through transversal dialogues over time and across spaces.' (Meskimmon 2017, 33) Meskimmon draws on Nelson Goodman's understanding of worldmaking, according to which the building of a 'world' always begins from what is already there: 'the making is a remaking' (Goodman 1978, 6). Meskimmon's insistence that the denizen and the world are not preformed but 'emerge in mutuality' is particularly helpful when exploring refugee resettlement in new host countries (Meskimmon 2017, 26). She develops the denizen into an inclusive category that rejects dualist thinking (citizen versus non-citizen) to become a bridging trope. Her suggestion that all members of society, irrespective of their social and legal status, and their descent, should be seen as engaged in postmigratory worldmaking, and hence as denizens, is eminently useful when seeking to understand how refugeedom is lived and how transversal alliances are forged in postmigrant societies (Petersen 2019, 381). As Meskimmon writes: 'In our worldmaking and our postmigratory dwelling, we are all of us denizens whether cast as "citizens" or "migrants"' (Meskimmon 2017, 33). As an experimental figure, the denizen thus enables us to explore how works of art and cultural representations

articulate postmigratory experiences of what cultural studies scholar Ien Ang has called the ‘condition of togetherness-in-difference’ (Ang 2001, 17).

To conclude, the artworks discussed in the following chapters must be understood as emerging from within the conjuncture of the recent transformations to Danish and EU refugee and asylum policies described above. Based on his study of refugee migration to Europe in the mid-2010s, Ludger Pries has suggested that *arriving* as an open process of social integration is key to understanding refugee resettlement. Starting from the definition in the German-language *Duden* dictionary, he unfolds a spectrum of meanings of what ‘to arrive’ (*ankommen*) can imply: ‘to reach a place, to come to a place; [. . .] to find appeal, resonance; [. . .] to affect someone [in a certain way], to touch them; to be important [to someone], to be of significance’.¹¹ Similar to Meskimmon’s notion of the worldmaking denizen, Pries’s definition of arrival conveys that arrival is not a passive state after landing somewhere, but rather an open process of interaction between those arriving and the place where they arrive (Pries 2018, 150–151). As the sociologists Ana Mijić and Michael Parzer note, ‘Pries positions himself against assimilation theory concepts and understands “arriving” as an open-ended (and often years- and decades-long) process of being taken in’ (Mijić and Parzer 2023, 3). Emphasizing that refugees’ process of arrival is usually more complicated and prolonged than that of other migrants because the primary cause of migration was the desire to escape from a life-threatening situation and find protection and security elsewhere, Pries defines arrival thus:

An arrival in the above-mentioned sense of a one-sided forced assimilation is very costly and harmful for those affected. Therefore, arrival should not be understood in an assimilationist sense as “finally finding a new home” or “irrevocably knowing where one belongs”. Arriving is *always an open-ended process* where the arrivals feel initially secure and accepted. Arrival implies the acceptance of the rules of the host but never any further and all-encompassing declarations of loyalty or dissociation explanations. Arrival means primarily to be received decently, accepted, respected and understood, and to get a chance to participate in the community of arrival. Arrival also means to share, to be able to express oneself and to disclose joy and sorrow. Arrival can only be successful when all those concerned share the same rights and when it is based on mutual acceptance. (Pries 2018, 152; see also 154–155; emphasis in the original)

Arrival can thus be understood as a process of worldmaking and co-habitation, or *co-existence* as Christine Ross calls it (Ross 2022), involving complex processes of mutual perception and the (re)constitution of the interrelationship between self and other.

11 The Duden dictionary, quoted in Ludger Pries, *Migration und Ankommen: Die Chancen der Flüchtlingsbewegung*. Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag 2016, 131. Translation quoted from Mijić and Parzer 2023, 3.

To this, I would like to add that refugees' arrival involves both making and storying their world anew. Art can assist in this, as the following chapters demonstrate.

This chapter's outline of the discourse on postmigration and postmigrant theory gives us a sense of the heuristic potential of postmigration as a framework for exploring artists' engagement with the storying and worldmaking of people with a background of forced displacement, and how this framework can be enhanced by feminist theory. This chapter has thus provided the necessary theoretical underpinnings of the book's proposition that art's capacity for *worldmaking* and *storying* can be deployed to support practices of cultural citizenship. Such practices are vital to building *a sense of having arrived* among people with a background of forced migration settled in a country that has increasingly limited their possibility of developing precisely such a sense of belonging, participation and access in order to express themselves.

2. Refugees, worldmaking and transversal politics through art

The conflicted welcoming of refugees to postmigrant societies

The considerable number of people living outside their country of origin and the urgent need to resettle those who have been forcibly displaced have given renewed importance to the practices and issues of welcoming newcomers into communities and developing transformative ways of living together that enable newcomers to participate in society. As the Canadian political scientists Feyzi Baban and Kim Rygiel observe in their 2018 report *Living Together: Fostering Cultural Pluralism through the Arts*, European countries are at the forefront of concerns about migration because they are 'key entry points for people relocating due to conflict, poverty, jobs and family'. With greater numbers of refugees arriving from the Middle East and Africa in neighbouring countries within these regions as well as in European countries, anti-migrant and anti-refugee sentiment has grown significantly. 'Faced with such realities, governments must learn how to peacefully govern societies that are increasingly diverse and multicultural', argue Baban and Rygiel. Their thorough and enlightening report, prepared in the scope of the cultural policy studies of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, examines how creative, citizen-led initiatives of civil society organizations and groups 'can open societies to newcomers and [foster] cultural pluralism in ways that transform understandings about who is a citizen and who belongs to the community'. Furthermore, their report convincingly substantiates their proposition that 'culture and the arts can play an important role' in producing inclusive societies.¹

1 Baban and Rygiel 2018, 22–23; see also 24. This chapter is in dialogue with Baban and Rygiel's thorough report, which is part of their comprehensive research project 'Living with Others: Fostering Cultural Pluralism Through Citizenship Politics'. My methods differ from theirs, as does my preference for in-depth analysis of selected artworks and projects. Their mapping of a broad range of projects is geared to produce a different kind of knowledge, and impact on cultural policies. Nevertheless, I have found in their work a rich source of inspiration and further empirical substantiation of the idea that art can contribute to fostering inclusive plural democratic societies. The main research questions of their report *Living Together*

During the war that started in 2011 in Syria, millions fled the country or were internally displaced. The neighbouring countries received the majority of the refugees, with Turkey becoming the largest host country with nearly three million people seeking refuge there, of which half a million settled in Istanbul. Özlem Ece, Cultural Policy Studies Director of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts, notes in the Foreword of Baban and Rygiel's report that a survey conducted in 2014 revealed that replies to the question 'Would you be disturbed to have a Syrian as your neighbour?' were equally distributed between 'yes' and 'no' among Turkish society (Baban and Rygiel 2018, 7). The following year, the number of refugees coming to Europe, primarily from Syria and Afghanistan, surged to a record 1.3 million, leading to what was perceived at the time as a 'refugee crisis in Europe'. Germany – the primary European destination for asylum seekers since 2012 – received a record number of 442,000 applications for asylum in 2015 alone, while in Denmark it was 21,316.² Had the question from the Turkish survey been posed to Europeans, it would probably have revealed a similarly ambiguous 'yes–no', reflective of divided populations wavering between hospitality and hostility towards refugees, as well as a sociocultural and political climate of what Jacques Derrida has famously dubbed *hostipitality*. Derrida's neologism captures accurately the interwovenness of hospitable and inhospitable conduct characteristic of nation-states, as well as of individuals towards the other as a stranger, and the ambiguity of how strangers are (not) welcomed: 'The welcomed guest [*hôte*] is a stranger treated as a friend or ally, as opposed to the stranger treated as an enemy (friend/enemy, hospitality/hostility).' (Derrida 2000, 4)

Such ambiguity towards 'strangers' raises the questions of why and under what conditions some communities are more open to cultural differences than others, as well as the questions of what roles art and curating can play in fostering a welcoming culture and environment, and what specific projects and practices have facilitated openness to newcomers. In this chapter, I argue that art and curating can engage citizens and newcomers in ways that may transform understandings of citizenship and cultural belonging as well as aiding the participation and the coming into ap-

indicate just how closely related some of our research interests are: '1) What role or potential do culture and the arts play in opening up space in which to build community, break down binaries, and foster understanding across/through/around difference? 2) How do specific arts and cultural projects create new types of spaces and forms of community that might enable new understandings of belonging that transgress traditional binaries (e.g. citizen/non-citizen/refugee, insider/outsider)?' (Baban and Rygiel 2018, 13).

- 2 Measured against the country's population, the number of first-time asylum applications in 2015 per 100,000 people was 540 in Germany and 370 in Denmark, with the average number for European countries being 250 (Pew Research Center 2016). For the Danish figures, see Bendixen 2022.

pearance of newcomers, especially refugees and asylum seekers – the ‘unimagined communities’ of European nation-states.

I borrow the term ‘unimagined communities’ from environmental humanities, and more specifically from Rob Nixon’s seminal book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, and his astute analysis of how those displaced by environmental destruction are actively excluded from the national community and narrative. Nixon coined the term to grapple with the predicament of communities whom the state-led construction of mega-dams in the global South has forced to resettle *within* the nation-state, or what Nixon terms ‘developmental refugees’. Yet, his points about the invisibilization of ‘inconvenient’ communities also apply to the transnational refugees and asylum seekers who are the focus of this book:

If the idea of the modern nation-state is sustained by producing imagined communities, it also involves actively producing unimagined communities. I refer here not to those communities that lie beyond the national boundaries but rather to those unimagined communities internal to the space of the nation-state, communities whose vigorously unimagined condition becomes indispensable to maintaining a highly selective discourse of national development. Narratives of national development are partial narratives that depend on energetically inculcated habits of imaginative limit, habits that hide from view communities that inconvenience or disturb the implied trajectory of unitary national ascent. (Nixon 2011, 150)

I propose that artistic and curatorial practices have a crucial role to play in actively reimagining such ‘inconvenient’ communities and providing collaborative platforms that bring them into view. This chapter seeks to provide some local, or rather localized, insight into transformative artistic and curatorial practices by exploring the Copenhagen community centre Trampoline House and the small but internationally acclaimed art space CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics, henceforth CAMP. From 2015 until 2020, CAMP was uniquely housed inside Trampoline House, which attracted international interest when it became part of documenta fifteen in 2022.³ This community centre originated as a ‘solidarity art project’ (Siim and Meret 2020, 40) that developed into a community centre in 2010, serving as a meeting place for refugees, asylum seekers, volunteers and citizens of Copenhagen. It was housed in a building in the multi-ethnic area of Nørrebro. Over the years, Trampoline House’s important civic engagement and specific forms of pro-refugee solidarity work became increasingly known and appreciated, both inside and outside Denmark. Over the years, many representatives of organizations and municipalities, along with other people, visited the place to learn from

3 For a chronological overview of all CAMP’s activities, see the annotated and illustrated timeline in Hansen and Nielsen 2020, 20–49.

their model example of how refugees and asylum seekers can be welcomed and recognized as denizens in a local postmigrant community, thereby supporting their process of worldmaking, their performance of cultural citizenship and their interaction with the local population of the receiving country.

Mirroring the amazing history of CAMP and Trampoline House, the present study comprises two chapters both adopting a combined feminist, postmigrant and infrastructural lens. In recent years, artworld professionals have been increasingly preoccupied with questions of infrastructure and how participants can generate infrastructures ‘from below’ by engaging in what philosopher Gerald Raunig has theorized as ‘instituent practices’ that are not necessarily performed within and by established art institutions but, rather, break with them by engaging in instituting as an ongoing, self-critical and transformative process. As Raunig explains, ‘without dispensing with resources of and effects in the art field’, such instituent practices are capable of imagining a new proposition and generating other practices and forms (Raunig 2009, 11; see also Roussou 2021, 181). Likewise, the more commonly used notion of infrastructure has gained traction as a tool to shift the attention to the processual and relational aspects of institutions, and to tease out ‘what’s at stake in radical forms of organization, practices of communing, or in curatorial experiments in the art system’ (Christensen and Mader 2020, 6). As noted by the literary scholars Solveig Daugaard and Frederik Tygstrup and the performance and cultural studies scholar Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt in their introduction to infrastructure as a concept for the study of art and culture in their edited book, *Infrastructure Aesthetics*, infrastructure studies have come to signify ‘a transdisciplinary and intersectional interest in the *organization of social processes* and the *systemic relations* that is afforded to them’ (Daugaard, Schmidt, and Tygstrup 2024b, 4). Overall, ‘infrastructure’ can thus be seen as ‘structuring structures’, in the sense that they are ‘structures of relation and distribution’ as well as ‘*structuring devices*’ that format material processes (Daugaard, Schmidt, and Tygstrup 2024b, 5–6).

In a sociocultural setting, infrastructure can perhaps best be conceived of as a set of processes that connect people and things, or human and non-human beings. As infrastructure enables processes and generates connections, infrastructures evidently also govern and shape these processes and connections. Thus, infrastructure operates as what the cultural theorist Irit Rogoff has called hidden ‘protocols’. In Rogoff’s view, the concept of infrastructural processes provides a means of shifting the analytical focus from categories to processes, more specifically to *entangled* processes that cannot be named and analysed as separate events or entities. The concept of infrastructure thus acknowledges the complex entanglement of the conceptual, the material and the procedural (Rogoff 2013, 15:30–16:15 min.). Linking Rogoff’s observations to this study, I would like to suggest that infrastructural processes are integral to worldmaking. Adopting the concept of infrastructure, along with its at-

tentiveness to the ways in which infrastructures format relations and time, can add nuance to the analysis of how certain artistic practices can afford refugees' world-making processes. To grasp the existential import of the infrastructural processes initiated by Trampoline House and CAMP as well as the difficulty of analysing such processes as separate events or entities, it is helpful to turn to Laurent Berlant's reading of the epigraph to Ralph Waldo Emerson's book-length poem *Nature* (1836), where Emerson turns from humans to worms. In Berlant's reading, the concluding lines conjure up a poetic image of an infrastructural relation between worm and soil, man and environment: 'And, striving to be man, the worm/Mounts through all the spires of form' (Emerson's *Nature*, quoted in Berlant 2022, 92). What the worm has in common with the human being to which it is compared is its capacity for creation, for giving form to a lifeworld. Berlant suggests that the world that the worm and humankind create for themselves forms an infrastructure that affords the 'movement' that makes up their existence and continually adapts to their way of life as they move along:

The worm creates a space of movement that becomes form. If it is form it becomes social, that is, of the world; at this stage it is movement and singular. In the worm-hole the worm creates an infrastructure to hold itself in the world: the hole fits the worm, but only as it moves. (Berlant 2022, 93)

In this book, the term *infrastructure* is used to designate the generative infrastructural processes of cultural institutions as well as artistic and curatorial practices. It is used with an acknowledgement of the worldmaking import of infrastructures captured by Berlant. More specifically, it serves as an analytical perspective on Trampoline House and CAMP's experiments with curatorial, collaborative and participatory forms of organization and representation. Their work has two levels: the 'institutional' and the 'functional' – that is, Trampoline House and CAMP can be analysed in terms of what they look like, institutionally or structurally, or what they do, i.e. their functions, uses and infrastructural processes, although it should be stressed that these levels cannot be neatly disentangled.

An infrastructural perspective makes it possible to draw the contours of cultural and social activity that is notoriously difficult to pin down and 'measure' because it operates through the 'distributed agency' of many actors (as opposed to a work of art created by an individual). An infrastructural perspective can help answer questions such as: What can collaborative artistic and curatorial practices engender, and how? What are their challenges, potential and limits? In doing so, it enables a better grasp of the tasks makers of critical artistic and social form (such as Trampoline House and CAMP) set for themselves, and what they can achieve.

Chapter 2 explores CAMP and Trampoline House in their local and national contexts. It begins with an introduction to Trampoline House and a brief outline of

Danish asylum policies around 2015, in order to contextualize CAMP's highly politicized curatorial work. To further contextualize CAMP's work, some general remarks on the constrictions on and the potential of art institutions and curatorial practices will lead to an examination of how CAMP's exhibition programme evolved over the years, and how it was embedded in Trampoline House. I use two exhibitions from CAMP's programme, *State of Integration* (2018–2020), to characterize the broad scope of CAMP's curatorial practice, before concluding the chapter with a consideration of CAMP and Trampoline House as 'postmigrant public spaces'.⁴

The communications scholar Slavko Splichal has made a useful distinction between a *public sphere* and a *public*, according to which a public is 'a social category, whose members (discursively) act, form, and express opinions', and a public sphere is 'its infrastructure', comprising various 'channels of opinion-circulation' (Splichal 2010, 28). As Splichal notes, a public sphere cannot 'act'. It cannot communicate, whereas a public can. Thus, a public sphere is 'a necessary but not sufficient condition for a/the public to emerge, an infrastructure that enables the formation of the public as the subject, the bearer of public opinion' (Splichal 2010, 28). Similarly, public spaces provide infrastructures of communication, but they are also more than that. They are spaces (physical or digital) where people gather and/or interact, and hence can be social spaces for relational practices. Public spaces such as Trampoline House and CAMP provide infrastructures that allow for the building of a sometimes frictional and sometimes convivial social community, while also enabling collective learning and the formation of a knowledge-sharing community that reaches beyond the local sphere of the house.

To examine what Trampoline House and CAMP have accomplished in the Danish context, I adopt the categories of 'space' and 'public', along with the concept of postmigrant public space, in order to examine how CAMP created a transcultural contact zone and addressed not just an (art gallery) audience but a plurality of publics while

4 Chapter 2 has evolved from an earlier article on CAMP in which my co-author Sabine Dahl Nielsen and I examined the groundbreaking curatorial legacy of Okwui Enwezor by tracing how the influential multiplatform model he developed for documenta 11 in 2002 can be traced to even a small-scale local art space such as CAMP. I would like to acknowledge my co-author Sabine Dahl Nielsen's contribution to this article, which first discusses core elements of Enwezor's transformation of curating into the creation of platforms for political interventions at his documenta 11 exhibition, and then moves on to explore the specific translation of Enwezor's legacy into the small-scale, local space of CAMP, using the concept of postmigrant public space as a lens on CAMP's plurality of critical publics. Conversely, the present study foregrounds Trampoline House, especially in Chapter 3, which seeks answers to the question of how Trampoline House's embedment in documenta fifteen in 2022 panned out. When we completed our article in 2020, this was still an open question (S.D. Nielsen and Petersen 2021). For a more elaborate definition of postmigrant public spaces, see Chapter 5 in Petersen 2023.

at the same time contributing to building the postmigrant community of Trampoline House as a crucial component of the worldmaking endeavours undertaken by the people of the house. In doing so, Chapter 2 seeks to deepen the understanding of art's role in postmigrant public space and worldmaking, demonstrating by CAMP's example what a transversal politics can be with regard to newcomers to postmigrant societies.

Denmark's asylum policies around 2015

The fact that CAMP's founders Frederikke 'Fred' Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen had the perseverance to keep a gallery dedicated to migration politics going for six years in Denmark is an extraordinary achievement in itself. Denmark has some of the toughest laws on asylum and immigration in Europe, and within the EU, with its dubious border regime, the slow violence of its asylum centres and its proliferating range of old and new forms of racism and fascism. Historically, Denmark has been held up as a liberal forerunner in respect to the protection of refugees. In recent decades, however, a series of restrictive policies concerning both asylum and immigration has been imposed in the country. For instance, 2015 saw the introduction of a new tertiary protection status, 'temporary protection', for those fleeing general violence and armed conflict. The following year, access to family reunification for those granted temporary protection status was removed during the first three years of residence, unless special considerations applied. Following the surge in the number of primarily Syrian asylum seekers in the summer of 2015, Denmark also ran an anti-refugee ad campaign in Arabic-language newspapers, warning refugees about the plights that asylum seekers and refugees would have to endure in Denmark. Such forms of indirect deterrence can be characterized as a type of 'negative nation branding', intended to discourage refugees and irregular migrants from arriving in the territory and accessing the asylum system. While other EU countries have increasingly followed suit and adopted similar policies to stem the tide of refugees and irregular immigrants from Africa and the Middle East, Denmark, along with some other countries, have also sought to brand themselves as 'hardliners'. Professor in Migration and Refugee Law Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen has thus rightly pointed out that 'Denmark has long openly justified its more restrictive asylum policies with reference to its desire to avoid asylum-seekers' (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2017, 99, 105–106, 109).

Racism obviously permeates this tightening of the laws on asylum. As Naika Foroutan has observed, many of the conflicts at the heart of European plural democratic societies – such as the struggles for equality, freedom, security and democratic rights – are fought, in an emblematic way, in relation to migration (Foroutan 2019a, 13–14). Regarding the European struggles against racism, they are

inseparable from the critique of the highly racialized border control measures generated by European refugee and asylum policies. As the refugee studies scholar Martin Lemberg-Pedersen has remarked, ‘the racialized fears of being demographically swamped by black majorities’ at the core of European border control systems can be traced back to colonial times, when the white Caribbean plantation elites were split between ‘the desire for profit maximization’ and the fear of suppressed Black majorities overpowering them on what the European colonizers regarded as their territories (Lemberg-Pedersen 2019, 260).

Thus, it could be argued that, in a Danish context, the activist and political struggle against unjust and debilitating asylum policies cannot be separated from the struggle against racism.⁵ Accordingly, CAMP’s critical interrogation of asylum and migration politics can be seen as a local variant of the worldwide anti-racism struggle. It is linked, then, to the protests against police brutality against African Americans specifically and systemic racism in general that exploded in the United States after the police killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, and which spread like wildfire across the Western world, thanks to the transnational Black Lives Matter movement.

Solidarity work and worldmaking at Trampoline House and CAMP

For refugees and displaced people, their new place of residence – far away from the place that once constituted their world – is not simply the world in which they dwell and a place where they feel at ease, but, rather, an unfamiliar location where a new world must be created, even if it is only a makeshift refuge. It is a place of *worldmaking* that may itself be comprised of many different sites where the building of fragments of a new existence can take place – sites of becoming and the intermingling and cohabitation with strangers, which may, in time, become a world of familiar places and cherished faces. Trampoline House in the northwestern district of Copenhagen was one such site of worldmaking. The paths and acts of many different kinds of people were woven together in this place, including those of artists and curators, especially thanks to the art space CAMP that also ensured that the social, the aesthetic and the political were bound closely together.

The first steps towards the founding of Trampoline House were taken in 2008 at the ‘Asylum Dialogue Tank’ workshop at the Royal Danish Academy of Art in Copenhagen. The workshop was initiated by the artists Joachim Hamou and Morten Goll

5 My use of the term *debilitating* draws on the queer theorist Jasbir Puar’s understanding of the systematic enactment of ‘debilitation’ as a political form of state violence based on the targeting of the unwanted or suppressed in order to debilitate their existence through a protracted process of wearing people down physically and mentally (Puar 2017, xiv–xv).

(who subsequently channelled and transformed his artistic and activist skills into his work as the executive director of Trampoline House), with curator Tone Olaf Nielsen, who all formed a group together with asylum seekers, students of art and architecture, activists and volunteering professionals (Hansen and Nielsen 2016, 121). In Trampoline House's ten-year existence,⁶ the initial core objective did not change significantly but remained that of creating 'a reversed space of exception to the camp's space of exception: a reversed space in which asylum seekers would temporarily be re-equipped with their basic civil rights that they are deprived of in the camps.'⁷ As explained in an early document, Trampoline House's activities were organized in ways that would encourage 'the meeting between Danes and asylum seekers'. They aimed to demonstrate that 'a non-profit, user driven culture space could function', as well as promote 'integration, learning, an exchange of knowledge, creating networks and mutual respect', thereby offering services to asylum seekers in a situation where the encroachment on their lives by restrictive regulation and policies was making it increasingly difficult for them to access such resources.⁸

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- 6 Trampoline House existed for ten years as a community centre with a stable base in Copenhagen, from 2010 in Skyttegade, and from June 2014 until 2020 at Thorasvej. After the centre closed, a group of former users, volunteers and employees set out in the spring of 2021 to establish a new centre on a more sustainable scale. The result was 'Weekend Trampoline House', of which more below. Tone Olaf Nielsen served as programme coordinator of Trampoline House from 2010 to 2018, and as the programme director from 2018 to 2020. She co-founded Weekend Trampoline House with Morten Goll in 2021 and served as its programme and communication director from 2021 until December 2022, when she stepped down after 14 years in the house's service. Morten Goll remained in position as director from 2010 until 2023 when he stepped down after 15 years, and Nynne Roberta Pedersen Pedersen took over as daily manager for a limited period until a reorganisation took place in November 2023 to ensure that the house had a refugee-driven management. In 2024, 75 per cent of the members of the board, chaired by Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali, had a background as an asylum seeker with firsthand experience with the Danish asylum system. See <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/timeline>, <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/our-history> and <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/board> (accessed October 28, 2024).
- 7 Quoted from Siim and Meret 2020, 42. My account of Trampoline House builds on their thorough interview-based analysis of Trampoline House and the community centre's work with refugees.
- 8 Quoted from the flyer 'Trampoline House – A meeting place for asylum seekers, Danes and everyone else', 2009, <https://selinihalvadaki.net/trampoline-house> (accessed August 8, 2022).

Fig. 4: On June 8th, 2019, the Copenhagen refugee community centre, Trampoline House, celebrated its 9th birthday with a festive party for all its members and supporters. Long-time member of the House, Eden Girma, suggested having a fashion show where all the House members would walk down a catwalk in Trampoline House's multizone, wearing their favourite outfit. Some people dressed in traditional garments from the country they had fled, like Eden did in the photo. Others created new outfits for the occasion or wore folk costumes from another part of the world that they borrowed from friends in the House. More than 300 adults and children from all over the world took part in the festivities. Photo: Lars Vibild. Courtesy: The Trampoline House Archive.



For five days a week the house offered various activities and classes (e.g. language classes and classes in democracy), a house meeting, legal counselling, job training, a children's club, a women's club, cooking, and, importantly, a space for conviviality. By creating a hospitable zone of contact, the community centre helped to break the isolation and alleviate the sense of powerlessness that many refugees and asylum seekers experience during their months and years of waiting in the Danish asylum system while their asylum application is being processed.⁹ As gender studies scholar Birte Siim and migration studies scholar Susi Meret note, the basic idea was to create a space where asylum seekers were involved in the daily activities on the same conditions as those which applied to the members of the house and

9 Trampoline House, 'Weekly Program', www.trampolinehouse.dk/program; and Trampoline House, 'It's Your House', www.trampolinehouse.dk/activities (accessed June 30, 2020). See also the annual report (Goll 2019); and Hansen and Nielsen 2016, 11 and 43.

other visitors. This involvement would improve their understanding of how Danish society works and provide a welcoming community, as an antidote to the insecurity, isolation and marginalization many displaced people experience in the Danish asylum and integration system. As René Kreichauf has demonstrated in his case study of ‘campization’ in Greece, Germany and Denmark in the years 2013–2016 (see the Introduction), many Danish shelters were deliberately placed ‘remotely from any urban settlement’. According to Kreichauf, this was a conscious national/political strategy of keeping asylum seekers out of the larger cities, especially greater Copenhagen. Moreover, after the mandatory stay in a centre until asylum had been granted, refugees would then typically be distributed to less populated areas with low proportions of immigrants (Kreichauf 2018, 10–12). Kreichauf concludes that these secluded spaces are ultimately ‘politically developed for the purpose of separating the “own” and the “(ethnic) stranger”, citizens and non-citizens’ (Kreichauf 2018, 14).

What Trampoline House sought to create was a space in-between, a contact zone. The House offered Danish citizens an opportunity to interact and learn from asylum seekers and refugees (Siim and Meret 2020, 42). By bringing newcomers together with their host communities, Trampoline House sought to foster a new sense of belonging as well as reduce the prejudice on both sides, and to challenge notions of who does and does not belong. Ideally, newcomers should be able to share the experience described by the asylum intern Frank in a video introduction to Trampoline House: ‘The moment you step into this house, you are family’ (Goll and Nielsen 2019, 2:26–2:36 min.). In a 2015 interview with Siim and Meret, Tone Olaf Nielsen explained the mutually integrative process:

When we established Trampoline House our first concern was how to get [asylum seekers] out of the camps [the asylum centers] and into the house. We did, and still do this by offering them three-months of practical training, and when they fulfil the contract, we reimburse their transportation costs that permitted them to visit the house at least two times per week. ... We try to find practical training, aimed at building people’s capacities and resources. We strive to facilitate a platform where we can actually exchange knowledge and learn from one another. At the same time, [the asylum seekers and refugees] can make use of all of the other activities: they receive legal counseling, meet the voluntary doctors who visit us once a week ... besides making friends and relationships ... which is not such an easy task when living in the isolation of the camps. But the house is also for ethnic Danes, and international students who are interested in immigration issues, and it is important that they too feel at home.¹⁰

10 Interview with Tone Olaf Nielsen, Copenhagen, January 27, 2015, quoted in Siim and Meret 2020, 43.

Trampoline House and its embedded art space CAMP could thus be seen as an ambitious 'reversed' attempt to confer cultural citizenship on people who were not recognized as citizens, and to encourage a sense of belonging and civic participation in society by creating a supportive infrastructure and welcoming asylum seekers into an environment of solidarity and everyday conviviality by 'rethinking hospitality through the rights of the guests rather than the privileges of the host' (Siim and Meret 2020, 38). It was a civil-society initiative, a coming together of people committed to fighting stigmatization, exclusion and rejection, and to supporting *postmigratory* processes of worldmaking involving both newcomers and locals. As Baban and Rygiel remind us, in a broad sociological understanding, citizenship is not a purely legal concept but a relationship between 'a set of practices (cultural, symbolic and economic) and a bundle of rights and duties (civil, political and social) that define an individual's membership in a polity'. It involves not only institutions, legal status and membership but also the discourses, practices, infrastructures, technologies, etc. by which populations and individuals are governed. Citizenship is thus 'productive of both citizens and non-citizen identities and subjectivities' (Baban and Rygiel 2018, 40) – just like nation-states are productive of both imagined and unimagined communities, as Rob Nixon has explained.

Discussions on cultural citizenship emphasize that cultural rights include rights to representation and meaning-making. According to the sociologist Jan Pakulski, cultural rights (e.g. concerning minoritized groups, indigenous people and LGBTQ+ communities) may be seen as a 'deepening' of political and social citizenship which has 'immense, and seldom clearly spelled out, consequences for the social infrastructure' (Pakulski 1997, 80; see also 77 and 83). They entail the re-evaluation of stigmatized identities and may require more extensive (and thus potentially problematic) state intervention to protect them, e.g. in broadcast and social media as well as educational institutions. More specifically, the claims to cultural citizenship rights involve,

[...] the right to symbolic presence and visibility (vs. marginalisation); the right to dignifying representation (vs. stigmatisation); and the right to propagation of identity and maintenance of lifestyles (vs. assimilation). [...] In other words, claims for cultural rights can be seen as heralding a new wave, a new breed of claims for unhindered representation, recognition without marginalisation, acceptance and integration without 'normalising' distortion. It reflects a pressure for what one may call an extended cultural democracy. (Pakulski 1997, 80; see also Baban and Rygiel 2018, 39)

Instead of taking a strictly chronological approach to the history of Trampoline House and CAMP, I would like to start with what was, at the time of writing, the last exhibition in Trampoline House, because it provides some insight into the

conditions of refugeedom for people in the Danish asylum system from which the House offered some regenerative respite. From this exhibition, organized within the framework of Weekend Trampoline House, I move on to consider, from a theoretical perspective, the ‘direct’ or ‘radical’ form of democracy enacted in Trampoline House in its different incarnations, as well as the peculiarity of its community. Only then do I turn to CAMP’s curatorial activities that unfolded in this context.

After suffering severe difficulties in attracting funds during the COVID-19 pandemic, Trampoline House had to close in December 2020 after ten years of operation. The closure of the house left a large void among the many refugees and asylum seekers who visited it. To fill that void, a group of former users, volunteers and staff set out in the spring of 2021 to establish a new house on a more sustainable scale. The result of this initiative was Weekend Trampoline House, along with profound, and evolving, infrastructural change. In collaboration with the Apostle Church in the Copenhagen neighbourhood of Vesterbro, it opened in January 2022 to run a year-long, non-profit project on Fridays and Sundays, run by volunteers. In the meantime, inflation had hollowed out the value of the allowance given to asylum seekers, making it more difficult for those living in asylum centres outside the capital to afford transportation. Thus, in the following year, from August until October 2023, Weekend Trampoline House moved out of Copenhagen to Roskilde, a smaller city about 20 kilometres from the Avnstrup Centre – a Red Cross-run ‘return centre’ or camp-like facility for families with children whose application for asylum has been rejected, as well as for families whose residence permit has been suspended (Bendixen 2018). In 2024, it was announced on Trampoline House’s website that they were working on transforming the community centre into an independent cooperative, ‘Trampoline House co-op’, and were looking for a new base in Copenhagen.¹¹

Weekend Trampoline House was able to move into a grand old residence named Villa d’Este, thanks to their collaboration with Roskilde’s Museum for Contemporary Art on the off-site exhibition *Non Performing*. This group exhibition was held in some of the historical buildings formerly belonging to the Sankt Hans psychiatric hospital in the outskirts of Roskilde. It was the inaugural event of a three-year programme of exhibitions, residencies and other activities that the museum organized in partnership with the Roskilde Municipality as part of the urban development of the hospital area into a residential neighbourhood – a programme with a site-specific and thematic focus on ‘an urgent debate about how we as a society care for those who fall outside the “norm”’ (Museet for samtidskunst 2023, 3). Thus, it was a collaboration with an art institution that opened the possibility for Trampoline House to move into

11 See Trampoline House’s website, <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/about> (accessed March 27, 2025).

a house again, albeit temporarily, into a place of their own and a place of worldmaking where they could integrate art-making and social solidarity work, even though they no longer had an art space.

During the exhibition period of *Non Performing*, Weekend Trampoline House was open for its usual weekly opening hours, not only to the regular participants in their activities but also to the exhibition audience who came to Villa d'Este to see the art exhibition comprising Trampoline House's videos from documenta fifteen (2022), and a major mixed-media installation created for this exhibition by the Rwanda-born activist, fashion designer, writer and filmmaker, Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali, with Joachim Hamou and Morten Goll as assistants. Mwicira-Mitali's creative trajectory in Denmark is closely intertwined with Trampoline House, as he was a long-term volunteer in the first Trampoline House, and co-founder of the Weekend Trampoline House and Trampoline House co-op, as well as making a powerful contribution to CAMP's opening event.

The 'art audience' was also invited to take part in activities such as democracy workshops, sewing workshops, house meetings and communal cooking and dining. The staircase leading to the first floor with Mwicira-Mitali's installation *Demystifying and Unpacking Refugee Trauma* was lined with printouts of images from refugee camps and fortified border zones across the world, all carrying the bitter-sweet message 'Welcome to' the country depicted (Algeria, Bangladesh, Greece, Hungary, Iraq, Pakistan, South Africa, Spain, etc.) evoking postcards with 'Greetings from' popular tourist destinations. The contours of a world map were painted on the wall above them to emphasize the global scale of refugee encampments and the need for more hospitable ways of welcoming refugees. On their way up the staircase and along the narrow corridor leading to the entry to the installation, visitors would also encounter text pieces listing psychological disorders and symptoms common among refugees, with three screens displaying slideshows of photographs from the Avnstrup Centre and the Sjølsmark and Kærshovedgård deportation centres. The corridor was also decorated with festoons of barbed wire, symbolizing the isolation of refugees in camps and how detention exacerbates their trauma and mental health problems. The installation itself – a makeshift 'house' with two claustrophobic rooms – used the same explicit language and confrontational imagery. The first room formed a primitive shelter for those who 'arrived', furnished with a narrow bed and various psychoactive drugs; the second offered a place for mourning those who did not make it, with a handwritten commemorative inscription scribbled onto a whiteboard placed above a black coffin – the symbolic last resting place of the countless and nameless victims who have died fleeing their country.

The democracy of those who are present

This short account of Weekend Trampoline House's contribution to *Non Performing* confirms that despite these structural and financial difficulties and changes, the core idea of Trampoline House remained the same. When Morten Goll was interviewed about Weekend Trampoline House in 2022, he stressed that although the loss of the house was painful and the financial situation difficult, the scaling down also provided the community with a greater degree of independence from municipal institutions and private foundations, thus strengthening the critical political project – the democracy and cultural citizenship project – at the core of Trampoline House:

We wanted to keep the house as a *place of radical democracy*, one that allows people to develop in their own direction. In that sense, it is very important to understand the difference between institutional democracy, which allows the encampment of refugees, and the culture of democracy that we promote. *Trampoline House democracy is a culture of critique, providing tools of how to improve society.* (Goll, in Bajek et al. 2022, 248; emphasis added)

I would like to briefly introduce here Alan Sears's concept of *infrastructures of dissent*, in order to emphasize that Trampoline House's organizational infrastructures – including the embedded art space CAMP – played a formative role in shaping its radical form of direct democracy. In Sears's sociological understanding, infrastructures of dissent facilitate the processes through which people 'develop the confidence to act collectively and change the world', i.e they provide the basic connections that underlie even apparently spontaneous acts of protest, and are needed for the building and sustenance of forms of 'counter-power' (Sears 2014, 1–2). As Sears observes, '[i]n the absence of this infrastructure, it is more difficult to sustain effective mobilization' (Sears 2014, 5). Infrastructures of dissent provide social movements with the means through which to develop 'political communities capable of learning, communicating and mobilizing together', as well as the capacity for solidarity and envisioning collective imaginaries and what migration and communication studies scholars Martin Bak Jørgensen and Daniel Rosengren Olsen term 'a politics of hope' (M.B. Jørgensen and Olsen 2020, 155 and 162; Sears 2014, 2). Learning based on an individual's own experiences, and the development of a 'counter-knowledge' that challenges the 'ruling ideas' or hegemonic consent about a system (e.g. the immigration, integration and asylum systems), are central to the capacity of dissent to break the structures of consent and move from resistance to transformation, argues Sears (Sears 2014, 7 and 9). Importantly in the present context, Sears acknowledges the impact of radical art on his own activist and political engagement, as well as art's capacity for imagining a better world and

articulating a 'grounded utopianism' based on 'the possibilities latent within the present' (Sears 2014, 19 and 28). He also emphasizes that the development of alternative thinking is dependent on 'cultural, educational and communications currents', or what the cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams referred to as the 'dissident cultural apparatus', comprising a self-learning ethos as well as a broad range of cultural and educational formats, ranging from publications and bookshops, to language classes, cultural centres, and to political theatre and participatory cultural forms such as workers' choirs (Sears 2014, 19–20; Williams 1989, 144).

In their study of the country-wide social movement *Venligboerne* ['Friendly Neighbours'], a civil society initiative within the broader Danish refugee solidarity movement to which Trampoline House also belongs, Jørgensen and Olsen define *dissent* in a way that may shed some light on Trampoline House's 'culture of critique'. They understand dissent as a social and political questioning capable of 'undoing consensus and rendering excluded actors and struggles visible'. Crucially, they stress that dissent is not limited to belligerent action but can also manifest as 'everyday forms of resistance and politics taking place in the "refugees welcome" movement as well as the development of practices of sharing, caring and learning'.¹² According to Sears, solidarity must be cultivated and sustained by supporting structures to become useful and lead to alliance-building (Sears 2014, 21). Jørgensen and Olsen add that 'while individuals may sympathize intuitively with refugees, organizational infrastructures are required to enable solidarity as effective praxis' (M.B. Jørgensen and Olsen 2020, 156). The 2022 interview with Goll suggests that Trampoline House was acutely aware of the importance and generative nature of the community's infrastructures of mutual learning and political dissent. Goll continues:

Now, we want to navigate Weekend Trampoline House in a different direction and develop it as a much smaller operation. [...] There will be no conflict in including rejected asylum seekers, because we don't need to please the government or any municipality. [...] One important instrument is the weekly house meetings, a social gathering, where everybody is seen and acknowledged. The house meeting allows direct deliberative democratic discussions. Unlike representative democracy, it's *the democracy of those who are present*. We always used this talking stick I brought home from a trip to Utah. (MG shows object with feathers). Talking sticks have been used for thousands of years in Native American communities to organize democratic discussions, where everybody is equally heard. We want to show our community that democracy can exist in many different ways. Of course, we also use ... say Danish or Congolese democratic traditions. What is important is that people in the room understand that their diverse cultural backgrounds are

12 M.B. Jørgensen and Olsen 2020, 155. My use of Sears's theory is in conversation with Jørgensen and Olsen's use of Sears in their study of *Venligboerne*.

welcome and heard, and that we will build our improved democracy from these common sources. (Goll, in Bajek et al. 2022, 248; emphasis added)

Thus, in its various incarnations, Trampoline House has always sought to alter the infrastructures of sociality itself through direct democracy and collaboration between people of diverse cultural backgrounds, thereby seeking to bridge the huge differences between citizens and asylum seekers.

One of the tasks that the Trampoline House community set for itself was to provide an inclusive space for *worlding* (Palmer and Hunter 2018) – that is to say, the possibility for refugees and asylum seekers to set up a world and become a community interwoven with civil society. This malleable and open community can be described as a community of mutual learning (M. B. Jørgensen and Olsen 2020, 162). However, the term that best captures the nature of Trampoline House and CAMP as knowledge-sharing communities that reach beyond the bounds of the local and national is probably feminist theorist Alison Assiter's concept of *epistemic communities* (Assiter 1996, 79–97; see also Petersen 2023, 107–144). Assiter's concept is based on the proposition that 'the appropriate epistemological subjects are collectivities', not individuals as traditional epistemologists presume (Assiter 1996, 80). Furthermore, she considers them to be loosely structured "imagined" communities in something like [Benedict] Anderson's sense' (Assiter 1996, 84; see also Petersen 2023, 133). Assiter argues that 'reality is shaped and altered by a community of people' because the construction and validation of knowledge are not individual activities but always 'co-operative, constructive endeavours' (Assiter 1996, 81). She links this idea of collective knowledge production to a feminist intersectional perspective to underscore that subjectivity is integral to the collective processes. As each individual is historically and socioculturally located, all knowledges are arguably situated, and 'some features of the subject of knowledge matter' (Assiter 1996, 81). Consequently, the knowledge produced within an epistemic community is not based on consensus but, rather, generated from the outlook of 'broadly like-minded people' (Assiter 1996, 81). Assiter argues that the distinguishing feature of *feminist* epistemic communities is that they are committed to a set of emancipatory values, and that this is what makes them 'emancipatory' communities (Assiter 2000, 329). As Trampoline House and CAMP were also committed to emancipatory values and social justice for refugees, it could be argued that they, too, should be seen as emancipatory communities.

Marsha Meskimmon has used Assiter's concept of epistemic communities as one of the keystones of a feminist intersectional and transnational theory of transversal politics, understood as a theory of democratic solidarity-building and conflict resolution based on negotiation across the boundaries drawn by difference (Meskimmon 2020, 7; see also 1, 31, 40, 105). Meskimmon argues that transversal politics can produce alliances, solidarities and epistemic communities that revolve around a common cause, but they also entail frictions as participants may position

themselves differently – politically, socially, culturally and artistically. The fact that Meskimmon goes beyond Assiter's definition of epistemic communities as knowledge-sharing, imagined communities is significant to this study of Trampoline House and CAMP. She proposes that epistemic communities 'do not pre-exist knowledge practices' but *emerge through them*, i.e. through mutual listening and responsive dialogues that are always situated and embodied (Meskimmon 2020, 19; see also Petersen 2023, 134 and 143–144). My exploration of how CAMP harnessed artistic and curatorial practices to serve the common cause uniting the art space and the house is in conversation with Meskimmon's understanding of epistemic communities as emerging through processes of mutual learning that also involve friction, negotiation and conflict resolution.

CAMP – curating art on migration politics

Returning to Trampoline House, it was thanks to the presence of the art space that Trampoline House also became a place where nongovernmental organization representatives, activists, scholars, educators, artists and curators came together within the framework of CAMP's programme of art exhibitions and its politically mobilizing, exhibition-related events, which were often woven into the fabric of the everyday life and regular activities of the community centre and its multicultural community of refugees, asylum seekers, volunteers, staff and other citizens of Copenhagen. CAMP was founded by Frederikke 'Fred' Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen, alias the curatorial team Kuratorisk Aktion ('Curatorial Action'). Their collective and politically engaged approach to curating resonates with that of other collectives, such as the approach explored by *ruangrupa*, a Jakarta-based collective established in 2000. Kuratorisk Aktion has collaborated with *ruangrupa* on several projects, of which the most important ones are *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts* (2006) and *documenta fifteen* (2022). In effect, the closing of the physical gallery space of CAMP in 2020 coincided with Kuratorisk Aktion's increasing engagement in the preparations for *documenta fifteen*.¹³

Kuratorisk Aktion's participation in the curating of this event resulted in the closure of CAMP, but this was not the end of the story. As a collectively organized

13 CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics, 'Camp's Founders and Trampoline House Will Be Part of the Next *Documenta*—and CAMP Will Close', Newsletter, June 19, 2020, <http://www.campcph.org/news/1962020> (accessed March 27, 2025). A note on spelling: I capitalize the name when referring to the institution *Documenta*; when referring to specific instantiations of the quinquennial, I use the variant preferred by the curator(s) in written material, i.e. *documenta 14* and *documenta fifteen*. An exception to this rule is quotes where I maintain the spelling used in the source quotation.

project rooted in art, Trampoline House was invited to develop, over the extended three-year period preceding the opening of *documenta fifteen* in June 2022, ‘alternative ways of organizing and sharing material and non-material resources’, based on the values of solidarity, collectivity and sustainability at the heart of ruangrupa’s curatorial strategy for *documenta fifteen*. While Frederikke ‘Fred’ Hansen joined ruangrupa’s curatorial team in 2019, Tone Olaf Nielsen remained in her position as programme director at Trampoline House, partly to continue her work in what became Weekend Trampoline House, and partly to coordinate Trampoline House’s contribution to *documenta fifteen*, in collaboration with a group of Trampoline House representatives.¹⁴ Despite Trampoline House’s unfortunate closure at the end of 2020, the House did participate in *documenta fifteen* in Kassel in 2022. Chapter 3 considers how members of Trampoline House used *documenta fifteen* as an opportunity to continue their work with some of the users of Trampoline House – as a platform for sharing the history, knowledges and methods of the house, and as a megaphone to communicate their critique of the Danish asylum system globally. Lastly, but importantly, they used the event to develop their own practice and work towards an economically sustainable version of Trampoline House (i.e. Weekend Trampoline House). In this way, Trampoline House’s contribution to *documenta fifteen* turned the international spotlight on the dehumanizing effects of Denmark’s restrictive asylum policies. At the same time, it demonstrated, through Trampoline House’s own example, how artistic and curatorial practices can accommodate the right of refugees and asylum seekers to visibility and dignifying representation, so that their voices, stories and claims can be heard.

Art institutions as providers of infrastructure

The practices of hospitality, solidarity and sharing so central to the welcoming of refugees and other newcomers is dependent on *infrastructures*, i.e. on supporting structures such as social institutions, public and private funds, networks of people and ethical standards for human interaction, forums for political mobilization, platforms for representation and visibility, etc. At this juncture, a note on the role of art institutions is therefore in order. In the artworld, ‘institutional critique’ as an artistic and scholarly concern has, since the 1960s, construed art institutions as something to attack, both aesthetically and politically as well as theoretically. Institutional critique has been important for its pertinent critique of the Western-

14 Tone Olaf Nielsen, email message to Sabine Dahl Nielsen and the author, February 10, 2021. See also ‘CAMP’s Founders and Trampoline House Will Be Part of the Next *Documenta*—and CAMP Will Close’.

dominated artworld's conflation with capitalism, (neo)colonialism and patriarchy, and the ways in which the artworld is banded with those in power and economic elites. Yet it has also contributed negatively to obscure the fact that art and cultural institutions can provide enabling platforms, even if they are invariably limited by various power structures and their dependency on external funds. The point I wish to make here is that in the artworld, institutions provide important infrastructures. As Lauren Berlant has noted, the difference between institutions and infrastructures is often a matter of perspective (Berlant 2016, 403). Institutionalized biennials, such as Kassel's quinquennial Documenta, can be perceived as large-scale institutional infrastructures for hosting curatorial and artistic projects as well as providing platforms for dialogue and discursive interventions into public debates. Small-scale institutions and local artistic and cultural projects can also create supporting and hosting infrastructures, or be themselves hosted by larger institutions. As the example of Trampoline House and CAMP demonstrates, such practices of hosting and support can provide entry points into postmigrant societies and local communities for refugees and other migrant newcomers.

In their 2018 report, Baban and Rygiel map the emergence of a panoply of artist-led projects and cultural initiatives initiated by civil society in Turkey and in Europe since the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015. Their report testifies to the fact that artistic and cultural practices can support some of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups of migrants: the refugees and asylum seekers. Baban and Rygiel's aim is to show how art and culture can promote an alternative 'radical cosmopolitan' approach to living together, based on the transformative relationality of human interaction, i.e. on people's capacity to transform one another through interaction. They suggest that '[f]rom the perspective of radical cosmopolitanism, living together does not privilege citizens over non-citizen groups nor the host's culture over that of the guest's culture' (Baban and Rygiel 2018, 11). It is noteworthy that Baban and Rygiel contend that radical cosmopolitanism provides 'a platform for integration' different from those of assimilationist and multiculturalist approaches. In fact, their understanding of radical cosmopolitanism converges with central tenets of postmigrant thought as they also emphasize equality, diversity, participation, multiple belonging, cultural rights and the need to develop pluralist national narratives:

Radical cosmopolitanism is based on marginalised groups acting in ways that force national narratives to reveal their mechanisms of power and exclusion. This is why radical cosmopolitanism is both political and radical; it begins with the assumption that the integration of marginalised groups (such as Turks into German society for example) necessitates transforming particular national discourses. For instance, currently third generation Turkish-Germans redefine

German national identity by challenging what it means to be German through their own experiences of being Turkish and German. (Baban and Rygiel 2018, 37)

According to Baban and Rygiel, the non-hierarchical openness to 'the other' which defines radical cosmopolitanism can reconfigure the established boundaries of communities and the perceptions of who belongs to them. They argue that 'culture and the arts can play a crucial role in fostering such pluralism by creating a deeper understanding between different groups such as newcomers and local populations'. Furthermore, artistic and creative projects give access to platforms for public representation. In doing so, they can help 'restore voice and give visibility to marginalised groups who may be excluded from full participation in society' (Baban and Rygiel 2018, 11).

Baban and Rygiel conclude with recommendations for the kind of cultural policies and infrastructures which are needed to enable cultural and artistic forms of production to create inclusive public spaces where minorities can narrate their stories, make alternative representations of themselves and their social struggles visible, strengthen their self-esteem and sense of belonging, as well as opening the possibility of dialogic engagement between locals and newcomers. Among other things, Baban and Rygiel recommend that government at the national level should support the plural cultural production of marginalized populations and encourage transformative ways of living together. Their recommendation to 'broaden cultural policy and programmes to invest in arts and cultural programming outside of formal institutionalized arts spaces' acknowledges the role of small-scale projects and summarizes their potential in a way that applies to CAMP: 'Smaller more localised cultural projects can lead, over the long term, to audience development, through arts awareness and appreciation. It can also encourage a greater sense of belonging and civic engagement in society.' (Baban and Rygiel 2018, 104–105)

Before delving into CAMP's curatorial programme, I would like to touch briefly on the issue of constrictions on and by art institutions and consider their impact on curatorial practices. It should be noted that curators always work within certain financial, structural and political constrictions. However, there is much to suggest that the Western institutional circumscription of their work is not always so tight where small-scale, (semi-)independent art spaces are concerned. Museums and large-scale exhibitions such as biennials, triennials and Documenta tend to gain extensive media attention and reach large international audiences. However, partly because of these very effects, they often end up being restricted by local politicians, sponsors and marketing departments trying to avoid dealing with explicitly political, and therefore potentially divisive issues such as asylum, immigration, integration, forced deportation and racism.

Anchoring solidarity work in the local

If, on the one hand, larger exhibition projects can sometimes be subject to restrictions, small-scale institutions and art spaces working with lower budgets, smaller audiences and less political and media attention can, on the other hand, experience a comparatively higher degree of curatorial freedom when seeking to address conflict-sensitive issues. This can provide them with a greater scope for contesting the boundaries and limitations of Western systems, and may, therefore, as CAMP's activities show, offer curators a more fertile ground for experimenting with different forms of public address and congregation, which might but does not have to be linked to exhibition making.¹⁵ As a non-profit institution operating on a small scale, CAMP succeeded in creating a critical curatorial model linked to activism. By founding an art space, the curators created the more stable infrastructure needed to prolong its duration and to embed their activities in politically engaged community work on a long-term basis. Furthermore, as a postmigrant public space, CAMP was a space for critical engagement with the world (rather than a space of autonomy and withdrawal). Exhibition-making was CAMP's primary means of critical engagement with the world through art. An exhibition is, in the words of the late curator Okwui Enwezor, embedded in the world as 'a space of public discourse', and it 'can no more assert a distance from its cultural context than it can repress the very social condition that brings it into dialogue with its diverse publics' (Enwezor 2015, 17–18). As suggested above, it was precisely the Danish context of anti-refugee anxieties and politics that impelled Kuratorisk Aktion to found a themed-based exhibition venue dedicated to showing artworks that articulate radical critiques of Western immigration, refugee and asylum politics – a place that reflected on the experience of forced migration while also seeking to stimulate sympathetic and affective encounters and greater understanding between displaced people and the Danish

15 This study of CAMP was conducted in collaboration with Sabine Dahl Nielsen. It is empirically based on our long-term interests *in* and engagements *with* CAMP's curatorial activities. We have both viewed the presented exhibitions, attended various talks, workshops and opening events, as well as participated in guided tours of the exhibitions given by representatives from CAMP's gallery guide educational programme for refugees. It should also be mentioned that I have attended, as a participant-observer, the openings of CAMP's inaugural exhibition and Temi Odumosu's *Threshold(s)*, as well as MTL Collective's *Decolonizing Assembly*. Furthermore, Nielsen and I have researched a broad range of texts, photographs and video-documentation published on CAMP's official website and conducted an in-depth interview on-site with Kuratorisk Aktion on December 13, 2019. We did not conduct interviews with the users of Trampoline House, because the ethical guidelines of the house state that permission to do so is only given if the interviewer works as a volunteer in the house for 20 to 25 hours a week for six months, as explained in Qadim 2020.

public(s).¹⁶ As the curators stated: ‘The objective is, through art, to stimulate greater understanding between displaced people and the communities that receive them – and to stimulate new visions for a more inclusive and equitable migration, refugee, and asylum policy.’¹⁷

Fig. 5: CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics, entrance to the exhibition space with the main room of Trampoline House visible to the right, 2017. Photo: Mads Holm. Courtesy: The CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics Archive.



This curatorial mission was effectively communicated right from the inaugural exhibition in April 2015, *Camp Life: Artistic Reflections on the Politics of Refugee and Migrant Detention*. It opened with Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali’s political fashion show *If the Sea Could Talk* (2014), a tribute to the thousands of migrants and refugees who have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, or died elsewhere, trying to reach safety. Here, the mixed audience of gallery goers, artists, intellectuals and activists, along with refugees, asylum seekers, regular users, volunteers and Trampoline House staff were confronted with a show presenting grand dresses sewn out of rice bags from United Nations refugee camps, men’s outfits combining satin and life

16 On sympathy as a precondition for solidarity, see Gilroy 2019, 1–14.

17 CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics, ‘About’, <http://campcph.org/about-camp> (accessed March 27, 2025). CAMP’s website has been preserved as an archive at <http://campcph.org/> (accessed March 27, 2025).

jackets and accessories made from barbed wire and bast. Mwicira-Mitali's thought-provoking use of the language of fashion conjured up the friction of multiple, conflicting associations, spanning not just the drama of rescue and survival but also the kinds of societal and environmental crises that necessitate humanitarian aid and refugee camps, the debilitating wait in asylum centres fenced-off from society, and the dream of a good life, safety and affluence, which may help refugees and asylum seekers overcome the ordeal they are going through (Hansen and Nielsen 2016, 36–37). Thus, the intimate connection between the mission of the art space and the purpose of the community centre was obvious from the start. The history of Trampoline House and its coming into being as a critical response to Danish refugee and asylum policies indicates that artists and curators played a significant role in how this unusual infrastructural combination of spaces, functions and objectives came about. As already mentioned, the initiative came from 'artists', and thanks to Tone Olaf Nielsen's participation, Kuratorisk Aktion was involved already in the early development of the house.

Camp Life marked the beginning of the centre's two-year exhibition programme, *Migration Politics*, which presented a series of six exhibitions (2015–2017) that were both locally relevant and internationally significant. The programme included a range of artistic responses to displacement, migratory routes, border politics, refugee and migrant detention, undocumented migration, deportation and visions for alternative migration and asylum policies (Hansen and Nielsen 2016, 19). The works were created by artists, artist groups and social networks that originated from many different countries, and which in many cases had firsthand experience of displacement, migration and asylum-seeking (Torp and Bonnén 2016, 7). This commitment to shedding light on the causes and consequences of forced displacement was also conveyed by the exhibition titles, and perhaps most trenchantly by the title of the international group show *We Shout and Shout, But No One Listens: Art from Conflict Zones* (2017), curated by Frederikke 'Fred' Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen.

In 2017, Kuratorisk Aktion produced its first pop-up project (with homeless migrants) in collaboration with the Copenhagen-based community radio station, The Bridge Radio, for the annual Roskilde Festival, in Denmark, one of the largest music festivals in Europe.¹⁸

18 For CAMP's project description, see 'The Bridge Radio at Roskilde Festival', CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics, <http://campcph.org/past/2962017> (accessed March 27, 2025). This project was later transformed into an exhibition/sound installation at CAMP where the event was named *Economy of Migrant Labor – For the Right to Work*. See 'Economy of Migrant Labor—for the Right to Work', CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics, <http://campcph.org/past/2292017> (accessed March 27, 2025).

Fig. 6: Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali's political fashion show *If the Sea Could Talk* (2014) presented at the opening of CAMP's inaugural exhibition, *Camp Life: Artistic Reflections on the Politics of Refugee and Migrant Detention*, curated by CAMP's co-founding directors Frederikke 'Fred' Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen, 2015. Photo: Alba Oren. Courtesy: The CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics Archive.



The year before, the collective had entered into an agreement with another major cultural institution when it 'exported' a constellation of three of its exhibitions to SMK, the National Gallery of Denmark, thereby reaching other audiences than those who found their way to Trampoline House. Besides the opening show, *Camp Life: Artistic Reflections on the Politics of Refugee and Migrant Detention*, the SMK exhibition comprised *The Dividing Line: Film and Performance about Border Control and Border Cross-*

ing (2016) and *From the Mountains to the Valleys, From the Deserts to the Seas: Journeys of Historical Uncertainty* (2015), a solo exhibition by Tiffany Chung (a Vietnamese American artist).

Fig. 7: Installation view of the group show We Shout and Shout, But No One Listens: Art from Conflict Zones, 2017, curated by CAMP's co-founding directors Frederikke 'Fred' Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen, with Gohar Dashti's photo series Today's Life and War, 2008 (wall) and Khaled Barakeh's installation Regarding the Pain of Others, 2013 (floor). Photo: Britta Thomsen. Courtesy: The CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics Archive.



In 2018, Kuratorisk Aktion initiated a new two-year exhibition programme, *State of Integration: Artistic Analyses of the Challenges of Coexistence* (2018–2020), which reflected three important changes in their curatorial practice. Firstly, there was a shift of emphasis away from the politics and experience of migration toward those of integration and other long-term effects of migration – in other words, to *postmigration*. Secondly, they entered into collaboration with internationally renowned figures such as the curator and art historian Temi Odumosu (from the UK but based in Sweden at the time) and the American visual culture theorist and activist Nicholas Mirzoeff. The second programme comprised a mixture of ambitious guest-curated group shows and small solo exhibitions in which

Kuratorisk Aktion spotlighted emerging practitioners, mostly with migrant or refugee experience. Thirdly, to further strengthen and develop their existing educational activities, Kuratorisk Aktion established CAMP Education!, a platform of knowledge dissemination geared towards producing educational material for school teachers and other educators as well as continuing the existing gallery guide education programme to enable asylum seekers, migrants, refugees and minority ethnic Danes to become part of CAMP's guide team.¹⁹ Overall, *State of Integration* can be seen as an emphatically local, context-sensitive use of curating as a flexible form of knowledge production that enables cultural producers to use different forms of public address and congregation.

The exhibitions presented within the framework of CAMP spanned a wide variety of formats, aesthetic sensibilities and modes of address. To give an impression of the curatorial breath of CAMP's programmes, I will home in on the two group exhibitions, *Decolonizing Appearance* and *Threshold(s)*, curated, respectively, by Odumosu and Mirzoeff as part of the *State of Integration* exhibition programme.

Curating as a politically mobilizing practice and poetics of relation

Thematically, Mirzoeff's *Decolonizing Appearance* (2018) focused on how appearance is used to classify, segregate and control human beings in today's colonially structured world to which migration is integral. It explored the violence and hierarchies of this regime and how to actively challenge its production of race as a sociopolitical category of distinction and discrimination (Ross 2022, 30). Through photography, video, installation and text-based work, the exhibition created constellations of art projects reflecting on the issue of appearance within the power matrix of 'the colonial'. For example, the video *The Gaze* (2018) by the Danish Trinidadian artist Jeannette Ehlers would confront visitors with a group of Black and Brown people, kneeling on one knee as a symbolic gesture against racism and racialization by 'the white gaze'. The majority of the performers were individuals applying for residence in Denmark, but the group also included the artist herself (T.O. Nielsen and Harrison 2018, 44–45). The dense coalitional formation of their almost motionless bodies, dressed in visually unifying black clothes, intensified the challenge of their steady collective gaze and embodied their claim for the right to dignifying representation. Other examples included Dread Scott's performance still *I Am Not a Man* (2004), which inverted the iconic 'I Am a Man' protest sign of the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Workers' strike in

19 (CAMP 2017, 16–17). See also 'Talking about Art', CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics, <http://campcph.org/guide-program> (accessed March 27, 2025), and 'Undervisningsmateriale' ('Material for education'), <http://campcph.org/undervisningsmateriale2020> (accessed March 27, 2025).

the US to comment critically on the limited advances of the civil rights movement in today's racialized societies, and Carl Pope's cluster of posters, *The Bad Air Smelled of Roses* (a continuous project that Pope began in 2004). Reflecting on various aspects of Blackness, the posters aimed to open new insights into the many meanings and functions of Blackness in society and human imagination.

Fig. 8: Installation view of the exhibition Decolonizing Appearance, 2018. Guest-curated by Nicholas Mirzoeff for CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics. From left to right: Jeannette Ehlers, The Gaze, 2018 (left); Marronage, Marronage #1-3, 2017 (centre); Carl Pope, The Bad Air Smelled of Roses, 2004–ongoing (right); and MTL Collective, Decolonizing Assembly, 2018 (ceiling). Photo: Mads Holm. Courtesy: The CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics Archive.



Decolonizing Appearance interrogated the power structures of appearance not only by presenting art projects in the exhibition space of CAMP but also through the conversations and discussions instigated by the projects, both those that occurred spontaneously in the gallery space – during guided tours, for example – and those which were curated. Mirzoeff and CAMP experimented with discursively oriented and activist approaches to curating in a series of exhibition-related events conducted in Trampoline House which enabled these politically mobilizing events to create *spillovers*, as Kuratorisk Aktion has termed it, into the social contact zone

of the community centre.²⁰ The most ambitious event was the *Decolonizing Assembly*, organized and led by Amin Husain and Nitasha Dhillon of the New York-based MTL Collective, which combines research and activism with artistic practice.²¹ Prior to the event, the collective had produced banners protesting against deportation with users of the community centre which were subsequently hung in Trampoline House and CAMP as a political and visual spillover of activity by the community to the gallery, and of artist engagement from the gallery to the community centre.

At the *Decolonizing Assembly*, MTL created a forum for asking politically mobilizing questions such as: How can the colonized have the right to look, the right to be seen – in short, the right to appear? What would happen when appearance is decolonized? What has to happen for decolonizing to take place where you live? The last question was emblematic of how MTL's assembly sought to address its public. The 'you' being addressed was a virtual 'you' that could be inhabited by persons with different positionalities. Crucially, on that particular day, it implicated a heterogeneous mix of people participating in the assembly on the history of colonialism and the current call for decolonization, including those who declared themselves as sympathizers, those critically inclined towards the activist approach of MTL Collective, and those situated somewhere in between these positions (Marronage 2019). MTL Collective's assembly thus anticipated and called forth a heterogeneous public of different national backgrounds and political positionalities in a way that resonated with many of the other components of the exhibition. What the participants had in common was a willingness to respond actively to the exhibition's proposition of how we are all entangled in the unfinished history of colonial relations and in racializing regimes of appearance, or as Michael Rothberg would probably say, how we are all implicated subjects (Rothberg 2019, 1 and 19). MTL Collective concluded the assembly by ensuring concrete action was taken within a week by appointing coordinators of a meeting for those who wanted to engage in decolonizing work, so that they could 'walk the talk' locally and collectively. *Decolonizing Appearance* thus represented a turn towards what the political theorist Oliver Marchart has termed 'activist art' and which he understands to be art that employs strategies of political activism in the attempt to stage counter-hegemonic struggles, leaving the art institution behind and forming new alliances of solidarity (Marchart 2019, 26).

20 The curatorial intention of creating *spillovers* between CAMP and Trampoline House is mentioned in the interview with Kuratorisk Aktion on December 13, 2019.

21 T.O. Nielsen and Harrison 2018, 54–55, 65–67. CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics, 'Decolonizing Appearance', <http://campcph.org/past/2192018>, and 'Decolonizing Assembly', <http://campcph.org/events/2392018> (accessed March 27, 2025).

Fig. 9: Installation view of the exhibition *Threshold(s)*, 2019–2020. Guest-curated by Temi Odumosu for CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics. From left to right: Michelle Eistrup, *BeLONGING Vexillum*, 2019 (left); and Luanda Carneiro Jacoel, *Kalunga Unspoken*, 2019 (floor and ceiling). Photo: Mads Holm. Courtesy: The CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics Archive.



Marchart distinguishes *activist art* from *critical art* – that is, art that seeks to critique and to instigate hegemonic shifts of critical practices from a position within the very structures and constrictions of art institutions. In contradistinction to activist artists, critical artists consider these institutions to be platforms for intervening into dominant discourses, or, in Marchart's words, 'potentially powerful *counterhegemonic* machines whose symbolic efficacy must not be underestimated' (Marchart 2019, 26). This category offers a more accurate description of the type of criticality and aesthetics represented in Temi Odumosu's *Threshold(s)* (2019–2020). This exhibition, with five Nordic artists of colour, explored female experiences of displacement and exile, in particular how memories and the residual effects (and affects) of colonialism 'travel' with migrants or are transferred intergenerationally as 'post-memory' – an embodied and also mediated heritage that crosses national and temporal boundaries to inhabit contemporary bodies, identities, languages, cultures and everyday life (Hirsch 2008). In *Threshold(s)*, the emphasis was on neither the journey nor the arrival but on the state of being in-between polarities and what it entails to produce critical art from that positionality, fuelled by the dynamics of postcolonial agony, emotional ambivalence and complex diasporic relations to places both in and beyond the Nordic countries. As Odumosu explained in the

catalogue, the exhibition was an invitation to consider 'how a modern body can also be a colonial document' and to explore 'the politics and poetics of relation' (Odumosu 2020, 7). In this case, the institutional platform of the gallery served as a 'counterhegemonic machine' (Marchart 2019, 26), providing female artists of colour with the necessary public space and visibility for their critique of 'inter-racial' relations in Scandinavia to enter into the public discourse on racialization, racism and racist violence in which the local Danish problems are usually minimized and their very existence sometimes denied.

Odumosu's objectives mark the other end of the curatorial spectrum at CAMP. As the art historian Mathias Danbolt has pointed out, curatorial modes of address can condition and produce alternative forms of publics (Danbolt 2019, 65). The objective of Mirzoeff's confrontational address was to decolonize and inspire anti-racist activist mobilization, although the Danish-based decolonial feminist collective Marronage has attacked his exhibition for merely 'decolonizing appearance' for 'the white gaze', as the majority of art-interested visitors to the gallery were likely to be white Danes.²² Conversely, the intended public produced by Odumosu's sensuous, evocative, but not any the less critical exhibition address was, I contend, a mixed audience. The exhibition's 'entangled herstories' invited empathic, bodily responses from everyone and offered a plurality of intersecting points of identification for non-white and female visitors (Odumosu 2020, 4). An emblematic example is Swedish-Ethiopian Saba Bereket Persson's *THE UNSPOKEN: About Unconscious Discrimination* (2015/2019), an installation of mannequins carrying costumes covered with sacks heavy from the unknown burdens they both concealed and exposed. The centrepiece of the installation was a video of dancer Mpululu Ntuye dressed in one of the costumes, her contorted movements giving bodily expression to Persson's experience of living in Scandinavia with a different skin colour than white, accompanied by a

22 Marronage 2019, 117. Marronage understands 'the white colonial mentality' to be integral to 'the white gaze' as a 'pervasive' phenomenon that has surfaced in recent curatorial initiatives taken by Danish art institutions, among others CAMP. Unfortunately, Marronage does not unpack their concept of *the white gaze*. This scopic practice and mental phenomenon is only evocatively linked by a discursive chain of equivalence to '*white fragility*: white people's reduced ability to tolerate racial criticism as a result of their racial privileges' (Marronage 2019, 101; emphasis in the original text). Moreover, Marronage also fails to mention that Kuratorisk Aktion has always sought to transform audience relations by inviting the users of Trampoline House to CAMP's events. As Frederikke 'Fred' Hansen explained in an email to Sabine Dahl Nielsen and the author on September 4, 2020: 'We have always done a lot to make our events open and accessible, and the users of the house have been a significant target group. When it was not possible to schedule CAMP events for days when the house was open and people from the camps [that is, asylum centres near Copenhagen] got tickets through their internship in the house, we would either rent a bus or compensate people for the cost of tickets, so they had the opportunity to attend.'

voiceover that summarizes the results of a scientific survey of common prejudices about Black people in Sweden.

Like *Decolonizing Appearance*, *Threshold(s)* included the staging of discursive and artistic events in Trampoline House. The most important one was the opening. As usual on Fridays, Trampoline House was crowded with regular users. It is no coincidence that the *Threshold(s)* catalogue includes snapshots documenting the conviviality, the mingling and the mixed community. As the evening's attractions included not only the weekly community dinner followed by a party with DJs and bar, but also CAMP's opening event, they were joined by artists and exhibition goers. Navigating through the hallway where children were playing, the newly arrived would pass the kitchen, the smell of freshly cooked food anticipating the pleasure of eating the treats cooked by Sisters' Cuisine. They would also pass by the open door to the meeting room, where the Korean-Danish artist and civil rights activist Yong Sun Gullach's performance was to take place, before entering the large multipurpose room, the heart and hearth of Trampoline House that brought the community together. Among other things, this space had a bar and an area with café tables where people could gather to talk to friends and strangers, play chess, and later that night have dinner. This was also where Odumosu gave her opening speech, and Maria Thandie and Deodato Siquir performed Afro-fusion music, which spread a meditative atmosphere and resonated with the introspective atmosphere of the exhibition. Although the music was soothing, it did not serve the purpose of repressing frictions and politics but, rather, extended the reparative work performed by Odumosu's exhibition into Trampoline House. Just before the live music started, Tone Olaf Nielsen announced the arrival of the bus that was to take parents and children who had come from the Sjælsmark deportation centre back to the centre. If people did not know already that the rejected asylum seekers living under appalling conditions at Sjælsmark were among those who used the house as a brief respite from camp life, they would have learnt about it at the opening event. The encounters between asylum seekers, local Copenhageners and the professional art crowd were obviously not devoid of friction, but it is remarkable that CAMP and Trampoline House managed to facilitate the interweaving of such a heterogeneous mix of people.²³ Odumosu's exhibition address, with its affective and empathic ways of engaging with the 'other' as a human being, was finely tuned to connect to and even blend into this local micro-community. CAMP's creation of such spaces of coming together can be seen as a response to the need to imagine public spaces anew as, what I term, *postmigrant public spaces*.

23 Trampoline House, with its constant coming and going of people of radically different sociocultural backgrounds and its embedment in a cultural climate of 'hostipality', was obviously not devoid of social frictions either and had to continuously find ways to negotiate difference; see Siim and Meret 2020, 44–50.

To conclude, what *Decolonizing Appearance* and *Threshold(s)* had in common, despite their quite different curatorial approaches, was the desire to generate a postmigrant transversal politics that defended the political and cultural rights of refugees and asylum seekers, and which also defied racism. As explained in the Introduction, the term *transversal politics* signals crucial links between political, ethical and artistic agency. My use of the term is indebted to Nira Yuval-Davis's sociological understanding of transversal politics as a feminist, intersectional and transnational theory and practice of democratic solidarity building and conflict resolution, and to Marsha Meskimmon's inspiring extension of Yuval-Davis's concept to the sphere of art. Meskimmon's book *Transnational Feminisms, Transversal Politics and Art: Entanglements and Intersections* offers a theoretical sensibility which not only facilitates an aggregated analysis of sameness and difference that complicates established assumptions about power and domination, but it also examines how intersectionality can 'create kin' and 'affective coalitions' (Meskimmon 2020, 8) – for instance, among the asylum seekers, refugees and members of the host community gathering at Trampoline House.

To better understand how solidarity, collaboration and coalitions were forged in Trampoline House, CAMP and at documenta fifteen, as well as in the art project *100% FREMMED?* ('100% FOREIGN?') discussed in Chapter 4, it is helpful to trace the feminist conception of transversal politics back to its origins in the peacebuilding work of the feminist activist movement Women in Black in Bologna, from the 1970s to the 1990s.²⁴ The group used the term 'transversalism' about the method they used in their work with conflicting national groups – Serbs and Croats, Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women – to find a fair solution to the conflicts. Crucially, as explained by Yuval-Davis, the boundaries between the participants were not perceived simplistically as if they were merely representatives of their groupings; their different positioning and background were 'recognised and respected'. Using the key words 'rooting' and 'shifting', the Bologna feminists worked from the idea that each participant would bring with her 'the rooting in her own membership and identity' but would also try 'to shift in order to put herself in a situation of exchange with women who have different membership and identity'. In other words, '[t]he transversal coming together should not be with the members of the other group "en bloc" but with those who, in their different rooting, share compatible values and goals to one's own' (Yuval-Davis 1994, 192–193; see also Yuval-Davis 1999). In this *intersectional* understanding, transversal politics bring together people who position

24 Meskimmon observes that feminist transversal politics developed concurrently with the philosophical exploration of transversal politics in the writings of Félix Guattari, Giles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, who sought to describe a similar politics based on non-domination, solidarity, self-organization and a radical transformation of subjectivity (Meskimmon 2020, 6–7).

themselves differently (socially, culturally, politically, artistically, etc.) around a common cause, and through their mutual listening, dialogue and negotiation it becomes possible to forge solidarities and coalitions. The postmigrant transversal politics engendered by Trampoline House, CAMP and the 100% *FREMMED?* project could be described as postmigrant because of their commitment to a common cause – the struggle *against* monocultural nationalism and the EU’s practices of migration containment, and *for* equality and multiple, ‘intersectional’ belonging – two basic tenets of postmigrant thought. These tenets are also core values of CAMP and Trampoline House, but as their work centred on people who do not have formal citizenship in Denmark – people who are citizens in the making, so to speak – their transversal politics foregrounded the struggle for the right to asylum and for basic cultural rights, i.e. what this book terms *cultural citizenship*.

CAMP’s off-site events and collaboration with larger institutions

Already, from early on, Kuratorisk Aktion combined exhibitions at CAMP and various kinds of exhibition-related activities extending into Trampoline House, with the creation of platforms for political interventions at multiple other locations, a practice epitomized by Trampoline House’s presence at documenta fifteen in 2022. An early example is Casteaway Souls of Sjælsmark’s contribution to the group exhibition *The Dividing Line* (2016). Here, the transnational group of rejected asylum seekers from Sjælsmark presented a performance in connection with the opening of the exhibition, and conducted so-called ‘meetings of mobilization’ at CAMP, where the harsh conditions of rejected asylum seekers were debated and collective calls for action were articulated (Hansen and Nielsen 2016, 14–15, 122–125). These meetings resulted in participants contributing to the public campaign For the Right to Have Rights, which demanded an end to forced deportations, the closure of asylum camps, an end to the criminalization of migrants and asylum seekers, and the right to move and to stay. CAMP’s activities were thus spatially dispersed, and a multiplicity of platforms were activated over time by means of educational, activist and exhibition-based projects.

CAMP also frequently shifted their activities from the domain of the gallery space to that of the discursive. Such discursive programming could include, for example, talks, workshops, seminars, and guided tours of the exhibitions conducted by users of Trampoline House. Like documenta fifteen, CAMP’s various exhibition-related activities involved participants from a wide spectrum of disciplines. Thus, the discursive programming at CAMP can be said to have transgressed disciplinary boundaries in seeking to set up collaborative platforms for wide-reaching, transculturally networked and cross-disciplinary ways of sharing and producing knowledge related to contemporary migration politics – in other words,

generative infrastructures. As Chapter 3 will demonstrate, Trampoline House's contribution to documenta fifteen was, in many ways, a continuation not only of activities developed in Copenhagen but also of the collaborative curatorial approach that Frederikke 'Fred' Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen had developed at CAMP together with the art space's many partners and volunteers.

In regard to documenta fifteen, it is of note that CAMP had already realized events at large-scale art institutions in Denmark, such as SMK (the National Gallery of Denmark) and the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art.²⁵ Although CAMP's curatorial team has reflected explicitly on the potential dangers of being co-opted into such trans-institutional collaborations, it continued to operate within these museological contexts, partly because the collaborations provided much-needed possibilities of funding – as did documenta fifteen²⁶ – and because they enabled CAMP to reach more extensive audiences, thus potentially broadening the scope of CAMP's curatorially staged political interventions.²⁷ As Sabine Dahl Nielsen and I have argued elsewhere, the effects of these trans-institutional collaborations were limited. CAMP's presence at SMK and the Louisiana Museum did not impact the institutional practices of these museums in any substantial way. Producing such counter-hegemonic effects would have necessitated long-term engagements as well as negotiations that addressed the power relations between the institutions and the small-scale art space more actively. This reservation aside, the collaborations evidently led to new audiences being exposed to CAMP's curatorial projects. The collaboration with SMK also enabled the free transfer of museum visitors to the lesser-known exhibition site of CAMP, and vice versa, in connection with singular events such as the opening of *Migration Politics: Three CAMP Exhibitions* (S.D. Nielsen and Petersen 2021, 87). The platforms and resources of established institutions can also be used strategically to amplify effects in the art field and

25 Examples thereof include *Migration Politics: Three CAMP exhibitions at the SMK* (2016) and *Spaces of Disappearance*, a literature and film event at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark, September 9, 2019.

26 In addition to Danish private foundations and donors, the 2022 programme of Weekend Trampoline House was supported by documenta fifteen and the Goethe Institute. See 'Those Who Make It Possible', <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/sponsors> (accessed March 27, 2025).

27 These issues – the potential dangers of becoming co-opted when engaging with mainstream art museums; the pragmatic necessity of securing funding in this way to run an alternative, small-scale institution such as CAMP; as well as the political importance of trying to reach new publics by means of cross-institutional collaborations – have been discussed at various public events, for example when Tone Olaf Nielsen presented CAMP's curatorial practice at the conference *Politics: Orientations and Possibilities of the Present*, Copenhagen University, October 30, 2019. The advantages and disadvantages of engaging with large-scale institutions such as SMK and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art were also touched upon in the above-mentioned interview with Kuratorisk Aktion on December 13, 2019.

to disseminate political critique. This was an important lesson that Trampoline House learned from its participation in *documenta fifteen*, and it suggests why Weekend Trampoline House was among the contributors to the group exhibition *Non Performing*, organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde the following year (2023).²⁸

Postmigrant public spaces

Although CAMP entered into collaboration with major museums, the majority of CAMP's discursive events took place at Trampoline House itself, to ensure a close connection with the regular activities of the community centre and its postmigrant micro-community. This constant interweaving of CAMP's activities and those of Trampoline House played a pivotal role in the curatorial production of what I have termed *postmigrant public spaces*. CAMP's activities materialized in both physical and media spaces and comprised various kinds of aesthetic, social and intellectual participation, public discourse, activism, political protest and acts of solidarity. Taking the spatio-temporal ramifications and the functional diversification into account, I define public space broadly. I call the kind of public spaces generated by CAMP *postmigrant*, to indicate that they are plural and sometimes conflictual domains of human encounter, shaped under the impact of migration and by forms of nationalism which have gained ground under the combined pressures of global capitalism, increasing economic inequality and the rising numbers of migrants and refugees.²⁹ Unlike the notion of the nation as a public sphere, the designator *postmigrant* foregrounds transcultural entanglement, which is a further reason why this concept is apt for describing the particularity of CAMP as a public art space existing within a community centre that is itself a postmigrant public space, albeit of a different kind.

As explained in Chapter 1, I build on Michael Warner's argument that a public 'exists *by virtue of being addressed*'. With regard to CAMP and Trampoline House, it is significant that Warner underscores that a public, in the modern sense of the word, also embraces strangers and outsiders – in fact, anyone who feels that the topic of the address 'speaks' to them. I prefer the term *public space* to *public sphere*: firstly, because I also draw on Chantal Mouffe's notion of democratic public spaces as inherently conflictual spaces; and, secondly, because I am concerned with a specific art space and local community, not the public sphere as a wide-ranging communication framework. In short, this chapter explores postmigrant public spaces as ambiguous,

28 <https://samtidkunst.dk/en/event/non-performing/> (accessed March 27, 2025).

29 For more on 'global capitalism', see Cole 2018.

social and discursive spaces where frictions and conviviality coexist (Mouffe 2007a, 2007b).

According to the proponents of postmigrant thinking, it is not only immigrants and their descendants but also the well-established 'elites' who are expected to adjust to and integrate themselves into the new pluralist structure of postmigrant societies (Foroutan et al. 2015, 3). This aspect of the postmigrant reconstitution of society and the social imaginary came to the fore in Trampoline House and CAMP. As multicultural and multilingual environments that facilitate face-to-face encounters between displaced people and the receiving communities, they testified to the fact that postmigrant public spaces can never be confined to 'the nation' as a public sphere. Such spaces always exist in a dynamic, transcultural relationship with people, discourses and cultures that hail from places beyond the nation-state.

CAMP's curatorial activities aimed at generating *publics* rather than audiences of art spectators, although the exhibitions also did just this. The ambition to produce publics and to 'activate moments of communal publicness' was also evident in the way in which Kuratorisk Aktion worked from a position of embeddedness and solidarity (O'Neill and Doherty 2011, 12). They consciously orchestrated CAMP's activities in Trampoline House to attract and interweave different kinds of people. In doing so, CAMP succeeded in engendering postmigrant public spaces which were relatively open forums, providing the indefinite publics that emerged within them with a place to thematize, discuss and act on issues related to forced migration, asylum seeking and integration, as well as exploring how art can stimulate engagements with these issues and foster solidarity among people.

How did CAMP negotiate latent conflicts and enhance the potential for bridge-building among the heterogeneous mix of individuals who constituted the gallery's public(s)? As already suggested in the outline of CAMP's activities above, the public spaces generated at CAMP had a distinctive local quality, since the centre's regular visitors lived mainly in the Copenhagen area. CAMP's strategy of public engagement thus relied on the possibility of face-to-face interaction and on addressing, in a politically active way, migration and integration issues of interest to the refugees and asylum seekers of Trampoline House, who remained the primary *intended* audience for CAMP's exhibitions despite the fact that it was mostly the art audience that set foot in the exhibition space. Nevertheless, the insistence on catering for the Trampoline House community is significant. Although it proved difficult to entice the majority of Trampoline House users to enter the gallery's 'other space', CAMP found ways to reach out to them and to get different groups to mingle. This was done by consciously seeking to present art projects that did not exclude the users of Trampoline House due to language barriers or excessive use of codifications specifically related to the artworld. As Kuratorisk Aktion stated, 'We look for artworks that do not involve too much language and that are not too conceptual, because we're not just talking to a professional art audience, we also address people in the house who

have no training or maybe a different training in understanding contemporary art. While English is the most commonly used language in the international art world, this might be only the fourth or fifth language to some of our audiences.' (Qadim 2020, 5)

The creation of a heterogeneous contact zone where Trampoline House users and art audiences could intermingle was also achieved by launching the educational programme, Talking about Art. By means of this programme, members of the Trampoline House community who were interested in learning how to become gallery guides were recruited and participated in self-organized workshops; they studied the exhibitions about to be mounted, and co-authored guide manuscripts that they subsequently performed in duos throughout the periods of the exhibitions.³⁰ In this way, encounters were staged within the exhibition space that effectively challenged the binaries of inclusion and exclusion, guest and host. Last but not least, getting different groups to come into contact within the curatorial framework of CAMP was made possible by co-organizing performances, film screenings, public debates and opening events in the familiar environment of Trampoline House, which its users regarded as 'their' space.³¹ These events offered platforms for democratic participation, aesthetic experience and raising and sharing sensibilities in discussions (or listening to discussions), as well as for informal conversations and sociability. Thus, the art events in Trampoline House, and the guided tours of the exhibitions given by refugees and asylum seekers, constituted the crucial contact zones where art and curating facilitated transcultural exchange between refugees, asylum seekers, local Copenhageners and (inter)national art audiences.

Returning to the question of how CAMP imagined public space otherwise – that is, as a contact zone for local Copenhageners (privileged) and asylum seekers (sub-altern) – it is important to stress that this contact zone was not primarily a space for rational, critical debate, although the premises sometimes fulfilled this purpose. Rather, it was a space of coming together, which made possible intersubjective encounters that would leave affective traces, provoke reflection and might even sow the seeds of sympathy, solidarity and pro-asylum seeker and anti-racist activism. Drawing on Jürgen Habermas's, Chantal Mouffe's and Michael Warner's theorization of the public sphere, art historian and curator Alpesh Kantilal Patel submits that there is a need for 'a public sphere (whether agonistic or counter)' which assigns a defining part to embodied, affective sociability in public dialogue. Patel suggests that in such spaces of coming together, the artistic practices (and, it could be added, the curatorial practices by which artworks are usually mediated) 'can be envisioned as

30 For more information on the Talking about Art programme, see Qadim 2020, 7.

31 The here-mentioned challenges of enticing Trampoline House users to enter CAMP's exhibition space, and vice versa, have been reflected upon by Kuratorisk Aktion in an interview with Sabine Dahl Nielsen and the author on December 13, 2019.

making felt – if only transient – connections among different, perhaps conflicting, counterpublics or subjects' (Patel 2017, 173).

Although CAMP's discursive events had a strong oral and local place-bound component, they were also communicated and expanded through use of the centre's website, exhibition catalogues (both printed and online), social media, and, sometimes, news media. In order to better grasp the implications of Kuratorisk Aktion's work, however, we need to look beyond CAMP. In 2011, Paul O'Neill and Claire Doherty identified a 'durational approach' in public art, based on case studies of temporally extended art projects that prioritize spatial and public forms of expression and knowledge production, and develop methods of working which dissolve the boundaries between artistic and curatorial modes of thinking, researching and organizing (O'Neill and Doherty 2011, 10–11). Because of their long time span, observes O'Neill, such enduring projects engender 'a complex set of interactions'. This suggests that they are capable of creating and sustaining 'a certain connectivity' among their participants and publics, that is, a deeper form of engagement that 'aspires to create an ethos of patience, perseverance and attentiveness' at odds with the usual round of globalized exhibition-making and the fleeting encounters between audiences and artworks in transit between venues (O'Neill 2011, 51, 55). As Andrea Baldini submits, 'enduring artworks' – and curatorial projects, it might be added – 'are important since they provide the opportunity to engage members of public-art publics in a more sustained and intense way, thus promoting more structured forms of discussion' (Baldini 2019, 19). As a long-term thematic curatorial project, CAMP operated along similar lines, generating different and repeated forms of coming-together which engaged many different actors in 'an exchange of ideas as part of an initiated process of potential transformation' (O'Neill 2011, 55). Such open-ended processes permitted conflicts and tensions to surface, but also allowed for the building of solidarity and what Foroutan has termed *postmigrant alliances*, that is, strategic bridge building between migrant and non-migrant actors who pursue a common goal.³² By bringing together different people based on a shared experience (for example, of migration, racism or discrimination), or with a common ethical stance on migration and diversity, postmigrant alliances enable new interest-based relationships to develop 'beyond homogenous peer groups'. By blurring the boundaries, these alliances between people of different heritage and citizenship status have the potential to restructure the understanding of identity and belonging, because 'other nonethnic principles are promoted in order to undermine the legitimacy of ethnic, national, or racial boundaries' (Andreas Wimmer, quoted in Foroutan 2019a, 199).

32 For Foroutan's definitions of solidarity and postmigrant alliances, and how they relate to one another, see Foroutan 2019a, 198–202.

To conclude, the participation of CAMP's audiences and the users of Trampoline House diverged from that of traditional visually oriented spectatorship and, instead, approximated a form of civil practice enacted by individuals as citizens or denizens. The durational character of this small-scale institution's curatorial engagement with migration, its long-lasting commitment to the development of solidarity, accountability and sustainable institutional structures, including the setting up of so-called support systems for participants, plays an important part in this shift. It enabled CAMP to experiment with varying forms of public address and congregation embedded in politically engaged community work, sometimes linked to activism and strategies of care. Crucially, it was the relationship between the different projects and events in the same place across time that enabled the activities to cohere synergistically, as their effects accumulated and produced transitory constituencies which supported CAMP's continual work towards more equitable migration, refugee and asylum policies.

3. Building collective infrastructures and strategies of care at documenta fifteen

Hostility towards 'strangers' at documenta fifteen

'I was a stranger and you took me in'. So reads the inscription on the Nigerian American artist Olu Oguibe's 16.3-meter-high concrete obelisk *Das Flüchtlinge und Fremdlinge Monument* ('Monument for Strangers and Refugees') installed in Kassel's Königplatz square on the occasion of the mega-exhibition documenta 14, held in Kassel and Athens in 2017. This Biblical inscription (from the Book of Matthew 25:35) was written in gold on each of its four sides and in four different languages: German, English, Arabic and Turkish – the four languages most commonly spoken in Kassel. At the time, the monument was perceived by many to be both a call to action and a homage to German hospitality towards refugees. Communicating a pro-refugee message from the city's main square, the obelisk soon became controversial as it stirred up the deep divisions over the country's refugee policy. When the exhibition ended and the city of Kassel initiated a fundraising campaign to purchase the work so that it could remain in the city, politicians from the local branch of the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland ('Alternative for Germany') contested the acquisition. Oguibe's monument was vandalized in January 2018, purchased by the city in June 2018 and dismantled in October 2018 without the artist's consent. The dispute was finally resolved in 2019 when the monument was relocated and reinstalled in Treppenstraße (Petersen 2023, 154–156; Ross 2022, 280; Brown 2018, n.p.), a centrally located, pedestrian stairway leading past the building, which, in 2022, became Ruruhaus – the headquarters and social hub of documenta fifteen. From there it leads on to the Friedrichsplatz square where the main venues of Documenta are located: the Fridericianum, Documenta Halle and the square itself which Documenta uses as a key venue for art in public space as well as an open air service area with street food vendors catering for the thousands of daily visitors to this mega event. Christine Ross has drawn attention to the counter-monumentality of *Das Fremdlinge und Flüchtlinge Monument* and the way it disrupts the standard temporal codes of monuments as historical markers. Oguibe's obelisk does not so much commemorate the past as uses the past as a foil for the ongoing

urgency of the present, with thousands of refugees and migrants from Africa and central and western Asia arriving on Europe's doorstep every year. Its meaning thus fluctuates depending on changes to German and European border and migration policies (Ross 2022, 283). The obelisk's counter-monumentality is also palpable at the linguistic level, as the personal pronouns (*I, you and me*) are what linguists term 'shifters': placeholders whose referent is determined by the situational and relational context of their use, which means that the addresser and the addressee could be anyone. Intending the monument to be a homage to both refugees and the host community, Oguibe thus emphasized that welcoming strangers and refugees involves the development of a *reciprocal* relationship between guest and host, based on an interplay between hospitality towards and gratitude from strangers (Oguibe 2017, 0:40–2:00 min.).

Fig. 10: Olu Oguibe, Das Fremdlinge und Flüchtlinge Monument ('Monument for Strangers and Refugees'), 2017. Concrete, 3 × 3 × 16.3 metres. Shown here in its permanent location in Treppenstraße, Kassel. Photograph: Anne Ring Petersen.



When inaugurated in 2017, *Das Fremdlinge und Flüchtlinge Monument* was likely to be read in the context of the widespread hospitality of Germans welcoming refugees in 2015–2016. Apprehended in 2022, when documenta fifteen took place, the inscription could be read as a questioning of hosting practices in the period after the COVID-19 pandemic when the European border and migration regime had become more restrictive, and hospitality had been not exactly ‘waning’, as Ross posits (Ross 2022, 283), but was more unevenly distributed than before with the arrival of millions of forcibly displaced Ukrainians since the beginning of Russia’s military invasion in February 2022 – with some 7.9 million people finding refuge across Europe over the following ten months (UNHCR 2023, 4). As Ross perceptively observes, the gratitude expressed in the inscription ‘I was a stranger and you took me in’ twists into worry and questions such as ‘What and when is hosting? Who is hosting? Why and how to host?’ (Ross 2022, 283). The fact that Oguibe’s monumental reminder of the ethics of hospitality was originally commissioned for documenta 14 points to Documenta’s institutional role of hosting artists and artworks from near and far to stage an encounter with what is still unknown and strange, and sometimes even uncomfortable or disturbing to confront, at one of the world’s most influential contemporary art events.

While Chapter 2 examined the history and methods of Trampoline House, a welcoming community centre for asylum seekers and local citizens in Denmark with the art space CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics nested within it, Chapter 3 explores the extraordinary story of how this local Copenhagen-based community centre became a key participant in the fifteenth edition of Documenta, curated by the Indonesian collective ruangrupa. Trampoline House’s contribution to documenta fifteen in 2022 resonates with Oguibe’s obelisk, not only because of the shared commitment to an ethics of hospitality and social ‘inclusion’ of refugees but also because any analytical engagement with these thought-provoking projects must consider their institutional embedment. Like the monument, towering over the shops and restaurants lining Treppenstraße, Trampoline House engaged with refugeehood and the ambiguous relationship between guest and host – Derrida’s *hospitality* – thereby spotlighting the tensions between refugeehood and hosting. Moreover, being a community centre (albeit one that had operated in proximity to artistic and curatorial practices), Trampoline House did not fit Western definitions of art, but echoed, rather, the programmatic message on Daniella F. Praptono’s documenta fifteen poster at the entrance to the Fridericianum: ‘... this question (where is the art?) is really happening ...’. As the art historian Judith Elisabeth Weiss noted in her essay on documenta fifteen as a ‘collective artwork’, the question of where the art is, is an existential one in the socially, politically and economically deprived ‘global South’ where formal education is often lacking and the stuff of life is more important than aesthetics (J.E. Weiss 2022, 66–67). Trampoline House’s

contribution testified to the fact that this also holds true for asylum seekers and other deprived and marginalized groups in the 'global North'.

Although CAMP's founders, Kuratorisk Aktion, did not participate in the capacity of a curatorial team, both Frederikke 'Fred' Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen were involved in curating documenta fifteen but at different levels of the organization. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Hansen became a member of ruangrupa's five-headed Artistic Team, with curatorial co-responsibility for the event and for extending invitations to individual artists, the so-called *lumbung* artists. Nielsen remained in her position as programme director for Trampoline House and co-coordinated its participation in documenta fifteen, together with an Artistic Team from the House.

The House itself had closed in 2020 due to financial difficulties but struggled on in a scaled-down version as Weekend Trampoline House (see Chapter 2). Throughout 2022, Weekend Trampoline House was given refuge on Fridays and Saturdays in the congregation rooms of the Absalon Church in the Copenhagen district of Vesterbro, which also hosted the preparatory workshops for documenta fifteen organized by Trampoline House's Artistic Team. Nielsen has explained the decision to participate in documenta fifteen despite the closure of the house thus: there might not be a house, but there was an 'ecosystem' and all the experience the community had harvested over the years, as well as methods and values that could be shared. Yet they faced an immense task. In the midst of mourning the loss of the house and seeing its supporting social structures fall apart, they 'had to start from scratch' and build a new infrastructure for Trampoline House's activities and for its Artistic Team to continue their work (Alberani, Mir, and Nielsen 2022, 13:30–16:00 min.)

In addition to enabling them to continue their work, documenta fifteen offered Trampoline House's Artistic Team a platform for sharing their history, knowledge, methods and political critique. Chapter 3 follows up on the case study in Chapter 2 by examining how Trampoline House became part of documenta fifteen's huge transnational experiment in transversal politics and transformative collectivity and worldmaking. More specifically, the chapter analyses their contribution to the exhibition as well as Trampoline House's collaboration with one of the other participating collectives, Project Art Works from the UK, on further developing their creative strategies of care in workshops. Reviewing Trampoline House's presence at documenta fifteen also allows me to pursue, in a transnational context, the key question of how artistic and curatorial practices can make refugees and migrants come into appearance and claim 'voice', how they can contribute to an interrogation of exclusionary asylum policies and help transform understandings about who is a citizen and who belongs to the community. Chapter 3 will use an infrastructural lens to explore the question of how art institutional platforms and curating can help foster a transnationally interconnected epistemic community. To borrow two keywords from documenta fifteen's curatorial terminology, in this particular case the postmigrant epistemic community could be further characterized as *inter-lokal*

(inter-local) and based on the principle of *lumbung*, i.e. a form of worldmaking and community-building based on the collective sharing of resources and knowledge in solidarity.

Infrastructures of selection, redistribution and participation

As one of the 14 collectives invited by ruangrupa to develop the idea and practice of *lumbung* over the long haul, Trampoline House joined the circle of so-called *lumbung* members.¹ In the official documenta fifteen vocabulary, the transnational network constituted by these 14 collectively organized projects and organizations with roots in art was designated *Lumbung Inter-Lokal* ('Glossary', Asvestopoulos 2022, cover, n.p.). Both the *lumbung* members and the *lumbung* artists, i.e. the groups and individuals who were invited to share resources and make art together during documenta fifteen, were asked to extend the spirit of collectivity and institutional hospitality by inviting more guests, bringing the total number of participants close to 1500 – predominantly recruited from outside major cultural and economic centres, and mostly based in the so-called global South.

What was initially celebrated by some critics as a bold curatorial approach – handing over the responsibility for one of the world's most influential art exhibitions to an Indonesian collective that voluntarily relinquished control by introducing a procedure of snowball sampling that gave the *lumbung* members and *lumbung* artists curatorial co-responsibility for recruiting more participants from their networks – became an object of critique when documenta fifteen stirred up a rampant anti-Semitism controversy. This was largely due to the fact that the radical decentralization of responsibility resulted in the curatorial collective (ruangrupa and its Artistic Team) losing the overview of the countless individual works and contributions. The downside of the curatorial snowball approach raised deeper questions of the suitability (and lack of adaptability) of the infrastructures of major Euro-American art institutions and biennials confronted with curatorial and artistic practices that deviate from the familiar forms pivoting on the individual authorship (and responsibility) of the *auteur* curator and what art historian Karen van den Berg describes as 'the author-centred Western art star machinery'. As van den Berg observes, the infrastructures of the global artworld were 'inadequately

1 These were Britto Arts Trust, FAFSWAG, Fondation Festival Sur Le Niger, Gudskul, INLAND, Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt, Jatiwangi art Factory, Más Arte Más Acción, OFF-Biennale Budapest, Project Art Works, The Question of Funding, Trampoline House, Wajukuu Art Project, ZK/U – Center for Art and Urbanistics. See <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-network/> (accessed March 27, 2025).

prepared for the consequences and contradictions' that ruangrupa's 'rhizomatic, collective mode of production and presentation' entailed (K.v.d. Berg 2023, n.p.).

What held *documenta fifteen's* heterogeneous mix of people and practices together was the overarching idea of *lumbung*. Derived from an agrarian term for a communal rice barn in Bahasa, Indonesia, where farmers share harvest surplus and everyone contributes what they can spare, *lumbung* is a word that denotes both a material architectural structure and a social infrastructure: people as infrastructure. I take the phrase 'people as infrastructure' from the article of the same name by the urbanist AbdouMaliq Simone, who writes about economic collaboration between people living in the ruined inner city of Johannesburg. Based on a detailed ethnographic study, Simone demonstrates how residents of limited means have used their ability to engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons and practices in flexible ways to develop 'a highly urbanized social infrastructure' that introduces a kind of provisional regularity and establishes a 'platform providing for and reproducing life in the city'. In Simone's understanding, the city's infrastructure of people consists of these flexible and often mobile 'conjunctions' between people, objects, spaces and practices. There is much to suggest that *documenta fifteen* was designed to work in a similar way, i.e. as an infrastructure of people (Simone 2004, 407–408).

The curatorial studies scholar Ronald Kolb has argued that ruangrupa's practices and methods are 'commons-driven', as they prefer doing to contemplating and representing. This preference shifts 'the power of representation' away from the tendency of exhibitions to establish a certain understanding of the world through an 'objective' or object-based public display, and to a more performative and participatory mode of exhibition-making that foregrounds interpersonal exchange in enclosed contact zones. More than anything, ruangrupa operated simultaneously on several levels: regionally across Indonesia, locally in Kassel, and inter-locally in the sense that the invited collectives interacted with each other in 'Lumbung Inter-Lokal' (ruangrupa 2022a, 16). Kolb concludes that ruangrupa's approach to commoning practices depended on the establishment of 'a network of networks embedded through local practices in a trans-local network' on a scale 'unparalleled in the art field' and thus capable of not only challenging but also threatening the established exhibitionary complex (Kolb 2022, 61; see also 67). However, the scaling up of a resource infrastructure, and its practices of trust-building and sharing, from the scale of a small village community to a multi-sited transnational network also presented challenges. The extent to which the *lumbung* approach could operate effectively and sustainably when expanded to a global scale was openly addressed by ruangrupa. As they note in the *documenta fifteen Handbook*, the distance between the globally distributed localities of the *lumbung* members made it difficult to maintain trust among the collectives, the individual artists, the collaborators and

the organization of Documenta (ruangrupa 2022a, 40; Phillips 2022, 14–15; Kolb 2022, 57).

Ruangrupa used the word *lumbung* to refer to collective sharing as the very core of documenta fifteen, as well as to send a strong message to the world about the regeneration and redistribution of resources needed in times of climate breakdown. They explained that *lumbung* ‘becomes something that the community can access in times of scarcity, such as a climate catastrophe or famine. [...] We see *lumbung* as a principle of cooperation, based on generosity and empathy. Sustainability is only guaranteed if resources are continuously renewed and replenished’ (ruangrupa 2022b, 60; 2021, n.p.). During the summer of 2022, when Europe was struck by unprecedented heatwaves and what the Global Drought Observatory assessed was likely the worst drought on the continent in 500 years, the concept of *lumbung* should also be read as a wakeup call to European citizens, governments and industries.² At the same time, the evocation of an agricultural community tradition can also be related to ruangrupa’s home city Jakarta – today one of the world’s largest metropolitan areas, with 35 million inhabitants (as of 2021) and faced with serious environmental problems, including rapid urban growth, traffic and population congestion, with ecological breakdown and aggravating flooding. At 17 cm annually, Jakarta is one of the world’s fastest sinking capitals. In response to these challenges, the government has decided to move the capital from Jakarta on the island of Java to the planned city of Nusantara on Borneo. The curatorial studies scholar Dorothee Richter has thus suggested that ruangrupa’s reconnection with agrarian traditions could be seen as romanticizing, or even as an act of ‘self-othering’ (Richter 2022, 34; ‘Jakarta’, in ‘Wikipedia’).

In documenta fifteen, *lumbung* became a metaphor for social, political and artistic practices that work towards a just and sustainable collective economy based on solidarity and the sharing of resources, where resources are scarce or – at documenta fifteen – where resources had to be stretched to cater for an excessive number of participants. Such practices were already being developed by the collectives ruangrupa invited to become members of *Lumbung Inter-Lokal*. When accepting the invitation, the collectives committed to *lumbung*-building processes ‘before and beyond’ documenta fifteen. They also received a production budget of 180,000 Euro and 25,000 Euro paid up front as seed money and ‘as an acknowledgement of the years of work in the artists’ localities and a seal of our agreement to find translations of that work to Kassel in 2022. This translation in its turn is made in such a way that it becomes (re)generative for the work beyond documenta fifteen’ (ruangrupa 2022a, 21). For many *lumbung* members, the budget came at a time of financial precarity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it was

2 BBC News, ‘Europe’s drought the worst in 500 years – report’, August 23, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62648912> (accessed August 25, 2022).

the documenta fifteen budget that enabled Trampoline House's Artistic Team to continue their work, although the house itself had been forced to close in 2020 when the Danish funding dried up.

Trampoline House's story exemplifies how ruangrupa extended the definition of the (mega-) exhibition to include the preparatory collective processes and the potential long-term effects as 'an important part of documenta fifteen' (ruangrupa 2022a, 9). The envisioned outcomes were, firstly, that the participants' contributions to documenta fifteen and whatever they had 'harvested' from the exchange with other collectives and individuals would 'cycle back' to each of the local contexts or ecosystems; and secondly, that the numerous local reverberations of this (re)generative circular process and redistribution of resources would transform the ecosystem of the artworld by 'sowing seeds for more changes in the future'. In doing so, documenta fifteen would ideally proliferate alternatives to the art market, and to object-based museum collections and artworks as 'mere individual expression' (ruangrupa 2022a, 16–17, 30). Weekend Trampoline House (see Chapter 2) is an important example of how documenta fifteen's cyclic and prefigurative principles governed the invited collectives' work, and how the redistribution of funds for the realization of documenta fifteen – or, *lambung one* in ruangrupa's terminology – enabled a precarious collective to evolve and persist beyond the closure of the art exhibition.

This brief description of the infrastructure of selection and financial redistribution suggests that the concept of *lambung* served not only as a generative concept but also as 'the operating system' for the 'ekosistem' (the social network of participants), as the whole organizational logic was derived from this concept. It also indicates that ruangrupa's curatorial approach scaled up the friends-cum-cultural-organizers model that they themselves represent (ruangrupa 2022a, 12). Founded in 2000 as a non-hierarchical collective, their practice encompasses many types of social and cultural activity, including self-organizing, sharing ideas and resources, as well as exchanging services and socializing activity such as eating, hanging out and singing together. In 2018, they established their present Jakarta headquarters, Gudskul, together with two other collectives, Serrum and Grafis Huru Hara. This is a multipurpose place and not-for-profit work model that serves as a platform for education, sharing, self-organization and 'collective-practice simulations', but also as an exhibition and studio space, as well as a clubhouse and informal meeting place that brings people together to talk over meals and for karaoke and 'loose assemblies' (Nguyen 2022, n.p.; ruangrupa 2021, n.p.). At documenta fifteen, ruangrupa introduced a whole terminology to support the building of new infrastructures and *lambung* practices and provide the language needed to describe them: *meydan*, for example, means 'public space' in Turkish and Arabic and designates accessible common spaces free of charge; while *nongkrong* – an Indonesian word for getting together to hang out and spend time together (with

friends) – suggests that visitors and participants should take an unconventional approach when visiting documenta. Instead of dedicating themselves to individual contemplation of objects, visitors should prioritize ‘decelerated togetherness’ and linger in the ‘hangout zones’, community gardens and waterfront spaces constructed for the event. As Karen van den Berg observes, ruangrupa’s insistence on activating a whole terminology alien to the Western artworld indicates that ruangrupa’s documenta followed ‘an episteme of its own’ (K.v.d. Berg 2023, n.p.).

How this episteme shaped their practice was particularly apparent at the key venue, the Fridericianum. Here, ruangrupa replicated their headquarters to give visitors a taste of how they work and as a model example of how many of the collective presentations at documenta fifteen were designed as a window onto the different local practices. Lastly, but importantly, by replicating Gudskul – and renaming the museum Fridskul (Fridericianum as school) (Asvestopoulos 2022, 12) – ruangrupa publicly marked their position and integrity. As they explained in the documenta fifteen guidebook: ‘instead of integrating ourselves into the long-established documenta system, we decided to stay on our path. We invited documenta back, asking it to be part of *our* journey.’ In doing so, the guest became the host, the master of the ‘house’ (cf. the architectural metaphor of documenta fifteen as a community rice barn) or the ‘acceptor’ who receives, makes welcome and by whose rules (of what and where art is) the institution Documenta, i.e. the guest, has to abide. A reversal thus took place: the host was invited by the other into their home (Derrida 2000, 9).

Ruangrupa’s hospitality and welcoming of participants was by no means unconditional. For documenta fifteen, the art collective laid out seven ‘rules’ or ‘lumbung values’, replicating principles central to their own practice: local anchoring, humour, generosity, independence, transparency, sufficiency and regeneration. The idea (and ideal) was that the contributors should not produce new works *for* documenta but use, rather, the long preparation phase to ask themselves how the lumbung values could be aligned with or ‘translated’ into their local practices and subsequently translated to the exhibition sites in Kassel. Here, the inter-lokal members and lumbung artists would finally become ‘neighbours for a hundred days’, approximating a globalized village community (ruangrupa 2022a, 34, 39).

Differentiated participation in documenta fifteen

In many ways, documenta fifteen epitomized the participatory turn in the arts, as all the invited groups were guaranteed some degree of interaction and collaboration with others. But what about the participation of the visitors? Much was done to engage children, especially in Fridskul/Fridericianum, where the Brazilian educationalist Graziela Kunsch had designed a nursery environment for children and parents, and where Rurukids could also be found – an open-door space where

children could play, relax, read books, watch films and participate in creativity workshops with some of the lumbung artists. Adult visitors often had to assume the rather traditional role of the perambulating viewer, an observer of (video) documentation of other people's collaborative processes and projects which had unfolded at another time and in another place. The occasional conversation with artists who were present in the exhibition mostly took place 'on the educational level', as the author and cultural journalist Max Glauner remarked in a discussion of the participatory aspect of documenta fifteen's collaborative art productions. His observation gives credence to Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson's claim that the participatory turn works in tandem with an educational turn, or a curatorialization of education that increasingly frames research, knowledge production and informal educative processes as artistic events and practices, sometimes even as the main event (O'Neill and Wilson 2010, 12–13). Although visitors were offered a range of 'interactive participation', these were often limited in scope and characterized by 'pedagogical distance', noted Glauner. Visitors were offered opportunities to, for example, drink tea in a Bedouin tent, write a comment on a Post-it or play a board game in Gudskul, and they could 'hum along' when watching one of the many video and audio works featuring songs. However, such activities did not achieve what Glauner calls 'lumbung parity' (Glauner 2022, 96–97; see also Schmidt 2024).

For the producers, participation was a quite different matter. The lumbung members were asked to engage in explorative 'inter-lokal' collaboration with other lumbung members on specific projects and to share programme, space and equipment (i.e. infrastructures), as well as encouraged to exchange knowledge and knowhow with one another to enrich their own practice, and to co-produce new knowledge. Major outcomes of this approach were lumbung.space, a digital platform and archive interconnecting the participants, and Lumbung Press, an offset printing workshop stationed in documenta Halle to realize artistic printing projects from well before the opening and throughout the exhibition period. For example, Lumbung Press printed a special issue on Trampoline House's contribution, published by the Copenhagen-based magazine *visAvis*, which seeks to improve the debate on asylum and migration, among other things, by publishing texts by people seeking asylum (Germa et al. 2022). Trampoline House's workshops with the British collective Project Art Works are among these 'inter-lokal' collaborations (of which, more below).³

As many commentators have noted, documenta fifteen was the first Documenta to be curated by artists/curators based in the so-called global South. In this edition of the mega-event, contemporary art and curating served, then, as a lens on contemporaneous shifts in the relations between hemispheric 'world cultures'. As the 100-day exhibition period of the quinquennial progressed, it became increasingly

3 <https://lumbung.space/> (accessed August 23, 2025).

evident that the cultural encounter between the South/ruangrupa and the North/the institution Documenta was tremendously generative, but it also ignited an unfortunate and explosive political and media controversy, which largely shifted the public's attention away from the prefigurative action undertaken by the participants collectively to a storm of accusations of anti-Semitism that turned documenta fifteen into 'the year's most contentious exhibition' (Greenberger 2022, n.p.).

Already before the opening, the atmosphere had become increasingly tense, but the real catalyst for the excessive outrage and increasingly politicized and toxic debate was the Indonesian collective Taring Padi's monumental painting *People's Justice* (2002), featuring two anti-Semitic caricatures of Jews among the dense mass of figures that filled the picture space. *People's Justice* was spectacularly displayed as the *point de vue* of Kassel's Friedrichsplatz, a centrally located public square and one of Documenta's most prominent venues, thus confirming the common observation that art in public space is especially prone to agitate people. As soon as the piece went up, close-ups of the two caricatures of Jews began to circulate on social media and in the German press, generating a huge outcry. Although the painting was removed after just a few days, ruangrupa was subjected to critical scrutiny after allegations that their curatorial process had opened the gates for anti-Jewish racism in the form of anti-Semitic imagery and the exclusion of Israeli Jewish artists. This fierce criticism was not only put forward in public debate but also by Jewish organizations in Germany and the US, as well as at the highest political level.⁴ Only days after the piece was dismantled, Germany's culture minister Claudia Roth proposed a five-point plan for how Documenta should change behind the scenes as a 'prerequisite for future federal funding'. Others called for more governmental control of Documenta, with Boris Rhein, the Prime Minister of the state of Hesse, where Kassel is located, demanding an investigation into the show. Predictably, the anti-Semitism allegations were also instrumentalized for right-wing politics, as the Jewish organization Casa do Povo in São Paulo, Brazil, pointed out when they denounced the rumour that they had been disinvited from documenta fifteen (Casa do Povo 2022). As the pressure grew over the following month, the director of Documenta, Sabine Schormann, mutually agreed with the board to resign, midway through the 100-day exhibition period.⁵ A side-effect of the disproportionately

4 Judith Elisabeth Weiss has explained, with reference to Germany's Nazi past and the genocide of the Jews, that 'the mural had to be taken down because it hurt the feelings of the Jewish victims in a country of perpetrators. The prohibition of anti-Semitic stereotypes in Germany is constitutionally regulated with the political-moral obligation of "never again"'. (J.E. Weiss 2022)

5 Two separate anti-Semitism controversies surrounded documenta fifteen. One centred on Taring Padi's *People's Justice* and its anti-Semitic imagery, the other centred on the inclusion of a Palestinian collective and the suspicion that Jewish and Israeli artists had been deliberately excluded from the show. Already in January 2022, i.e. prior to the opening and the controversy

one-sided focus on anti-Semitism was that other types of racist reactions, threats and hostility related to documenta fifteen (especially against ruangrupa and the Palestinian participants) were virtually sidelined, as was every other aspect of the collectivist work and spirit of sharing that characterized the event.⁶ In effect, the debate about an exhibition that featured thousands of objects and contributions by approximately 1500 participants basically revolved around only a handful of works and the anti-Israeli BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign) affiliation of a few of the participants.

The strong reactions can partly be explained by the political and historical contexts. The first Documenta was organized by Arnold Bode in 1955 in part as an attempt to move out of the shadows cast by the Nazi regime and the Holocaust and to bring Germany up to speed with the modern art that the Nazis had deemed 'degenerate'. In the years leading up to documenta fifteen, however, crimes motivated by anti-Semitism had increased significantly. Therefore, anything shown at the exhibition in Kassel would set itself in relation to the Holocaust as a crime against humanity and Germany's anti-Semitism policy (Richter 2022, 39). Although there were some grounds for criticism of the anti-Semitic elements in documenta fifteen, there is much to suggest that the event unwittingly became collateral damage in Germany's memory wars over the Holocaust and its Nazi history (ruangrupa and lumbung community 2022b). My approach is thus in line with Karen van den Berg's analysis and proposition that, in the aftermath of documenta fifteen, critical attention should not centre on any anti-Semitism, but on the contribution that this edition of Documenta made to 'the development of an alternative operating system for the arts' (K.v.d. Berg 2023, n.p.).

The omission of Jewish Israeli artists is reflective of a general problem of ruangrupa's model of membership and political alignment: despite the inter-local connectedness and trans-local alliances it engendered, it also produced exclusions

over *People's Justice*, activist groups in Germany criticized ruangrupa and their artistic team for including the Palestinian collective, The Question of Funding, who were perceived as 'anti-Israeli activists'. For a detailed English-language outline of this protracted controversy, see Greenberger 2022, dated 23 June. Claudia Roth's proposal for a five-point plan was made public at <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/bundesregierung/bundeskanzleramt/staatsministerin-fuer-kultur-und-medien/roth-menschenwuerde-unverrueckbar--2055528> (accessed August 8, 2022, no longer online). For anti-Semitism as a form of racism, see Berenbaum 2022.

- 6 The one-sided criticism provoked ruangrupa, the artists and the artistic team of documenta fifteen to publish the letter they had sent to the members of Documenta's supervisory board in the internationally circulated newsletter *e-flux*, with an appeal to the international press and public to support them in their refusal of Documenta's alleged censorship of works. The signatories also complained that artists and members had experienced 'structural racism and neglect', e.g. in connection with obtaining visas and accommodation in Kassel. See ruangrupa and lumbung community 2022a.

of its own. Yet, it is important to observe that ruangrupa's preference for small-to-medium 'cellular organisms' – which was reflected in their introduction of Lumbung Inter-Lokal, as well as assemblies or 'mini-majelis' of four to five collectives and individual artists organized according to time zones (dictated by the need to meet online during the COVID-19 pandemic) – also served a generative purpose (ruangrupa 2022a, 32, 40). Such infrastructures evoke the curator and art historian Minh Nguyen's perceptive observation that its curatorial framework was set up to explore networks of relations as alternative paths for intimacy, support and allyship, with an emphasis on collectivity and friendship:

Friendship-as-praxis is tricky: it's subjective, exclusionary by nature, and, in some cases, a veil for nepotism. But participants in this Documenta – predominantly from outside major cultural and economic centers – are less cliques based on inter-generational wealth or MFA cohorts, and more groups that have long collaborated without funding or fanfare. They have convened to address specific local needs by creating social organizations where they were absent. (Nguyen 2022, n.p.)

Reflecting on the commonly overlooked connection between art and friendship, cultural theorist Nikos Papastergiadis has emphasized the significance of friendship in creative production and critical evaluation. His observation that some art projects, such as Thomas Hirschhorn's collaborative projects, 'can only come to be if there is friendship' hits the spot with regard to documenta fifteen's politics of lumbung (Papastergiadis 2020, 15). Friendship, explains Papastergiadis, offers an alternative way of thinking about the relations, processes and commitment that shape the field in which art and ideas are generated: 'Friendship thrives in circumstances where there is familiarity or convergences of interest, creating an opportunity to bond, and may be aligned with the experience of solidarity. However, we are also aware that friendship requires a sharpness and vitality that is not always compatible with the fuzzy feeling of union.' (Papastergiadis 2020, 21)

Trampoline House at documenta fifteen

Following the invitation to join Lumbung Inter-Lokal, Trampoline House invited 'members and friends of the house to form an Artistic Team, responsible for participating in the lumbung meetings and for developing lumbung collaborations and projects for the exhibition'.⁷ Recapitulating Oliver Marchart's distinction, it could

7 Quoted from the website of Trampoline House, 'documenta fifteen', <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/events/2022/6/10/documenta> (accessed March 28, 2025). The Trampoline House's Artistic Team were: Carlota Mir, Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali, Fedaa Sultan (from Oct. 2020–Dec. 2021), Helene Grøn, Jean Claude Mangomba, Joachim Hamou, Khalid Albaih,

be said that when Trampoline House became part of documenta fifteen, it entered a powerful established institution, thereby shifting its position from activist art to a critical form of art that operates from within the institution (Marchart 2019, 26).

Videos, writings and workshops were an important part of the infrastructure of Trampoline House's participation in documenta fifteen and their attempt to bring their community's calls for change to Kassel. Beginning in January 2022, the team members hosted different workshops in Weekend Trampoline House in Copenhagen and, later, in Trampoline House's installation at Hübner Areal in Kassel and other documenta fifteen venues. Several workshops centred on producing testimonies of refugee experience and the living conditions in the Danish asylum, deportation and integration systems. Thus, an early workshop with pupils in Copenhagen engaging with asylum laws and asylum centre regulations was documented in the thought-provoking video *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary*, subsequently shown in the installation area in Kassel alongside a video introduction to Trampoline House.

The human rights activist and poet Jean Claude Mangomba facilitated a creative writing workshop about the criminalization of asylum seekers in a discriminatory legal system, and in the spring of 2022 the artist and co-founder of Trampoline House, Joachim Hamou, initiated a string of puppet workshops in Weekend Trampoline House and in Danish deportation centres. The idea was to enable some of the Trampoline House users, who were not allowed to travel and had been stripped of their identity cards and right to mobility in the Danish asylum system, to represent themselves and have a kind of ghostly presence in Trampoline House's exhibition in Kassel. A concluding workshop was also held in Kassel itself, in which adults and children made masks of the participants.⁸

Furthermore, Trampoline House's Artistic Team made an intervention into two of Kassel's public spaces. Khalid Albaih used the pedestrian underpass under the busy traffic circle Platz der Deutschen Einheit (the Square of German Unity) for the sound installation *The Walls Have Ears*, which amplified the unheard voices and testimonies of asylum seekers in Denmark and filled the passageway with the murmur of voices, as if a multitude of people were moving through it (Kunstforum International 2022, 250). Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali gave visibility to the life and suffering of refugees in the fashion show performance *In a Closed World – Visible and Invisible Walls*, in which he used the Treppenstraße as a catwalk for models presenting 40 outfits from his political fashion show performance *If the Sea Could Talk*, a

Morten Goll, Muhannad Al Ulaby, Sara Alberani, Shakira Kasigwa Mukamusoni, Tone Olaf Nielsen, visAvis and Yong Sun Gullach (from Oct. 2020–Dec. 2021).

8 For an overview of the events and exhibits contributed by Trampoline House's Artistic Team, see <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/events/2022/6/10/documenta> (accessed March 28, 2025).

tribute to the thousands of migrants and refugees who have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, or died elsewhere, on their journey towards safety.⁹ As explained in Chapter 2, this performance had previously been staged in 2015 inside a densely packed Trampoline House to mark the opening of the art space CAMP / Center for Art on Migration Politics. In Kassel, the performance was re-enacted in public space, accompanied by a poet-singer and a dancer giving voice and bodily expression to the suffering of refugees. And all the while Oguibe's towering *Das Flüchtlinge und Fremdlinge Monument* was watching over the disquieting spectacle on the pedestrian street, evoking the hope of hospitality and of being embraced by a local community: 'I was a stranger and you took me in.'¹⁰

Indoors, at Hübner Areal, three of Mwicira-Mitali's outfits served as the eye catcher of Trampoline House's installation *Castle in Kassel*. Mwicira-Mitali had incorporated them into a collaborative work with Joachin Hamou, *Silenced Bodies – Loud Images*, in which the extraordinary dresses sewn out of rice bags from United Nations refugee camps, sisal, bast, and other materials, were displayed on mannequins balancing precariously on a makeshift platform evoking a raft. The dresses were crowned by masks – imprints and self-representations of asylum-seeking members of Trampoline House who could not leave Denmark. Because Danish asylum legislation prohibits asylum seekers from leaving the country while their case is pending – and only permits rejected asylum seekers to travel back to the country they fled from – many of the people who contributed to the project for documenta fifteen could not travel to Kassel with the Artistic Team for the opening.¹¹ Thus, the masks were also critical reminders of the unequal access to the privilege of transnational and cross-border mobility. In the artworld, the difficulties with obtaining visas encountered by artists with a background of forced displacement hamper the careers of many artists – and it continues after they have been granted refugee status but not (yet) citizenship. Like goods, their works usually travel easily across the national borders the artists themselves cannot cross. Thus, the reception of their work is affected by the inability of the artist to be present and speak about their work in person.¹²

9 For a video of *In a Closed World – Visible and Invisible Walls* made in collaboration with documenta archiv, see YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vD_7fqvPrRA (accessed April 1, 2025).

10 The fashion show was held on July 15, 2022. See <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/calendar/in-a-closed-world-visible-and-invisible-walls/> (accessed April 1, 2025).

11 See Trampoline House's programme for documenta fifteen at <https://www.trampolinehouse.dk/events/2022/6/10/documenta> (accessed April 1, 2025).

12 For an analysis of how legal constrictions and visa costs in the UK, along with intersectional barriers in the artworld in general, affect artists with an asylum seeker or refugee background, see Chapter 2 in Carden-Coyne et al. 2026.

Fig. 11: Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali and Joachim Hamou, Silenced bodies – loud images, mixed media installation at Hübner Areal, documenta fifteen, Kassel, 2022. 360 x 360 x 300 cm. Photo: Tone Olaf Nielsen. Courtesy: The Trampoline House Archive.



The three ‘Silenced Bodies’ were stranded right outside a circle of chalk drawn on the floor to mark the penetrable boundaries of *Castle in Kassel’s* territory. The installation was designed by Morten Goll and Joachim Hamou, and was equipped with sofas, carpets, lamps, potted plants, tables and chairs to conjure up the community centre’s relaxed everyday atmosphere and sociability. Except for a string of eight performances and workshops led by members of Trampoline House’s Artistic Team, the Copenhagen micro-community only had a mediated presence on three flat-panel TV screens. In other words, the transition to Documenta also transformed and translated Trampoline House into a representational mode of exhibition making. What

visitors would encounter on most days of the exhibition period was a representation of Trampoline House. Yet, it was a representation designed to convey the impression of a buzzing activist community and thus very different from the 'archival' presentations of participants such as Asia Art Archive and The Black Archives which were shown in the Fridericianum, and displays of artefacts in cultural history museums in general.

In *Castle in Kassel*, visitors could sit down to watch members of Trampoline House 'appearing' in affecting video testimonials to life in Danish camps for asylum seekers and the mitigating and life-saving work of the community centre. In *The Chain*, directed by Shakira Kasigwa Mukamasoni, a visit to Avnstrup (a centre for families who have not been granted asylum and for those who have had their residency permit revoked) gives some insight into the living conditions experienced by asylum seekers. After the opening shot from a demonstration against deportations, Mukamasoni appears and explains that 'the chain' is about the people who have been living for many years in camps, where they are not allowed to work and earn their own money and are infantilized by the camp system's control of their movements and everyday life. As one of the interviewees remarks: 'The camp is like a prison.'¹³ The video is composed of brief interviews giving 'voice' to people in Avnstrup. The most moving and thought-provoking stories are those of the young teenage interviewees who have lived in different camps for periods of between five and seven years. Their stories of how they have spent half of their childhood confirm that families spend years in camps like Avnstrup, and they are moved around between different parts of Denmark, so the children must change schools frequently and are deprived of the possibility of building lasting childhood friendships as well as losing the ability to envision a future for themselves during the debilitating long period of waiting. These conditions can be seen as a specific, inhumane variant of the 'postmigrant' condition of asylum seekers, theorized in Chapter 5 as a condition of 'waithood' and generating a peculiar form of postmigrant subjectivity.

Documenta fifteen's general thematic of translation between different places, people and spheres was interpreted in a thought-provoking way in a video directed by Morten Goll, a member of the Artistic Team and general director of Trampoline House at the time.¹⁴ *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary* cross-cuts between two

13 Trampoline House, *The Chain*, 2022; concept and direction by Shakira Kasigwa Mukamasoni. It has not been possible to obtain information on Mukamasoni's production crew.

14 Trampoline House, *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary*, 2022. Concept and direction: Morten Goll; camera: Joachim Hamou and Muhannad Al Ulaby; editing: Joachim Hamou; production assistant: Malak Saidi; cast: Hannah Doensig Bernstein, Negin Gholami, Taufiki Habyarimana, Anna Luka Østergaard-Kröll, Navid Nazaryan, Benjamin Rahmanifar and Malak Saidi.

different locations. One is a living room in which a mixed group of teenagers are gathered around a table, discussing in Danish which key words best capture their experience of the Danish asylum system. It transpires that they have all lived in, or are still living in, asylum centres in Denmark. Their discussion is cross-cut with a classroom where two German-speaking female teenagers read the translated definitions of the selected words aloud, as if they were reading from a regular school textbook on ordinary matters and not a text about the experience of children living marginalized lives under conditions radically different from those of their Danish peers. This is suggested by the words they select: phase one, two and three (of the process of seeking asylum), registration, interviews (with immigration service and the police), pocket money, curfew (home no later than 10 pm), meals at fixed times (e.g. breakfast at 7–8am, even when pupils have to leave for school earlier) – and not forgetting ‘red class’: the practice of sending child asylum seekers to classes for children with special needs, so that they develop a learning deficit that is difficult to overcome once they are sent to a public school.

Fig. 12: Trampoline House, Castle in Kassel, mixed media installation at Hübner Areal, documenta fifteen, Kassel, 2022. Dimensions variable. Photo: Morten Goll. Courtesy: The Trampoline House Archive.



Fig. 13: Trampoline House, *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary*, 2022. Still image from the video directed by Morten Goll. Shown as an integral part of the installation *Castle* in Kassel at Hübner Areal, *documenta fifteen*, Kassel, 2022. Courtesy: Morten Goll and The Trampoline House Archive.



The audience is confronted with the gap between the relative freedom of the 'ordinary' classroom, with the two German-speaking pupils, and the constrictions experienced by children in asylum centres at the moment when the camera cross-cuts from the classroom back to the group when they are deciding to define the asylum centre as a prison. The reason for this definition is given 'in translation', as the camera returns to the classroom where their explanation is read aloud in German. The children with camp experience feel that they are treated with suspicion, as if they were 'inmates', although the only 'crime' they are guilty of and the only thing that distinguishes them from their Danish peers is that they have applied for asylum in another country than where they were born. Despite the 'factual' style of the video and the staged reading of the 'dictionary', *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary* is profoundly moving because it exposes how the asylum system prevents children and youth from living a normal childhood, and that the system is designed to suppress and control.

Although the video for *documenta fifteen* focused on a local context, the translational approach indicated that the conditions described by the children were not unique to Denmark but were, rather, reflective of *campization* – a term introduced by the urban researcher René Kreichauf to describe the camplike accommodation infrastructures that have been expanded throughout the EU (see the Introduction). These accommodations operate as sites of management of people-on-the-move as they 'temporarily halt the movement of refugees and delineate a space that separates

them from the outside world' (Ross 2022, 84). According to Kreichauf's analysis, campization is achieved by measures of differentiation – including demarcation (the separation of 'migrants' from the local population); containment (as a camp encloses its residents, it also makes them visible as strangers and potential criminals in ways that amplify processes of racialization and stigmatization); legal exceptionality (the governmental and legal frameworks of the camps differ from those applied to citizens, as is evident from *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary*); and temporariness (the camp is a place of 'permanent temporariness' as the resident's length of stay is unknown and may last for years). Lastly, but importantly, campization entails problematized protection (residents generally state how these accommodations give them a sense of being protected, but this highly controlled protection also limits their autonomy) (Kreichauf 2018, 4 and 16; see also Ross 2022, 92). Here, Kreichauf builds on a 2016 study of Palestinians in Danish camps by Anja Kublitz, who concludes: '[U]nlike the spectacular catastrophe in Lebanon during the civil war of killing and being killed, life in the Danish camps is characterized by minor mundane catastrophes, infinite un-becomings that slowly erode the lives of my interlocutors.' (Kublitz 2016, 246).

The translational approach of *The Children's Asylum Seeker Dictionary* reflected the fact that 'translation' was a key theme in Trampoline House's exhibition. Here, visitors could also flick through the visitors' book, a medium of written communication. Like the video, the book's introductory remark pointed to the significance of language and translation to Trampoline House's acts of hospitality: 'The official language of Trampoline House is English, because we want to show that inside these walls, inside this circle, the Danes are guests in the language too. We host each other by translation, by democratic process, by everyone being guests and everyone being hosts.'¹⁵

Quotes from poems and books reflecting on the experience of exclusion engendered by the Danish asylum system were inserted into the visitors' book, with an invitation to visitors to write comments on these testimonies on the blank pages. Attentive to the fact that Trampoline House's installation was created in the immediate aftermath of the influx into Europe of millions of displaced Ukrainians, following Russia's escalated military intervention on 24 February 2022, one comment in particular accentuated the continued need for Trampoline House's work with people who have fled their country: 'Prompt: Where is home? Ukraine. Being bombed every second. My heart is bleeding. For all humanity. Masha 2022. Hopeful.'¹⁶

15 The author's field notes from a visit to documenta fifteen on June 21, 2022. The visitors' book was created by Jean Claude Mangomba and Helene Grøn of Trampoline House's Artistic Team; the pair also facilitated some of the workshops.

16 The author's field notes from a visit to documenta fifteen on June 21, 2022.

Adjacent to the encircled space was a site-specific installation entitled *The Wall*: a whole wall with infographics mapping the increasingly rejective nature of Danish asylum policies under a title that evoked the many walls and fences built at borders around the world to keep unwanted refugees and migrants out of national territories. *The Wall* thus provided a critical explanatory context for the *Castle in Kassel*. Integrated into the long text painted directly on the wall of Hübner Areal were digital screens displaying Muhannad Al Ulaby's 'The Gif Collection' – a collection of animated loops conveying a narrative through a few frames and utilizing cartoons, photography and the shapes and red and white colours of the Danish flag to convey the national context.¹⁷ The use of the personal pronoun 'you' in the wall text ensured that the intention of nudging visitors to identify and empathize with asylum seekers would be difficult to miss: 'This is what you are facing when seeking asylum in Denmark... You must be accommodated in an asylum center located far from the city centers to keep you from integrating into society... If you are rejected, you lose the right to pocket money and unpaid internships, must move to a deportation center where you are not allowed to cook your own food, and must report daily to camp authorities.'

The 'aggressive humanism' of the mural's description of the asylum system formed a stark contrast to and gloomy backdrop for the 'caring humanism' pervading Trampoline House's installation *Castle in Kassel* and their workshops. It also indicated that, for Trampoline House's Artistic Team, participation in documenta fifteen was not about the prestige associated with the art event but more about its communicative power as a showcase that could potentially attract worldwide attention to the suffering of asylum seekers in the Danish system. As noted by Morten Goll, 'It is the biggest megaphone we can get' (Morten Goll, quoted in Kryger 2022).

Creative collaborative strategies of care

Also included in Trampoline House's exhibition was the iconic name sign that used to decorate its central room, as well as children's drawings, protest signs from pro-asylum demonstrations and, importantly, a group of photographic portraits of people from the house. These eerie monochrome portraits were either based on the negatives or covered by a semi-transparent veil of blue tint, evoking a ghostly sense of presence that underscored the absence of the community body on site. The portraits were grouped on the wall so that they encircled and symbolically embraced a drawing depicting a circular diagram onto which institutions and

17 As indicated by the exhibition wall texts by Trampoline House's Artistic Team, *The Wall* was a collaborative work comprising contributions by Muhannad Al Ulaby, Morten Goll, Joachim Hamou, Claude Mangomba, Khaled Albaih and Olga Alexandrovna Thieme.

actors vital to the presumably asylum-seeking creator's life in Denmark had been mapped. The creator's home marked the centre of the diagram. In the circles around it were a hospital, a job contact, a park, cars, and most conspicuously, Trampoline House, adorned with a smiley and the attribute 'help'. In the exhibition, this visualization of a lifeworld or individual cosmos attested to art's capacity for facilitating worldmaking as well as an analytical understanding of how anyone who is situated in society is simultaneously situated within a web of relations.

This small drawing was intricately linked to two large-scale collaborative drawings based on similar circle diagrams. All the drawings or 'cosmologies of care' had resulted from Trampoline House's collaboration with one of the other lumbung members, Project Art Works, on a series of joint workshops entitled 'Massaging the Asylum System and Creative Strategies of Care'. It was co-curated by Sara Alberani, Carlota Mir and Tone Olaf Nielsen, in collaboration with Kate Adams of Project Art Works, and comprised workshops in different localities. The three drawings on display had resulted from the first workshop for people in the Danish asylum system with a connection to Trampoline House. It was held in Weekend Trampoline House in Copenhagen on May 20–22, 2022, prior to the opening of documenta fifteen and was based on 'cosmologies of care' – a method of activism, discourse and facilitation developed by Kate Adams when Project Art Works was one of five artist collectives nominated for the 2021 Turner Prize, and part of Project Art Work's contribution to documenta fifteen.¹⁸ The knowledge on which the drawings were based came from the people of the House, while Kate Adams used her experience with the cosmology method and her knowledge of health systems of care and control to facilitate the development of the drawings, as well as initiating a conversation on what the participants understood 'freedom' to be.¹⁹ The workshop series as a

18 This paragraph draws on the text in the exhibition space describing the aim and process of the workshop to visitors, as well as the workshop description in documenta fifteen's calendar of events, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/calendar/massaging-the-asylum-system-and-creative-strategies-of-care-a-workshop-by-project-art-works-and-trampoline-house/> (accessed March 28, 2025). The first workshop in Weekend Trampoline House was curated by Carlota Mir and Sara Alberani, both members of Trampoline House's Artistic Team, with Tone Olaf Nielsen and Kate Adams also involved (Alberani, Mir, and Nielsen 2022). The collaboration was supported by the Italian Council (2022), Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity, Italian Ministry of Culture. See the announcement of the concluding workshop: <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/calendar/massaging-the-asylum-system-and-creative-strategies-of-care-a-workshop-by-project-art-works-and-trampoline-house/> (accessed March 28, 2025).

19 In a short video from the workshop by Muhannad Al Ulaby entitled *Massaging the Asylum System – A Collective Exploration*, Kani, the woman who made the small drawing mentioned above, is seen presenting her drawing. There are also clips showing Kate Adams facilitating the process of drawing and the dialogue on freedom. Apparently, the video is no longer online.

whole aimed to experiment with practices of care and develop critical perspectives on (social) care, as well as producing testimonies of refugee experience with the Danish asylum, deportation and integration systems.

Project Art Works is a collective of about a hundred neurodiverse artists, activists, caregivers (including family members), facilitators and staff, founded in Hastings, UK, in 1997 by the artist and activist Kate Adams and the painter Jonathan Cole. Like Trampoline House, they fight for the rights of severely marginalized people and seek to support and empower them, among other things by raising awareness to change the social care system in the UK, much like Trampoline House has sought to raise critical awareness of the asylum system in Denmark by sharing the stories of refugees and asylum seekers in the country. Project Art Works uses a broad set of artistic and holistic methods to foster understanding and representation of people with complex needs for care and support. Like *ruangrupa's Gudskul*, their installation at the Fridericianum replicated their studio environment in Hastings, with rubber flooring and cardboard sheeting on the walls and a large structure for archiving artworks and film. Among the works displayed was the evolving series of large-scale drawings *Cosmologies of Care*, to which the Trampoline House drawings belong.

As part of the preparation for their collaboration, the members of Trampoline House and Project Art Works discussed each other's practice in documenta fifteen's conversation series 'lambung konteks'. Under the headline 'Navigating Systems of Care and Control', the members of the two collectives discussed the similarities and differences between their methods and their communities.²⁰ Although they work in different European countries, both collectives had experienced how societal and institutional infrastructures affect the people they work with, and support, in ambiguous ways. As Alberani noted, the institutional systems that 'care for' refugees and asylum seekers, and for people who are neurodivergent, often operate as oppressive systems of control that hamper their access to a public sphere – and thus to participation, visibility and 'voice' (Alberani, Mir, and Nielsen 2022, 19:00–22:00 min.). While Project Art Works primarily focuses on creative collaboration and artmaking – thus using artmaking to help build the structures of representation and solidarity that health and welfare systems seldom provide – the systems of care and control central to Trampoline House were the legal systems of immigration and asylum, the asylum centres, and humanitarian organizations such as the Red

20 For this online conversation about the collaboration between Trampoline House and Project Art Works, moderated by the social scientist Yasmin Gunaratnam, see 'lambung konteks: Navigating Systems of Care and Control'. It took place prior to the opening of documenta fifteen on May 5, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sHlvXgKASg> (accessed April 1, 2025).

Cross (Trampoline House and Project Art Works 2022, 21:45–24:00, 42:00–45:30, 48:30–58:00 min.).

In the collaborative workshops, the participants explored, through facilitated conversations, the relations between the Trampoline House community, the needs of people as they seek asylum and try to rebuild their lives in Denmark, and the ways in which different institutions and civil society initiatives support or work against their dreams and needs. The conversations also considered how Trampoline House sought to empower displaced people and to fight for a more humane asylum system. The participants drew ‘cosmologies of care’ to examine the interrelationships between people, systems and the state. Drawing thus became an investigative instrument to map and analyse the forces and factors determining the lives of asylum seekers and their process of resettlement in the country where they hope to build a new home. Kate Adams’s methodology of care worked well for the participants because it was a gentle process unfolding in a relaxed atmosphere. It enabled the participants to work together to visualize the relationship between individuals and systems of care and control, especially the different institutions and bodies asylum seekers must interact with, as well as representing their struggles and desires. Each of the collaboratively fabricated large-scale drawings depicted a cosmology of concentric circles which placed refugees within the structures of the Danish asylum system and society, i.e. the infrastructure of care and control that can both enable and hamper their worldmaking (Alberani et al., 2022, 22:00–30:00 min.). In my interview with the three curators, Carlota Mir explained that it was the collaboration on a drawing representing the Danish asylum system in the first workshop in Copenhagen that made them realize the impossibility of having a system that would care for the needs and wishes of asylum seekers which the present system was created to suppress (Mir in Alberani, Mir, and Nielsen 2022, 25:00–28:00 min.).

One of the two large drawings from this workshop made visually comprehensible the complex (invisible) network of relations which make up the Danish asylum system. Resembling a complex Venn diagram, it visualized the interlocking institutional, legal and financial infrastructures that determine the lives of ‘people with temporary residence permit’ – and how supportive civil society organizations, documenta fifteen, and activist groups and movements such as Black Lives Matter were positioned in relation to the asylum system. This drawing could thus be read as the ‘cosmos’ of asylum seekers in Denmark, and it invited a dual reading. It could be read as a mapping of the activist initiatives supporting their worldmaking and attempts to reposition themselves within a system designed to relegate them to the margins (Black Lives Matter, ‘the church industry’, and local initiatives in Copenhagen such as the Bridge Radio and the magazine *VisAvis*). It could also be read as an infrastructural analysis of the interlocked systems of care and control that both fuel and inhibit their agency. The other drawing focused more on humans as relational beings and collectives. It depicted a cosmology of concentric circles in which ‘people’

constituted the centre, mapping several types and degrees of freedom, and how they can be reached. The centre was encircled by layers of determining factors: barriers, obstacles and facilitators, ranging from the legal asylum system itself to housing and work, to money and justice, health and disability, community and citizenship, and territorial borders. Radial lines labelled ‘resilience’, ‘anger’, ‘hope’ and ‘Trampoline House’ named the human resources and agency that the ‘people’ at the centre of the circle diagram needed to overcome the concentric layers of ‘circumstances’ and reach the area beyond the circle, where the key words suggested that desired freedoms such as unrestricted movement, relationships, and deciding what happens to one’s body and future would flourish.

Fig. 14: Collaborative drawings by Kate Adams, Project Art Works and Trampoline House in Hübner Areal, documenta fifteen, Kassel, 2022. Front: Cosmologies of Care: Freedom, 2022, posca pens on paper, 180 x 150 cm. Back: Cosmologies of Care: The Asylum System in Denmark, 2022, posca pens on paper, 290 x 290 cm. The drawings were made during Project Art Works’ workshop ‘Massaging the Asylum System’ in Trampoline House, May 20–22, 2022. Workshop curation: Carlota Mir and Sara Alberani. Guest facilitators: Kate Adams and Tim Corrigan (Project Art Works). Trampoline House consultancy: Nabila Saidi and Tone Olaf Nielsen. Photo: Tone Olaf Nielsen. Courtesy: The Trampoline House Archive.



The collaborative interlinkage of the two lumbung members was also manifested in Project Art Work's exhibition space, where a German-language version of the last-mentioned drawing was on display. For Trampoline House and Project Art Works, this local-to-local, or 'inter-lokal', collaboration on creative strategies of care enabled the collectives to share knowledge and experience of how the holistic, artistic and investigative method of 'cosmologies of care' could be adapted to other groups than the neurodivergent people for whose needs it was initially tailored. The two large-scale drawings suggested the method's usefulness as a collective instrument, while the small cosmological drawing that formed the centre of the cluster of community portraits pointed to the method's potential as a tool for displaced individuals to comprehend and express how forced displacement had relocated them geographically and repositioned them socially.

As Carlota Mir has explained, the method and the collaboration also enabled the participants to realize that, despite the considerable differences between the needs of refugees/asylum seekers and those of neurominorities, there were many similarities with regard to the systemic suppression and obstacles they each had to tackle – and this insight made possible *a coalitional moment*. By sharing their knowledge and methods while working together, i.e. by 'living out a politics of lumbung', and by acknowledging the similarities as well as the uniqueness of their members' needs and aspirations, Trampoline House and Project Art Works were able to forge 'a temporary coalition of people who have been othered' while also recognizing that such a coalition is not devoid of inner conflicts and tensions (Alberani et al., 2022, 46:00–50:00 min.).

Shortly before documenta fifteen closed, the two collectives co-hosted a concluding workshop in Kassel titled 'Massaging the Asylum System and Creative Strategies of Care'. This workshop took a more visionary approach to refugeedom. The aim was to let participants explore how to rethink the European asylum system together by using Project Art Works' visual method of cosmologies of care. The workshop took inspiration from the ways in which European leaders and peoples had welcomed the millions of Ukrainians who had been forcibly displaced by Russia's military invasion. The extraordinary political and popular goodwill demonstrated that the EU is capable of improving its dysfunctional asylum system and establishing infrastructures that enable displaced people to access housing, healthcare, education and work. Accordingly, the reception of the Ukrainians was dubbed *Den store modtagelse* ('The Great Reception') in a research-based podcast series in four parts, exploring how the reception of the Ukrainian refugees in 2022 was experienced by Syrian refugees living in Denmark, and by the municipal caseworkers and volunteers who receive refugees. Unlike the Syrian refugees who arrived in 2015–2016, the Ukrainians were granted residence on the basis of a special law that allowed them to obtain a residence permit without prior asylum processing. They also experienced a greater freedom of mobility (and freedom from

visa requirements) because they had had access to the EU prior to the war as sought-after labour migrants. Briefly explained, the change of the legal framework gave them much quicker access to housing, work and becoming part of society, although they shared with the Syrian refugees the condition of only being granted temporary residence and the prospect of having to live in uncertainty about their future for years (Bayraktar, Kohl, and Sandberg 2023, part 1, 2:30–10:00, 14:50–18:30 min.).

As Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen suggests in the podcast, the handling of the Ukrainian refugees can be seen as ‘a natural experiment that can help point some ways forward from the paradigm we have been locked into for the last 20, some would say 30, years – the control and deterrence paradigm’ (Gammeltoft-Hansen, in: Bayraktar, Kohl, and Sandberg 2023, part 1, 30:45–31:45 min.). Gammeltoft-Hansen suggests that, with time, it will be possible to see what concrete effects the procedural and legal changes have had in terms of faster residence permits, faster access to the labour market and greater freedom for displaced people to choose where they want to settle, both locally and across the EU – all issues that the prevailing paradigm has made it difficult to open a political discussion about in Denmark and at a European level.

The last workshop in Kassel used this historical and political opening to pose the question as to whether the future reception of refugees in Europe could be different, be more humane. The workshop brought together a more casual and mixed group of people of different nationalities, including from German, Middle Eastern and Ukrainian backgrounds. Some people had flight or migration experience, others were visitors to documenta fifteen who happened to be passing by and engaged spontaneously for a couple of hours. While the first day of the workshop took place in Trampoline House’s exhibition in Hübner Areal, the second day was held in Project Art Works’s space in the Fridericianum (Alberani, in Alberani, Mir, and Nielsen 2022, 30:00–36:00). In the workshop, the participants first collaborated in pairs on drawing cosmologies of a future asylum system. The second day, which was facilitated by Tone Olaf Nielsen, ended with all the participants collaborating on a large cosmological drawing of a future asylum system. Inspired by the European willingness to change the system temporarily to accommodate displaced Ukrainians, they envisioned an asylum system that would welcome people from war zones without any questions being asked regarding their reasons to be here; a system that offered people the possibility of living in a place of their own choice, of receiving assistance from the beginning, also for family reunification, and where other barriers to people’s need to rebuild their lives would also be lifted (Nielsen, in Alberani, Mir, and Nielsen 2022, 32:00–34:00 min.). The last workshop of ‘Massaging the Asylum System and Creative Strategies of Care’ thus used the cracks and openings in the European refugee regime produced by the reception of displaced Ukrainians as leverage for claiming a more humane asylum system for all displaced people.

Transversal politics as prefigurative politics: Concluding remarks

Based on this account of the ‘Massaging the Asylum System’ workshops in Copenhagen and Kassel, I contend that these workshops succeeded in engendering a transnational epistemic community – that is, a knowledge-sharing community which pursues the common goals of developing a transversal politics of care for asylum seekers and of reimagining the asylum system of Europe’s postmigrant societies. The collaborative cosmological drawings remain as visual testimonies of the coming into being of this fleeting and malleable epistemic community. In Marsha Meskimmon’s understanding of transversal politics, affect, imagination and aesthetics are posited as central to creative and transformative political projects. Building on the sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis, Meskimmon contends that transversal politics are more focused on advocacy than ‘representation’ – that is, speaking *with* rather than *for* (Meskimmon 2020, 7). This is exactly the approach of the workshop series. However, as political struggles are always about ‘representation’, the questions of the *who*, *what* and *how* of representation, along with the questions of the *effects* and *affects* produced by representation, cannot be ignored.

As affect, imagination and aesthetics are at the core of artistic practices of representation, they can assume a central role when they are deployed as critical or activist tools to reimagine society, or an aspect of it. By acting materially and creating representation(s) – understood *both* as the production of objects/images/texts which can transmit a message and be ‘read’ and call forth affective and reflective responses, *and* as a speaking *with* and also (through the images) *for* – Trampoline House and Project Art Works mobilized art’s potential to reshape the social imaginaries of flight and change the perception of asylum seekers and the asylum system.

Trampoline House’s commitment to envisioning a more humane asylum system, and the commitment of all lumbung members and artists to turning this art event into a powerful collective experiment in practising lumbung values, suggest that the kind of transversal politics at work in documenta fifteen amounted to a visionary collective experiment in creating the future in the present social relationships – an experiment in transformative worldmaking, as it were. It could be described, then, as a *prefigurative politics*.²¹ I borrow the concept of prefigurative politics from social movement studies, where it concerns the ways in which social movements and their participants seek to embody or represent the future they desire in their contemporary practice. As political theorist Dan Swain notes, it refers to the idea of ‘building the new world in the shell of the old’, and it is often associated with the idea of building an intentional community within social movements (Swain

21 I have developed these thoughts on the relation between documenta fifteen’s lumbung practices, prefigurative politics and post-multiculturalism further in a subsequent study. See Petersen 2025.

2019, 47–48). In this case, the old shell is Documenta, an institutional infrastructure of the Western art world.

But there is more. As the sociologist Marianne Maeckelbergh has explained, prefigurative politics is a method, an ‘action form’ concerned with creating appropriate organizational infrastructures and processes:

In my experience as an activist, practising prefiguration has meant always trying to make the processes we use to achieve our immediate goals an embodiment of our ultimate goals, so that there is no distinction between how we fight and what we fight for, at least not where the ultimate goal of a radically different society is concerned. [...] Prefiguration is a practice through which movement actors create a conflation of their ends with their means. It is an enactment of the ultimate values of an ideal society within the very means of struggle for that society. (Maeckelbergh 2009, 66–67)

To draw the strands together, I would like to propose that the artistic and collaborative practices which thrived within the lumbung framework of documenta fifteen could be described as an *art of prefiguration*. My use of this term is in conversation with the concept of prefigurative politics developed in social movement studies, and I use it to describe the work of artists who have ‘walked the talk’ and experimented with practising the change they want to see as a way of ‘building the future now’ (Rob Sparrow, quoted in Graeber 2009, 202).

Art resembles protest movements in the sense that, across history, artists have been pioneers in contesting and reimagining the values and practices of society. At the core of the art of prefiguration is the enactment in the present of a desired world or society of the future. Like transversal politics, prefiguration involves advocacy. It is also inextricably linked to communication and representation and is carried out through the infrastructures, platforms and technologies of representation and appearance available in a given historical period. It is a deep understanding of prefiguration’s dependency on representation and the potential in working within the infrastructures of an art institution attracting global media attention that prompted Morten Goll to state on behalf of Trampoline House’s Artistic Team that Documenta ‘is the biggest megaphone we can get’ (Goll, in Kryger 2022, n.p.).

Looking at documenta fifteen more broadly, the artworks and installations on display at the exhibition venues were, arguably, crucial instruments of communicating the projects and objectives of the invited collectives and individuals to the visitors. However, the primary channel of communicating a prefigurative politics was more likely to have been the democratic deliberative processes through which the invited participants became engaged in organizing and collaborating on a Documenta founded on lumbung values. These processes could be perceived as generating a micro-utopia in which ‘many forms of grounded utopianism’ could

coexist (Sears 2014, 19), an exemplary community dedicated to lumbung values and serving as an alternative model of how to live, think and talk together on a crisis-ridden earth in the age of the capitalocene (Demos 2017, 85–87). They can also be seen as an alternative, which demonstrated to the broader public that ‘other ways are possible’, as ruangrupa put it (ruangrupa 2022a, 17; cf. Swain 2019, 50); and that a worldwide network of artists and cultural producers had for some time already been exploring such forms of worldmaking and of generating other ways of organizing their activity and alternative social and economic infrastructures – as blueprints of the change they wanted to bring about.

If many visitors and critics failed to grasp the prefigurative dimension of documenta fifteen, it was probably because the generative processes played out primarily among the in-group of participants and was rarely accessible to the out-group of visitors. This critique is in line with that of Karen van den Berg, who argues that, as this mega-event attracted thousands of visitors every day, the informal ‘nonkrong’ gatherings were unable to compensate for the absence of public discussion events with adequate publicity: ‘Participation in the workshops was, to an extent, reserved for insiders and persistent visitors who clicked their way through the depths of the website, registered well in advance, and were prepared to wait longer.’ (K.v.d. Berg 2023, n.p.) What visitors saw throughout the exhibition venues and experienced in the workshops was mostly the material and immaterial traces resulting from the organizational processes that were collected and communicated through the medium ruangrupa termed *harvest* (Blagoev and Ortlieb, 2023, 3): the artistically recorded takeaway from an event (e.g. a meeting or discussion) that is made in order to ‘share what is being discussed’ and enable ‘collective learning’, and which can take any form, including ‘a sticky note, a story, drawing, film, sound piece, or meme’ (ruangrupa, 2022a, 42).

Prior to the opening of documenta fifteen, in an interview with Nikos Pastergiadis, ruangrupa had explained the core ideas of their practice and how this informed the lumbung values of their documenta. They stressed the importance of co-operation among active participants to carry out a task considered ‘useful for the common good’ and emphasized the role of gathering, listening, non-domination and collective imagination: ‘In sum, we are drawing on ideas that bring people together in conversation rather than force them into authoritative processes. Conversations meander, and decisions spring forth [...] It is a collage: thousands of pieces of ideas come together. Bad ideas are polished up with a little collective imagination.’ (ruangrupa, 2021, n.p.)

Crucially, ruangrupa also suggested that documenta fifteen was only the first phase in an evolving system of change. This idea was emphasized in the concluding conference *Let there be lumbung*. Here, the significance of the journey *after* documenta fifteen – repeatedly designated ‘lumbung one’ – was stressed in ways which confirmed that a non-prescriptive prefigurative politics, with an openness towards a

variety of possible priorities and goals, underpinned the making of documenta fifteen.²² Furthermore, ruangrupa's curatorial strategy of inviting 'friends' resonated with Papastergiadis's proposition that friendship is essential to the experience and meaning of art:

The new arts economy that we are aiming to build brings art back to its more useful function: the imagination and realization of new (and remembered) ways of living and organizing that are more just, humane, and holistic. We are therefore looking for friends that focus their artistic experimentation, activism, and/or imagination on the fields of (urban, rural, public) space, economics, education, and ecology. We're interested in organizations that cherish relations, generosity, and the search for the rebalancing of individual and collective needs. In the first phase of crafting this new art economy, collectives and organizations that already have this at the core of their mission are invited to enrich the lumbung economy with their own experiences, activities, and resources.²³

The avenue explored by Trampoline House and Project Art Works in their joint workshops was one that took art's visual and political agency seriously, casting imagination and its visual materializations as what Meskimmon has called 'a potential "strong card" in transformative politics' (Meskimmon, 2020, 138). Moreover, as suggested by the title of Dady de Maximo Mwicira-Mitali and Joachim Hamou's work *Silenced Bodies – Loud Images*, they demonstrated that images can speak volumes about silenced bodies: migrant, neurodivergent, disabled – and other *othered* bodies. In collectively produced videos and workshops, Trampoline House's Artistic Team explored the power artistic and curatorial practices have to affectively include marginalized bodies in the community of the national Home, despite the nationalist 'post-multicultural' attempts to affectively, and in some cases also physically, evict unwanted migrants and asylum seekers.²⁴

Although it was Trampoline House and not its embedded art space CAMP that was presented at documenta fifteen, CAMP's mission of using art to work towards more humane migration and asylum policies obviously informed the way artistic practices and visual media were harnessed in Trampoline House's exhibition and the workshops with Project Art Works. In taking a final summary look at Trampoline House and CAMP, what seems to have been the common thread in their activist social work and curatorial programmes – from the first local workshop

22 The term has also seeped into the debate on documenta fifteen; see Kolb 2022, 76; Phillips 2022.

23 ruangrupa 2021. See also *Let there be lumbung* (day 1), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goueiZ8Kh4g>, and *Let there be lumbung* (day 2), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjGxqUwOkou> (2:45:00–2:47:00 min) (both accessed March 28, 2025).

24 A concept of 'affective eviction' is elaborated in Gaonkar 2022.

at a local Danish art academy to the concluding workshop at one of the global artworld's agenda-setting mega-exhibitions – is a transversal politics that is also prefigurative. It is prefigurative in the sense that the Trampoline House community and CAMP sought the change they wanted to see by enacting practices appropriate to the future in the present. They sought to 'reach ahead' while also acknowledging that the future (of a more humane asylum system) had not yet been achieved. This spirit of hope, tempered by criticism and realism, is captured eminently well by Dan Swain's definition of the core issue of prefigurative politics: 'how to represent action in the present as both intimately connected to future alternative practices, while nonetheless distinct from them, to see the present as not not, but not yet, the future' (Swain 2019, 60).

Bringing Swain's understanding of prefigurative politics into the present study of contemporary artistic and curatorial practices inevitably raises the question of what roles artists, activists and cultural professionals can play in generating new models of coexistence that grapple with the inequalities and conflicts involved in cohabitation, at the same time as they cultivate more reciprocal modes of coexistence which acknowledge our interdependency as human beings (Ross 2022, xi-xii).

In the field of art, creative collaborative attempts are being made to reinvent multicultural coexistence from below as a kind of transnational and cosmopolitan 'post-multiculturalism' based on principles of planetary coexistence, sustainability and regeneration.²⁵ *ruangrupa's* *documenta fifteen* stands out as the most thought-provoking, radical and encompassing endeavour to date. Based on the principles of 'lumbung' and committed to collaborative practices of commoning and an ethics of sharing and sustainability, the contributors to *documenta fifteen* experimented with developing variegated ways of sharing resources, knowledge and friendship as a way of 'building the future now' as a radical form of worldmaking. Thus, *documenta fifteen* can be seen as a fertile breeding ground for an art of prefiguration, proffering 'lumbung' as a metaphor for sustainable ways of living together as a global community of transculturally interconnected and mutually responsible and responsive collectives.

25 For the resonance between *documenta fifteen* and *ruangrupa's* *lumbung* methodology and recent 'post-multicultural' attempts to rethink multiculturalism beyond the political backlash against it in the 2010s, see Petersen 2025.

4. A postmigrant civic ethics from the perspective of the refugee

Dilemmas of representing refugees

Chapters 2 and 3's study of how Trampoline House and CAMP gave space to those facing a rigid asylum system suggests but does not elaborate on the fact that representing refugees and asylum seekers presents many challenges and dilemmas, no matter whether the chosen format is a form of assisted or mediated self-representation, an artist-led participatory practice, or if the artist is the authoritative figure who creates representations of precarious others, speaking *for* instead of *with*. Critical questions of how refugees and asylum seekers are represented may also arise when the artist has a refugee background herself, as in the work of the Vietnamese American artist, Tiffany Chung. In *The Syrian Project* (2011–2015), which figured prominently in her solo exhibition at CAMP in 2015, Chung used quantitative data from UNHCR statistics to represent visually the routes and scale of the Syrian exodus. For all their breathtaking beauty and the acuteness with which her small, delicate maps register the Syrian crisis, they do not escape the pitfall of reducing refugees to anonymous numbers. Nor are the works of artists who have themselves been victims of state persecution above criticism, as evidenced by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's documentary *Human Flow* (2017). Capturing human stories in 23 countries across the globe, Ai Weiwei's film documents the staggering scale of the worldwide refugee crisis and the suffering of the many refugees who have sought shelter and struggle to survive in the squalor of overpopulated camps. In this case, the fact that the film was made in solidarity with refugees does not make obsolete the critical question why the figure of the world-famous, globe-trotting artist is repeatedly foregrounded, so the focus shifts to the artist's strong identification with what he describes as 'these unfortunate people who are pushed into extreme conditions by outside forces they are powerless to resist'.¹ In her insightful critical discussion of Ai Weiwei's unquestionably urgent

1 Ai Weiwei, 'The Refugee Crisis Isn't about Refugees. It's about US' (The Guardian, February 2, 2018; quoted in Ross 2022, 191).

and thought-provoking film, Christine Ross captures the tensional ambiguity of the artist's empathy eminently well, with the concept of the *pharmakon* as being both a poison and a remedy or cure. Ross uses this concept consistently throughout her book, *Art for Coexistence: Unlearning the Way We See Migration*, as a tool to analyse the ambiguities that representations of forced displacement are steeped in, especially those that seek to move the viewer to empathize with refugees. Ross demonstrates that the ambiguities and 'pharmakon paradox' inherent in art is one of its strengths with regard to the representation of migration and coexistence (Ross 2022, 178). She also suggests that the call for empathy is constant in Ai Weiwei's many works on 'the dehumanization of migration', but 'it tends to be ambivalent precisely because of its identificatory dimension' (Ross 2022, 191). This is most manifest in Ai Weiwei's photograph of himself posing as the drowned three-year-old Kurdish refugee, Alan Kurdi. The result of his attempt to express his empathy by literally staging himself as Alan as depicted in Nilüfer Demir's widely reproduced press photo from September 2015, showing the infant's body lying face down at the water's edge of a Turkish beach, is, Ross argues, a misguided over-identification that 'vampiristically' absorbs the young boy's body and redirects the attention to how the artist feels (Ross 2022, 192). Here, the 'poisonous' side of the *pharmakon* takes over at the expense of its 'therapeutic' side. Conversely, there are scenes in *Human Flow* where the 'poisonous' side of the artwork-as-*pharmakon* is partly overtaken by its 'therapeutic' side (Ross 2022, 194–195).

What Ross's reflections on art, empathy and the *pharmakon* make evident is that the representation of 'the other' is a minefield. Even representations grounded in the very best of intentions, or which are created by someone who is a member of the community being portrayed, may be questioned. Chapter 4 examines some of these problems of representation by shifting the focus from asylum-seeking newcomers to those who have been granted permission to stay and build a life in the postmigrant society of Denmark.² To quote a postmigrant watchword coined by the German activist movement Kanak Attak in the 1990s, and reintroduced into the debates in 2016 by Esra Küçük (who was at that time head of the Gorki Forum at the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin), an important point in this chapter is that what matters in a postmigrant politics of representation is 'Haltung statt Herkunft', or 'It is not about where you are from, but where you are at' (Petersen, Schramm, and Wiegand 2019, 21; Küçük 2016).

Before I turn to the dilemmas of representing people from refugee backgrounds, some general remarks on representation and difference are needed. 'Representation is a complex business', observed Stuart Hall, especially when dealing with 'people and places which are significantly different from us' (Hall 1997a, 225–226). This is because 'difference' is a contested area of representation that constitutes a key site of

2 This chapter builds on a previous study; see Petersen 2021.

the ongoing negotiation between the competing social and political forces through which power is defended, contested and shifted. In addition, representations of difference, especially *visual* representations, engage emotions and attitudes. They may trigger the viewer's anxieties and desires, as well as mobilizing cultural stereotypes that reinforce already existing prejudice and conventions. Representations are important, therefore, not only because of what they *are*, but also because of what they *do*, i.e. for their discursive and cultural functions and effects.

Drawing on Foucault's discursive approach, Hall stresses that the subject is *produced within discourse* and can thus become 'the bearer of the kind of knowledge which discourse produces [...and] the object through which power is relayed' (Hall 1997b, 55). In discourse, the subject has two sides or 'sites'. As a representational practice, discourse produces *subjects as identifiable figures* – the national citizen, the foreigner, the refugee, etc. In doing so, discourse also constructs *subject-positions for the reader or viewer* from which to make sense of its particular knowledge and representations (Hall 1997b, 56). Hall's point about the dual role of the subject in practices of representation is fundamental to any engagement with representational practices pivoting on 'difference', especially when the practices of representation have a stake in the construction of a binary opposition between 'us' and 'them', self and other, as is the case with the representation of forcibly displaced people.

To begin with, it should be stressed that the focal point of Chapter 4 is not the uprooting and flight from home, nor the forced displacement of refugees. As Emma Cox has noted, 'an emphasis on *transiting* bodies risks distilling refugee subjectivity to beleaguered mobility' (Cox 2017, 495). This chapter shifts the perspective to the open-ended processes of 'regrounding' (S. Ahmed et al. 2003) and worldmaking (Meskimmon 2017, 2011) that refugees undergo in the receiving country, and it links the representation of such processes to the broader debate about belonging and citizenship in Europe. Despite their mundane character and embeddedness in the inconspicuous elements of everyday life, the processes of settlement and belonging are inseparable from political discourses and the tightened policies on asylum and integration which have been implemented in connection with the resurgence of nationalism and the fortification of national borders in many Western countries, i.e. 'the European border and migration regime' (Hess and Kasperek 2017, 58–60). Refugees and representation is thus a profoundly politicized topic that brings societal conflicts to the fore, also when experiences of refugeedom and questions of asylum are addressed within the sphere of art and literature, which is still widely believed to possess some degree of freedom and distance from society despite the fact that the rich tradition of political art developing since the 1960s and 1970s has effectively refuted the modernist idea of radical autonomy and separateness.

Given the politicized nature of the topic, a study of artistic and curatorial modes of representing refugees should include a consideration of the entanglement of aesthetics with politics and ethics. Instead of going the traditional route and turning to

Jacques Rancière's theorization of the relationship between aesthetics and politics, thereby following in the footsteps of the numerous scholars and other professionals in the art field who have embraced Rancière's theory in recent decades, I aim to pursue some new avenues.³

The ethical dilemmas and conflicting aims and perceptions involved in representing refugees are many, as Hannah Arendt suggested in the very opening sentence of her 1943 essay 'We, Refugees': 'In the first place, we don't like to be called "refugees"' (Arendt 2007, 264). The question of how to 'represent' refugees (and other marginalized or vulnerable groups) leads to two kinds of ethical consideration. Firstly, there is the risk of conforming to pre-existing tropes and thereby unintentionally exacerbating stereotypes of suffering and victimization, or their compensatory antidote, which over-emphasizes assimilation and 'notions that refugees should be "just like us"' (Blomfield and Lenette 2018, 325). Secondly, there is the issue of agency and empowerment: should refugees be represented, or should they represent themselves in the receiving country? Should they 'have' agency, voice and visibility, or should they be 'given' agency, voice and visibility by spokespersons and other mediators in order to increase their chance of being 'heard' and 'understood' by the authorities and citizens of the receiving country? Should they be given full control over the means of representation and platforms of communication? Or should 'speaking' and 'making visible' in public spheres be based on a collaboration between refugees and native citizens? If so, what can participatory practices accomplish, and what dilemmas and conflicts of domination and suppression do they involve?

This chapter will explore the problem of representing refugees by way of a case study of the art project *100% FREMMED?* ('100% FOREIGN?'), initiated in 2016 by photographer and curator Maja Nydal Eriksen and Metropolis/Copenhagen International Theatre. *100% FREMMED?* is Denmark's first major documentary collection of individual accounts of former refugees. It consists of 250 life stories and photographic portraits of individuals who were granted asylum in Denmark between 1956 and 2019. It can be said, therefore, to form a collective portrait and multivocal narrative that inserts citizens of refugee backgrounds into the narrative of the nation, thereby expanding the idea of national identity and culture, or more specifically 'Danishness'. Additionally, at the time of its completion in 2019, it was distinguished as the most encompassing civic participation project yet undertaken in Denmark. *100% FREMMED?* was an extraordinary ramified, expansive and viral project that engaged inhabitants, cultural institutions, cultural producers and municipal officers in cities across most of the country.

3 For a critique of Rancière's theory, see Marchart 2019, 13–14. For a recent example of how Rancière's theorization of the relationship between aesthetics, politics and ethics can be applied in a study of representations of refugees, see Arda 2019.

100% *FREMMED?* was also an interdisciplinary project aiming to ‘give voice’ to people with refugee experience. It spanned several genres – interview-based narrative, photographic portrait, art in public space, and more. The project allows us to think of participatory art as a privileged locus for the exploration of intersubjective relations and the question of how to ‘represent’ citizens with refugee experience as well as the history and practice of asylum – the building of a future life in a foreign country.

In a study of arts-based methods in refugee research, Isobel Blomfield and Carline Lenette proposed that, through collaboration with people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, artists can create representations which are more empowering. One way of achieving this is to produce ‘counter-narratives that provide a more holistic construction of refugees’ individual historical, gender, political and cultural circumstances’ (Blomfield and Lenette 2018, 325). Yet, there are many dilemmas and ambiguities involved in such an endeavour. 100% *FREMMED?* will serve here as the analytical reference point for a discussion of some of these issues. This chapter’s basic methodological premise is that both the politics of representation and the ethics of representation must be addressed when engaging with representations of refugees, and that such representations must be situated in their immediate contexts of production and reception for their politicized character and meaning to become comprehensible. Only by considering the socio-historical circumstances and political climate is it possible to understand what 100% *FREMMED?* set out to do, and why and how the project sought to engender a new civic ethics from the perspective of the refugee.

To situate the project in its historical and regional European context, I will briefly consider Danish immigration and asylum policies in the 2010s, starting from the proposition, put forward in the Introduction and further elaborated in Chapter 1, that Denmark can be described as a postmigrant society. My consideration of the *ethical* aspects of 100% *FREMMED?* draws on Arendt’s essay and what the English studies scholar Andreea Deciu Ritivoi has described as Arendt’s attempt to articulate an ‘ethics of alterity’ from the perspective of the refugee (Ritivoi 2019), as well as the Vietnamese American filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha’s concept of *speaking nearby*. When considering the *political* aspects of the project, I return to the feminist concept of transversal politics adopted in Chapters 2 and 3 because it has a strong intersubjective and ethical component (Yuval-Davis 1999; Meskimmon 2020). The case study illuminates some of the difficulties involved in representing refugees in a participatory art project, especially the challenge of ensuring that there is scope for the participants’ agency to unfold (Blomfield and Lenette 2018, 235), as well as the question of how to create narratives that counter stereotypification and articulate claims for the democratic right to be treated as an equal – or, in other words, a post-migrant civic ethics for a plural democratic society, springing from the perspective of the refugee. It is hoped that by threading the theoretical discussion through an

example, this chapter can contribute to a deeper understanding of how participatory art forms and their interpretive and collaborative practices can intervene in the field of representation, and what they can bring to the ethical politics of representing refugee experiences and the understanding of postmigrancy.

Politics, ethics and aesthetics

For the purposes of this case study, I define ethics broadly but with a special emphasis on what ethics is understood to be within the domains of artistic practices and aesthetics, understood here in the broad sense of 'sensory embodied experience' and not as a branch of philosophy and art theory. I adopt Geoffrey Galt Harpham's understanding of ethics as 'the arena in which the claims of otherness – the moral law, the human other, cultural norms, the Good-in-itself, etc. – are articulated and negotiated' (Harpham 1995, 394). As Harpham explains, ethics has two functions: to formulate an ethical critique of the norms that are constituted within a given ethical system; and to articulate and defend different norms. I would like to suggest that *100% FREMMED?* sought to fulfil both purposes. Another way of describing the project's dual function is to see it as pursuing both political and ethical ends. This rephrasing indicates why it is relevant to turn to Hannah Arendt. As Ritivoi observes, Arendt's 'ethics of alterity' was connected to her ideal of a political community as an arena in which individuals are not seen as born with a fixed and unchanging identity, but defined by their actions, opinions and shifting positionalities; a plural community in which figures of alterity are not pushed to assimilate into sameness, but where difference is embraced (Ritivoi 2019, 104–105).

In recent decades, the discourses on ethics and literary practice have increasingly focused on questions about otherness and witnessing related to the practices and responsibilities of both authors and readers (Newton 2019, ix). In the field of contemporary visual arts, however, the discourse on ethics has taken a different and somewhat understudied course. Since the 1960s, an expansive definition has extended the significance of art beyond the singular, discrete object, which is the work of art, to encompass the human relationships engendered by its production and its reception, as well as its institutional and social framework. As a result, artistic production has become increasingly reflexive about its complex relation to society and shifted towards a strengthening of the connections between the work of art and its social context, site(s) of reception and its audiences. To strengthen the interaction of audiences with works of art, a host of participatory practices – ranging

from 'relational aesthetics',⁴ to 'relational antagonism',⁵ to 'artivism'⁶ – have been introduced by artists who more often than not engage with politicized social issues, such as inequality, marginalization, gender, racism, stigmatization, climate crisis, and more. The discourses on the so-called 'social turn' and 'participatory turn' in art are thus inseparable from questions about 'aesthetics and politics'.⁷ It is from within these dominant and entangled discourses that a contemporary discourse on 'the ethics of aesthetics' has emerged and has sought to define the special qualities of the social field and the intersubjective relations that an artwork engenders, and of which it is also a part (Beshty 2015, 18). In other words, the discourse on art and ethics is a discourse *within* the discourses on art's relation to politics, participation and social engagement, from which it is rarely singled out for separate theorization. A rare example is the artist and writer Walead Beshty's attempt to define an 'aesthetics of ethics' in his introduction to the anthology *Ethics*, with its source texts from the 1970s to the early 2010s. Beshty characterizes art that turns to ethics as 'an art that operates directly upon the world it is situated in' (Beshty 2015, 19) and whose ethical dimension is 'manifest in the aesthetic appearance of the work itself' and in the 'conditions of reception' it creates for its audience in order to propose 'a modification to the social contract, with the artwork acting as the signification of this modification' (Beshty 2015, 20). Applied to the practices of representing refugees, this understanding would shift the attention from the work of art as a discrete object to the ethical relationship between the way in which an artwork depicts subjects as *identifiable figures* and how it co-constructs *subject-positions* (Hall) to make its figures and message readable for the recipient – or, to borrow a more accurate term from literary parlance, for the implied reader who is often also what Michal Rothberg names an *implicated subject* (Rothberg 2019).

Denmark's immigration and asylum policies

To fully understand the implications of *100% FREMMED?* as an artistic, ethical and political intervention into current public debates, it is necessary to outline the contours of Denmark's asylum policies and the popular feeling in the country regarding

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- 4 This much debated concept was coined by art theorist and curator Nicholas Bourriaud (Bourriaud 2002).
 - 5 This term was coined by art historian Claire Bishop as part of her seminal critique of Bourriaud's concept (Bishop 2004, 77).
 - 6 'Artivism' is a contraction of art and activism. For a definition of the term and practice, see Reestorff 2017, 16.
 - 7 This brief outline does not do justice to the breadth and complexity of these discourses on contemporary art. For a more elaborate account on the social and participatory turns, and for further references, see Petersen and Nielsen 2021.

immigration and the growing demographic diversity of the population around the time when the project evolved. For decades, immigration has divided public opinion and turned demographic change into an existential question about the perception of self and other. What does it mean to be Danish? And what does it mean to be foreign?⁸ What does it take to become ‘a member of society’ in social terms, or to be recognized as a citizen in the legal sense of the word?

Since the influx of refugees and migrants from the Middle East and Africa into Europe in 2015, the narrativization of arrival has placed refugees within ‘a condemnatory frame’ that is legitimized by concerns about refugees being a threat to national safety rather than people in need of aid and shelter, and which is backed by ‘combative modes of political leadership’ (Cox 2017, 485). An important change in European asylum policy and law is the introduction of further restraints on the possibility of gaining the security of permanent residency and access to citizenship. As Chapter 3 explained, in recent years, Danish governments have introduced some of the toughest requirements for naturalization in the world as a means of ‘negative nation branding’ (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2017), including a new tertiary status of ‘temporary protection’ (2015) and a three-year postponement of access to family reunification for those granted temporary protection, unless special considerations apply. Important to this chapter is the fact that the restrictions on citizenship also affect well-established groups in society, such as immigrants who have lived and worked in the country for most of their lives, as well as their descendants. In 2021, a report from the Danish Institute for Human Rights criticized the fact that only 65 per cent of the descendants of immigrants born and raised in the country obtained Danish citizenship. The fact that the number of people granted citizenship has declined to its lowest point in 40 years has also raised concerns about the democratic problem that a growing section of the population does not have the right to vote (Danmarks Statistik 2021; Andersen et al. 2021, 48, 58–59, 132–135).

Furthermore, in 2019 a study from the three Nordic countries, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, showed that young adults in Denmark thought that the acquisition of citizenship had become too difficult, indicating that there is a widening gap between parliament and the views of its population, especially young people (Erdal et al. 2019, 29–31, 60, 228–229). Although most researchers have argued that there is no genuine *political* multiculturalism in Denmark, recent surveys suggest that Danish ‘monoculturalism’ is waning (Holtug 2016; C.A. Larsen 2016a, 2016b). In addition, both the philosopher Nils Holtug and the sociologist Christian Albrekt Larsen have suggested that Danes increasingly base their notion of national community on the

8 Lisa Abend makes similar observations in a feature article about the effects of Danish immigration policies on public opinion and the self-perception of the Danes (Abend January 16, 2019).

idea of Denmark as a political entity rather than a cultural community. Larsen has convincingly argued that the growing significance of diversity in the Danish national self-perception results primarily from *generational* effects and can therefore be considered irreversible. Based on a comparison of two large surveys conducted in 2003 and 2013, Larsen concludes that the national self-perception of the population seems to be ‘moving slowly but surely towards multicultural’ (C.A. Larsen 2016a, 135).

What can be observed in Denmark is a split between, on the one hand, a growing openness to ‘cultural diversity’ in civil society and among some politicians, which ties in with a germinating critique of ‘institutional racism’ (e.g. in the labour market, the police, film and media, higher education, etc.), and, on the other hand, a broad coalition in parliament pushing for stricter laws on immigration that target especially refugees and irregular migrants. In short, Denmark, which has historically prided itself as being a liberal advocate of the protection of refugees, has become increasingly reluctant to integrate even comparatively small numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. Anxious to stem the tide of right-wing nationalistic backlash and win back voters from the anti-immigration populist party, *Dansk Folkeparti* (the Danish People’s Party), both the conservative and the centre-left blocs in parliament have more or less appropriated the anti-immigration policy of *Dansk Folkeparti* and supported the seemingly endless series of restrictions on asylum, immigration and citizenship, thus testifying to how an ‘invasion complex’ has permeated national politics (Papastergiadis 2017, 13; see also Papastergiadis 2012, 36–40).

In 2019, the year that the project *100% FREMMED?* was completed, the flagrant dehumanization of refugees by Danish asylum policies became obvious when the social democratic government declared that some asylum seekers from Syria could be sent back to the Damascus province, although no other country in the world had yet declared this region safe enough to return to. This repatriation plan was fiercely contested by left-wing politicians, humanitarian organizations, ordinary citizens, and, importantly, young Syrian refugees who saw their whole existence destroyed, as well as by some members of the social democratic party. Even so, Danish politicians still find voter and parliamentary support for continuing their aggressive anti-asylum seeker policies, as explained in the Introduction (Abend 2019).

As noted by Nils Holtug, immigration policies are closely linked to the policies that govern civil society at large. It is reflected in the scramble for votes and the fact that ‘there is a growing part of the political spectrum that sees a welfare state and a multicultural society as directly incompatible, or at least difficult to have side by side’. The broad political and voter support for such restrictive policies indicates that ‘Danes are quite polarized over immigration’, as Holtug puts it (Holtug, quoted in Abend 2019, n.p.; see also Holtug 2013). The polarization over immigration is aggravated even further by the ways in which anti-racism and feminist identity politics are often framed in the media and public debates by hostile narratives on ‘political correctness’ and ‘the culture of hurt’, and are wrongly interpreted as attempts

to introduce prohibitions and suppress freedom – especially the white majority’s freedom of speech – rather than as struggles for social justice and expressions of a changing demography (Marker and Hendricks 2019, 120–121, 148). As philosophers Silas L. Marker and Vincent F. Hendricks observe in their book on the Danish public debates, both narratives ‘are used by one side of the debate to frame the public as an *us*, who are the sensible and rational ones who do not get offended or hurt by trivial matters, and a *them*, who can be hurt by anything, has no sense of humour and cannot take a joke’ (Marker and Hendricks 2019, 163).

With immigrants and their descendants making up 16 per cent of the population, a figure expected to rise to 22 per cent by 2070, it could be stated that Denmark is already well on its way to becoming a multi-ethnic society (Danmarks Statistik 2024, 7). In a 2022 study of the origins of children up to the age of 16, which used a more fine-grained set of classifications than Statistics Denmark, Jeppe Fjeldgaard Larsen and Christian Albrekt Larsen have even shown that, in 2019, 23.4 per cent, not 13.4 per cent, of children and youth had some kind of non-Danish heritage, and that the classifications hitherto used have underestimated the ethnic diversity among the youngest citizens, especially in greater Copenhagen (J.F. Larsen and Larsen 2022, 47–49 and 59). They conclude that, although ‘ethnic diversity’ is difficult to measure, the trend is clear:

All in all, it is not an easy task to provide a meaningful description of ethnic diversity in a society. Essentially, the problem is that on the one hand, ethnic divides are a fact. They are reflected in language and culture. They are reflected in experiences of discrimination. They are reflected in settlement patterns. But on the other hand, ethnic divides are also ephemeral and constantly changing. These changes will be particularly evident among children and young people. (J.F. Larsen and Larsen 2022, 50)

Denmark can thus be characterized as a postmigrant society (see Chapter 1). At this juncture, the point I wish to stress is that the ways in which Danish governments have dealt with the challenge of refugees and their protection have not only affected the people directly concerned. In the longer term, the historical move away from the humanitarian commitments that were defined in the 20th century will also change the Danes’ perception of society and national identity. It has, in fact, already changed. As Søren Jessen-Petersen, the former Assistant UN High Commissioner for Refugees, has said:

Today, the joy and pleasure I felt by being Danish in an international organization, has been replaced by shame and embarrassment when former colleagues and friends contact me after yet another critical article in a major international

medium about constraints, restrictions and inhuman treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in Denmark. (Jessen-Petersen 2021, n.p.)

100% FREMMED? – an overview of the project

The 100% *FREMMED?* project emerged from and grappled with the socio-political circumstances outlined above. At the same time, it also engaged with the world history of refugeedom since the end of the Second World War and the adoption of the United Nations' Refugee Convention in 1951. It constituted a targeted attempt to expand the understanding of citizenship by inserting a wide range of personal stories about, and portraits of, citizens with refugee backgrounds in the official narrative about Denmark, thereby adding a new chapter to Danish history (Padovan-Özdemir 2020, 3).

It is important to underscore that the aim was not to tell the stories of the wars and persecutions that forced people to flee, or about internment in detention camps and asylum centres or the other troubles refugees have, and have had to go through before being granted asylum in Denmark. 100% *FREMMED?* aimed to involve citizens with a refugee background in a multivoiced rethinking of national identity as a heterogeneous rather than an ethnically homogeneous category. Here, the refugee and migration perspective became a tool for bringing the country's actual diversity to light. In other words, the project was not about the escape, the journey and the arrival but the process of building a life in a foreign country and the lifelong, open-ended formation of identity it entails. As explained to the digital visitor on the project's website, the aim was 'to update the national romantic portrayal of Denmark and place the participants in the official image of Denmark'.⁹ In addition, the project made an ambitious attempt to unite art, history, identity, inclusion, learning and democratic participation in one project.

Maja Nydal Eriksen and Metropolis initiated the project in 2016. The first phase resulted in a series of 100 photographic portraits and interview-based stories by former refugees living in Copenhagen. It was first shown at an exhibition in Copenhagen City Hall in the spring of 2017; it also included the performative event *Levende fortællinger* ('Live stories'), during which the audience was able to engage with some of the participants in a one-on-one conversation. This was followed later that same year by an open-air exhibition at a centrally located quayside in Copenhagen. In the next phase (2018–2019), the project was transformed into a travelling exhibition, expanding the project's geographical reach to include participants in cities across the country, where the project was shown in public spaces and included

9 '100% FREMMED?', <https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/> (accessed March 30, 2025).

newly added portraits of local residents.¹⁰ With each city, ten new portraits of local inhabitants were added. The exhibition was also accompanied by other events, such as theatre productions (with some of the participants as performers), community dinners, events at local libraries, and, importantly, educational activities for school classes.¹¹ The latter, as a spinoff from the documentary project, was developed by Nydal Eriksen and the project group into an ambitious educational package which was launched in 2021, consisting of a website about dual cultural identity based on material and nine key themes from the exhibition, as well as classroom material and classes taught by former refugees.¹²

Fig. 15: Installation view of the 100% FREMMED? ('100% FOREIGN?') exhibition in the city of Viborg, Denmark. The general exhibition setup with the local portraits was on the ground level, with the 100 portraits from Copenhagen installed on cubes on the steps above them. Curated by Maja Nydal Eriksen in collaboration with Metropolis/Copenhagen International Theatre. The photographic portraits and the texts are mounted on cubes measuring 200 x 200 cm. © Maja Nydal Eriksen.



10 '100% FREMMED?', <https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/> (accessed March 30, 2025).

11 In addition to *Levende fortællinger* at Copenhagen City Hall in 2017, Teater Katapult in Aarhus co-produced *100% fremmed? Levende fortællinger* ('100% Foreign? Live Stories') with Metropolis/Copenhagen International Theatre. It premiered in 2019 and was based on the life stories of six participants in *100% FREMMED?* living in the Aarhus area (Christoffersen 2019).

12 For a critical analysis of the classroom material and how it was used in classes observed in a field study, see Jacobsen and Padovan-Özdemir 2024.

A postmigrant society

Although the idea for *100% FREMMED?* arose from the debates about the ‘European refugee crisis’ which dominated the media in 2015, the project’s focus on the Danish context must be understood from its origins in Maja Nydal Eriksen and Metropolis’s previous collaboration with the Berlin director and author group, Rimini Protokoll, on the staging of a Copenhagen version of their successful *100% City* concept at the Royal Danish Theatre in 2013. In *100% City*, the 100 individuals on stage were selected based on statistical criteria, with each individual representing 1% of a city’s inhabitants, so the group collectively drew a sociological portrait of the city, thus inviting the audience to ponder the relationship between individual and type and between individual and society. Since the premiere of *100% Berlin: A Statistical Chain Reaction* in 2008, the *100% City* concept has been developed into many productions, including *100% København* (‘100% Copenhagen’), with the 100 Copenhageners on stage selected through statistical criteria, as prescribed by Rimini Protokoll’s *100% City* concept (Eacho 2018, 185). *100% FREMMED?* used a similar method to select the first 100 participants,¹³ and aimed to include equal numbers of male and female participants. In the portrait photographs, Nydal Eriksen also played with gender stereotypes, depicting women in typical ‘masculine’ postures, and vice versa. There are, for instance, more men shown lying down and more women playing an ‘active’ or ‘leading’ part. Moreover, many of the individual stories address questions of feminism and equality through narratives of social control, both positive and negative, and by seeking to unsettle gender stereotypes.¹⁴

As a unique feature of the Copenhagen edition of *100% City*, the performance *100% København* was followed, in 2015, by an exhibition of staged portraits of the people behind the statistics, accompanied by their own suggestions on what sets them apart from the crowd. Here, Maja Nydal Eriksen assumed the dual role of artist

13 The statistical method was explained on the project’s first website (now closed) and included information about how the 100 participants from Copenhagen were distributed over 29 different countries of origin. The same figures were given on a large poster placed at the entrance to the exhibition at the Copenhagen City Hall in 2017. The fact that this statistical distribution was not included in the catalogue with the 100 portraits from Copenhagen published the following year indicates that the project had evolved and freed itself from Rimini Protokoll’s *100% City* concept (Jensen, Nat-George, and Eriksen 2018).

14 Maja Nydal Eriksen, in an email to the author, June 1, 2021. For some examples of reclining men, see <https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/news-1/ahmed-kadhim-al-sovirawi>, <https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/news-1/gervais-nombe>; for examples of active, leading women, see <https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/news-1/rawan-abdullah>, <https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/news-1/santha-selvam> (accessed March 30, 2025).

and curator. This exhibition thus provided the model for *100% FREMMED?*,¹⁵ with the portraits in both cases emphasizing the actual cultural and ethnic diversity of the capital.

It could be argued, however, that the meaning of the figure ‘100%’ changes, because *100% FREMMED?* does not seek to map the demography of a whole city but, rather, suggests that alienation and belonging can be measured quantitatively on a scale from foreign to Danish. However, the question mark indicates that the proposition is deliberately provocative and should not be taken at face value. If anything, it implies that the binary opposition between ‘Danish’ and ‘foreign’ should be questioned. This is, in fact, what many of the participants did. Some refused to be measured according to this binary system. For instance, Sri Lankan-born Santha Selvam declared herself to be her very own ‘Santha mixture’.¹⁶ Others used the percentage scale to criticize anti-immigration sentiment and policies, or to express their feeling of alienation and stigmatization, or conversely, their sense of belonging and inclusion. Overall, the percentage scale was used by the participants to communicate, in a succinct way, their personal experience of and their position on social inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, most of their stories imply knowledge of the fact that being Danish and foreign are coexisting parts of the participants’ identity and feelings of dual belonging. As such, the project is a multivoiced articulation of a postmigrant sense of belonging.

This emphasis on complexity brings me back to the idea of postmigration. As Chapter 1 explained, it offers a framework of understanding within which art’s contributions to societies in the process of recognizing that they are moving towards increasing cultural and demographic diversity can be examined. This collective process of cognition and transformation is full of conflicts and entails a number of battles for recognition and equality alongside struggles over identity and culture. The postmigrant condition is thus characterized by political disagreement and clashes between, on the one hand, various forms of cultural pluralism, and, on the other, of nationalism, including anti-immigration and racist right-wing populism – clashes that have also brought *100% FREMMED?* into the firing line. When the exhibition’s portraits of mainly Brown and Black citizens were shown outdoors at Islands Brygge in Copenhagen over the summer of 2017, unknown perpetrators scrawled graffiti over all the exhibited portraits and threw half of the exhibition in the harbour – a vandalism that not only contained a gloomy reminder of the boatloads of refugees drowning at Europe’s borders, but also raised some concerns

15 For the theatre production, *100% København*, see <https://www.metropolis.dk/tag/100-koebenhavn/> (accessed March 30, 2025). For a recording of the performance, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dz0isa3Eh4I> (accessed March 30, 2025).

16 Santha Selvam, <https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/news-1/santha-selvam> (accessed March 31, 2025).

in the municipalities with which the project team subsequently collaborated. Would the exhibition be vandalized again? If so, this might risk producing some negative publicity, shifting the focus to the racism and hostility in the local area.¹⁷

On the one hand, postmigrant thinking relaunches migration and sociocultural diversity as a normal state of affairs and thus as circumstances that affect all citizens regardless of origin, simply because they are embedded in everyday life; on the other, it remains, at the same time, critically attentive to the pervasiveness of anti-immigrant sentiment in European societies and political discourses. In her perceptive analysis of postmigrant democratic societies as societies in transformation that harbour a significant potential for social conflict, Naika Foroutan has argued that ‘migration’ operates as ‘a twofold trigger’ and ‘a symbolic battlefield for social self-description’. She suggests that migration functions as ‘a metanarrative loaded with accusations of social conflict and insecurity, against which social antagonisms are constructed’; and that it also serves as a vehicle for ‘identity formation that trades in the normality of diversity, hybridity and plurality as new markers of alliances and changing post-migrant peer group identities’ (Foroutan 2019b, 153). *100% FREMMED?* positioned itself at the centre of this symbolic battlefield for social self-description and collective obsession with ‘migration’.

However, the concept of a postmigrant society also harbours a normative, or perhaps even utopian dimension: it is nurtured by the dream of change towards a more pluralistic and inclusive democratic society – a postmigrant imaginary, which also sustains *100% FREMMED?*. Of relevance to the participatory method underpinning the project, Foroutan argues that connections through family, friends, school, political engagement or the workplace have produced ‘new kinds of knowledge, empathy and attitudes’, which construct ‘post-migrant alliances’ of ‘heterogeneous peer groups’ whose participants share moral and democratic ideals:

Immigrants and their descendants are not alone in their struggle for representation and participation. They have supporters for their cause who do not necessarily have a migration background but share views on democracy and equality. [...] Post-migrant alliances are a powerful tool to challenge structures of discrimination: they enable a shared fight against racist attitudes and the isolating othering of migrants, transcending socially constructed divisions and concepts. (Foroutan 2019b, 158)

From a postmigrant analytical perspective, *100% FREMMED?* can be seen as a response to the migration-related changes and debates of the 21st century, and as an attempt to put the postmigrant negotiations, ambivalence and contradictions

17 Interview with Maja Nydal Eriksen, November 26, 2019.

that surround national identity into perspective by raising the question about the refugee experience of belonging and alienation. The exhibition catalogue, with the 100 chronologically arranged portraits from Copenhagen, reflects the contemporary political situation, because it makes clear that the feeling of being a stranger and not belonging is most pronounced among the participants who have been granted asylum in recent years, not just because they have only had a few years to build a connection to Denmark but also, as explained above, because asylum seekers have been surrounded by growing suspicion in the political and legal system, and it has become more difficult to obtain a permanent residence permit and citizenship (Petersen 2020, 21–23; Jensen, Nat-George, and Eriksen 2018).

Individual and type

Thus endowed with a postmigrant perspective, we can take a closer look at some of the individual portraits and stories in *100% FREMMED?*. The photographs suggest that Nydal Eriksen deliberately used the tension between individual and type in the original *100% City* concept to challenge the viewer's expectations. Overall, the portraits communicate that the project is not an advocacy of assimilation into a predefined, monocultural Danishness, but an attempt to put something else in place of the national romantic myth that unity presupposes sameness by demonstrating the actual diversity of the population. In the photographs, Nydal Eriksen also consistently follows a contrapuntal principle that a slightly humorous, experimental, and often colourful, visual staging of the portrayed should provide a contrast to their stories, which often give glimpses of adversity, alienation, ambivalence and criticism. The text and the image thus form a tensional whole, where the image sometimes tells one thing about the person and the text something else. That tension is deliberately constructed through the curation of the participants' voices and appearances, and helps to nurture the audience's questioning interest about the individual's character, precisely because image and text do not validate one another in any straightforward way.

Let us take two examples from the first part of the project, in which all the participants were photographed in the Tivoli gardens, one of the oldest amusement parks in the world and located directly opposite Copenhagen City Hall. Tivoli is popular among Copenhageners and tourists because its environment combines contemporary forms of entertainment with a nostalgic mix of exotic historical styles appropriated from other cultures, something that has been the visual hallmark of the park since its inauguration in 1843.

At the photographer's request, the participants chose the clothes they would like to be depicted in and brought an object or person(s) they wanted to be photographed with. A cross-sectional gaze will quickly detect variations in how participants and

photographer use attire and props to express identifications and affiliations. In some cases, a 'type' or stereotypical figure is implied, in the sense that the portrait of the individual rubs up against common notions of particular ethnicities and nationalities. For example, if anyone might have expected to encounter a primitivist stereotype in the portrait of Congolese-born Julien Kalimira Mzee Murhul, they will be surprised to meet a highly educated man who signals, with his tie and attaché briefcase, an affiliation with the business sphere.

Fig. 16: Maja Nydal Eriksen, portrait of Julien Kalimira Mzee Murhul, from 100% FREMMED? ('100% FOREIGN?'), 2017. Photograph, 110 x 100 cm. © Maja Nydal Eriksen.



But there is something else in the image that provides resistance to stereotypicalification and puts the viewer to work. Murhul's right arm is clad in armour, the meaning of which is open. It could be interpreted as a sign that he is a man who has something to fight for – or against – but other interpretations are also pos-

sible. Behind him is a white mansion-like architectural model, which could carry thoughts in the direction of the White House in Washington, DC, or Marienborg, the official residence of the Danish Prime Minister, and thus towards the centre of political power and parliamentary influence from which the surrounding fence seems to exclude Murhul. Tivoli's Concert Hall can be glimpsed in the distant background. Unlike the amusement park's original concert hall, which was built in a flamboyant Moorish style and crowned by onion domes, the current building, from the 1950s, is a piece of de-exoticized modern modular architecture that discreetly supports Murhul's photographer-assisted self-representation.

Fig. 17: Maja Nydal Eriksen, portrait of Nawras Al-Hashimi, from 100% FREMMED? ('100% FREMMED?'), 2017. Photograph, 110 x 100 cm. © Maja Nydal Eriksen.



Conversely, the portrait of Iraqi-born Nawras Al-Hashimi plays overtly with the exotic. His aubergine-coloured winter coat almost blends into the deep burgundy

semi-darkness of the background, from which an enigmatic construction in green and gold emerges as if from Aladdin's cave, conjuring up fantasies of oriental palaces and mystics. However, the figure of Al-Hashimi pulls the flying carpet of imagination from under the feet of any spectators who might think that they can recognize an 'oriental type' in this portrait. Not only does Al-Hashimi look back at the viewer with a piercing gaze, but when reading his story, viewers will discover that he is a childhood educator and lives in 'a spiritual collective, where, through meditation and therapy, we heal and support one another to help us find and accept ourselves as we are, freed from culturally based layers of identity such as gender and ethnicity' (Al-Hashimi in Jensen, Nat-George, and Eriksen 2018, n.p.). Thus confronted with their own stereotypical expectations, the viewers' migrantizing perception of Al-Hashimi as an 'outsider inside' (S. Ahmed 2000, 3) is nudged towards the realization that the source of mysticism in the picture should not be sought in the Middle East, but in the western spirituality movements that have become an ingrained part of Danish culture.

A Human Exhibition?

Because several of the portraits play with the notion of the exotic, *100% FREMMED?* could potentially be read by some as an exoticizing project. For example, Marta Padovan-Özdemir, who researches integration, discrimination and pedagogy, has argued that it is a 'migrantological human exhibition', because the portraits set in the Tivoli gardens recall a problematic aspect of Tivoli's history. Between 1878 and 1909, there were 50 'human' exhibitions in Denmark that displayed 'exotic' human beings from distant cultures. These exhibitions travelled to major European cities. When reaching Copenhagen, they were often hosted in the Tivoli, or alternatively at Copenhagen Zoo, where huge crowds of curious Danes visited exhibitions such as 'China in Tivoli' (1902) and 'South India in Tivoli' (1903). These displays of ethnographic stereotypes stimulated both scholarly anthropological interest and a popular desire for entertainment and the spectacularly exotic (Bak 2020, n.p.). In addition, these exhibitions did not just passively reflect the fact that racial hierarchies and prejudice permeated European mentalities of that time, they actively contributed to disseminating the theories of race and European civilizational superiority which were used to legitimize colonial exploitation abroad. Considering Tivoli's past, Padovan-Özdemir's comparison of *100% FREMMED?* to the historical human exhibitions is therefore not surprising, but it does come across as somewhat superficial, because it is based solely on the observation that persons of foreign descent have been portrayed in Tivoli, and the fact that racial prejudice and fantasies of white supremacy still persist. Such a reading overlooks all the

historical differences and the ‘postmigrant’ message the photographs communicate that is key to this project.

A straightforward comparison with the earlier human exhibitions neglects the fact that in the early 21st century the audience for exhibitions in public urban spaces is inherently diverse. Padovan-Özdemir, for example, assumes that the audience of *100% FREMMED?* is similar to the crowds of white Danes who visited the human exhibitions around 1900. This leads her to conclude that the reception of these representations of ‘refugees’ is ‘pedagogically dependent on the imagination and the aesthetic and discursive register of the majoritized viewer’ (Padovan-Özdemir 2020, 55). There were also sexual and ethnographic aspects to the human exhibitions, as ‘exotic’ peoples such as ‘Laplanders’ (i.e. Sami), Nubians, Bedouins, Indians (India) and Japanese were displayed with sexual connotations. According to Rikke Andreassen, the leading Danish expert on the subject, ‘the women were often half naked and performed sexually provocative dances’ (Andreassen 2003, 22, 25). Moreover, there was a connection between the exhibitions and the scientific disciplines of anthropology and ethnography, which explains why great attention was paid to the ‘authentic’ ethnographic details of the exhibits and the way in which exotic people were displayed, not as individuals but as representatives of racialized groups according to the scientific paradigm of evolution that dominated the decades around 1900 (Andreassen 2003, 22, 26–28).

The peoples staged in the human exhibitions did not have any ‘voice’, either collectively or individually; nor did they have any influence on how they were represented in the commercial and ethnographical images of the time – as opposed to the participants in *100% FREMMED?*, who were co-producers of both their portraits and their stories. Moreover, as an exhibition based on portraits of named individuals, *100% FREMMED?* sought to create a kind of ‘contact zone’ (Pratt 1991) which could facilitate mediated face-to-face encounters between people living in Denmark. Conversely, the human exhibitions were mass spectacles of temporary ‘guests’ performing their ‘authentic’ daily life as allegedly unspoiled people of nature, living with their animals in an exhibition environment designed to look untouched by western civilization (Andreassen 2003, 23–27). In other words, the stereotyped tableaux of these exhibitions were designed to serve as mirror images of their “‘primitive’ villages”, thereby ‘preserving a European white world order’ (Andreassen 2003, 35):

The majority of Danes did not personally engage with the exhibited people; they remained distant observers. For them, as for Denmark as a whole, the exhibitions had a larger cultural function in creating a racial imagination of the nation. (Andreassen 2003, 147)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has used the term *worlding* to criticize the process of mental colonization, in which the colonized internalizes the colonizer's perception of their land, language and culture so that it is 'worlded' for the 'natives' according to their master's logic and disdain for their culture (Spivak 1985b). As my analysis of the co-production of the portraits in *100% FREMMED?* has demonstrated, this project distances itself from the way the colonial human exhibitions forced the people on show to see and represent themselves, or, to follow Spivak, to *world* their native land and its ancient customs as imagined by the other. The collaborative approach in *100% FREMMED?* is, I argue, more akin to Donna Haraway's understanding of thinking, writing and worldmaking as a work of *sym-poiesis*, of making livable worlds together – worlding *with* (Haraway 2015, 255; 2016, 58).

In summary, an ahistorical comparison neglects how Nydal Eriksen's artistic and curatorial approach differs from the human exhibitions, and how the subtle evocation of racial exhibition history is intended to bring the difference out: all the details of individualized backgrounds and the participatory strategy of portrayal testify to the fact that Danish society has become multi-ethnic. That only people of migrant backgrounds have been portrayed arguably makes the project *migratizing*, but in a country which has not yet officially recognized that it has become a postmigrant society, such a systematic inclusion of 'other' bodies, voices and stories – their coming into appearance in the public sphere – is a necessary first step that may help pave the way for a deeper understanding of what living under postmigrant conditions entails for all citizens.

Here, a note on how the word 'foreign' is used in the title *100% FREMMED?* is in order. On the one hand, 'foreign' designates someone who has arrived from an 'outside' and is perceived as 'an Other', and thus it has an othering or a migrantizing effect. On the other, the question mark points up the inadequacy of the term and conveys that the dual aim of the project was to problematize the misconception that people of refugee background do not transculturate and 'belong', and to acknowledge the persistent, albeit in many cases dwindling, feeling of alienation that refugees (and immigrants in general) must tackle, precisely because they are subjected to various forms of exclusion and migrantization. Arguably, representations of people who are already migrantized in the popular perception and public discourse will never be completely free of racial markers or hierarchies of power, but this should not overshadow the point that dignifying representations can work against marginalization and exclusion and radically challenge the nationalist divide between 'us' and 'them'.

A comparison with a study of another travelling exhibition can help us get a better grip of the ethical and political work that *100% FREMMED?* aspired to do: this is Alfred Steichen's 1955 exhibition *Family of Man*, as interpreted by Ariella Azoulay, an expert on photography studies. Azoulay describes *Family of Man* as 'a landmark event in the history of photography and human rights' (Azoulay 2013, 19). As with

100% FREMMED?, its objects of display were photographs of people from across the world, and it was likewise historically related to a particular time period, the period after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948. The purpose of Steichen's exhibition was to demonstrate the universality of human actions in daily life and the human life cycle. Azoulay reads the images of the exhibition as an 'archive containing the visual proxy of the United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (Azoulay 2013, 20). She notes that the exhibition could not be ascribed to a single creator, i.e. the curator, but, similar to *100% FREMMED?*, bore 'traces of an encounter of multiple participants' that included both subjects and viewers (Azoulay 2013, 32). Importantly, Azoulay underscores the 'multiplicity' of the photographic material that Steichen subsumed under categories such as 'work' and 'family', and how its 'heterogeneity' seemed to work against misconceptions of universality as an ideological regime of sameness and the eradication of difference. Its multiplicity suggested diversity in unity:

The identical format of black-and-white photographs showing humans in allegedly similar situations actually foregrounds to what extent the photographed persons differ from each other – their crafts vary, their gestures are multiple, and every expression or smile hints at a different experiential world that cannot be organized along generalizations of nation, gender, or race. (Azoulay 2013, 28)

Paying close attention to the exhibition's potential effects, i.e. what the exhibition *does*, Azoulay proposes reading the photographs in *Family of Man* not as 'descriptive statements with universal claims' but as 'prescriptive statements claiming universal rights' (Azoulay 2013, 20). Turning back to the portraits of the Danish project, I propose to read them not as documentary descriptions but as prescriptive statements claiming democratic rights, including what Chapter 1 termed *cultural rights*, and which Pakulski has argued comprise the right to symbolic presence and visibility, the right to dignifying representation, and the right to the propagation of identity and maintenance of lifestyles (Pakulski 1997, 80). As prescriptive, rights-claiming statements, the worlds and stories of *100% FREMMED?* resonate with the prefigurative politics adopted by Trampoline House and the lumbung community of documenta fifteen, as discussed in Chapter 3.

The domestic culture of public discourse

With its basis of co-creation and collaboration between citizens, interviewers and artist/curator, *100% FREMMED?* can be linked to a broader current in contemporary art where artists, curators and other professional actors reach out to new user groups and audiences in participation-based projects. Like Trampoline House,

100% *FREMMED?* belongs, therefore, to the growing number of such projects which have sought to find ways to 'give voice to' minority groups and to improve their access to democratic participation in society. Although every story in 100% *FREMMED?* is based on a long interview, the conversations are systematically reduced down to short stories of a uniform length and with varying perspectives on the overall question of belonging and alienation that was posed to all the participants: 'What percentage foreign do you feel?'¹⁸ Using Padovan-Özdemir's accurate wording, the voice speaking can thus be described as a 'curated voice' (Padovan-Özdemir 2020, 50). While she criticizes this artistic-curatorial approach for being a 'pedagogically domesticating form of oppression' that 'neglects structural suffering and offers the resolution of alienation' (Padovan-Özdemir 2020, 55–56), I prefer to perceive the project as an ethical and political attempt to introduce an alternative mode of representation and to establish the kind of voice or enunciation that Trinh T. Minh-ha called 'speaking nearby'. Minh-ha defines speaking nearby as an alternative to the prevailing practice of speaking *about* the Other, thereby making the Other an object that is 'absent from the place spoken from'. She describes speaking nearby as an 'indirect' way of speaking – for example, it could appropriately be added here, through the dialogic form of an interview. This mode of enunciation does not disempower those affected (deprives them of their voice and visibility), and it is predicated on the speaker's/artist's awareness of their own privileged position of utterance (Chen 1992, 82). In 100% *FREMMED?*, the privileged position is that of the white majority, understood as a position of naturalized dominance and preference that eases the access to airtime and to making oneself heard in the Danish public sphere.

As Nermin Duraković has explained, 'the domestic culture of public discourse' is dominated by 'a discourse in which "they" (foreigners) are seen as objects rather than subjects' (Duraković 2021, n.p.). Or put differently, speaking nearby is something of a rarity. Duraković is in a better position than most to highlight this problem. As a child, Duraković came to Denmark from a Yugoslavia being ravaged by a brutal civil war. He has therefore been part of 'them', the newcomers. At the same time, he is also a graduate of the Funen Art Academy, Denmark, and a recognized figure on the Danish art scene. He is thus undeniably part of 'us'. Such ambiguous 'both–and' positions have tremendous difficulty in finding acceptance in Danish politics, public discourses and mainstream national culture. People with a dual or multiple sense of belonging are rarely embraced, and it is into this ideologically and emotionally charged field that 100% *FREMMED?* made an intervention. As Duraković puts it, the public conversational culture treats "them" (strangers) as:

18 'Hvor mange procent fremmed føler du dig?', quoted from Maja Nydal Eriksen's unpublished interview guide 'Samtaleguide 100% *FREMMED?*' (2016), n.p.

anything but an included part of our common consciousness or as a common and equal voice that must be taken seriously and that can act and function with a critical potential. It tells us very directly that our society does not rest on equality, equal rights or equal access to critical expression, and that there is still a long way to go. The idea and the realization of equality require a more nuanced view of ourselves. (Duraković 2021, 82)

Although the delicate balance between listening and communication that the ideal of speaking nearby requires is hardly achieved in all 250 interviews, comments like the following show that the participants in 100% *FREMMED?* could articulate experiences with structural discrimination, suffering and alienation. This not only must be presumed to separate them from the white Danish interviewers, but it also leaves a question mark over the modern myth of Denmark as a country characterized by democratic equality, populated by friendly residents who, with openness and tolerance, welcome strangers as their equals: 'I have found it very difficult to feel at home here because it's been a constant struggle with the Danish Immigration Service', says Samira Khalifa. Similarly, the aforementioned Julien Kalimira Mzee Murhul explains, as he voices his claim for democratic representation, how changing governments have created a climate of inhospitality by using refugee policy for negative nation-branding to scare refugees from seeking asylum in Denmark: 'I feel foreign in Denmark, even more than 100%. When the government constantly tightens legislation on immigration instead of making legislation that will facilitate integration, it is hard to feel at home. ... Us new Danes born south of the Sahara are not part of the Danish Parliament (*Folketinget*), and as a result we don't feel like we are part of society either' (quoted from Jensen, Nat-George, and Eriksen 2018, n.p.). The experience that it is difficult to be recognized as a 100% citizen is shared by Cong Hung Nguyen, who describes the feeling of alienation in a way that is strikingly similar to the critical reader's letters and posts that Brown and Black Danes increasingly publish in the daily press and on social media, especially since the Black Lives Matter protests against racism which flared up in the early summer of 2020, after the police murder of the African American George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota: 'I have no ambition of returning to my home country like a lot of other foreigners talk about. I am 50% foreign, but only because everyone always asks me where I come from.'¹⁹

Last but not least, there is the issue of silence as resistance. In this case, the silence is visual and differs from the kind of silence that Rob Sharp observes sometimes occurs as 'a form of political protest' that rejects the conditions on

19 Jensen, Nat-George, and Eriksen 2018, n.p. For a critical introduction to Danish refugee policy, see Gammeltoft-Hansen 2017. For a critique of the historical development in Danish immigration policies since the mid-1990s, see Bolt Rasmussen 2011.

which voice is offered normatively (Sharp 2024, 11). In *100% FREMMED?*, the rejection of visually mediated expression comes across as a form of self-protection. Included among the 100 portraits from Copenhagen are two interviews with anonymous female refugees. To maintain full anonymity, a greyish silhouette has been substituted for a portrait with identifiable features, which arguably protects these individuals from being identified as refugees, and identified at all. In contrast, their voices are clear, and their stories suggest that their need for anonymity might be rooted in memories of extreme vulnerability. One interviewee still feels '100% foreign' because she had only been living in Denmark for 18 months at the time of her interview. Her story suggests that her family had been pushed around so much within the international refuge regime that it had become extremely difficult for them to grow attached to any new country or to rebuild trust in other people and the authorities: 'I feel that I have always lived in wartime, in Syria, in the Lebanese refugee camp, and also through my dad who still grieves every day about the war in Palestine. [...] My mother is from Jordan, so when we fled from Syria we wanted to go there, but they would only let my mother in the country. Not us, because we are Palestinians.' (Jensen, Nat-George, and Eriksen 2018, n.p.) The other interview is with an unaccompanied minor who arrived in Denmark at the age of 14 and declares herself to be '100% Syrian'. Yet, her story suggests that during the two years she spent in a residential institution for children and young people before reunification with her parents, she learnt Danish and grew into an independent person used to making own decisions and was therefore finding it difficult to readjust to being in her parent's custody again (Jensen, Nat-George, and Eriksen 2018, n.p.).

Both anonymous stories convey an acute sense of longing for a country of origin, either Palestine or Syria. In her study of postmigrant homesickness, Anna Meera Gaonkar starts from the observation that for people of migrant backgrounds, especially descendants of immigrants, homesickness can both manifest as sickness *for* a home and as sickness *of* home, and she argues that the latter results from a pressure from 'unhoming' discourses and social practices. An everyday example of this could be growing up where majority-ethnic strangers feel entitled to ask migrantized individuals where they come from (implicitly conveying that they are presumed to be from 'elsewhere' and do not 'belong'). A political example could be the Danish special laws for social housing areas with a high percentage of tenants of non-Western backgrounds racialized as 'non-white' (Gaonkar 2022, 9–12, 27–29). Such practices produce the kind of sickness *of* home expressed by Murhul and Nguyen. As regards the parliamentary politics, Gaonkar argues that they produce what she terms *affective evictions*. This term could be extended to Murhul's and Nguyen's feeling of being *unhomed*, and their perception of their new homeland as a site of discomfort where they are produced by social practices and political discourses as exterior to the affective territory of the national home. Murhul's and Nguyen's stories indicate that they are identified as what Sara Ahmed has described as the outsider inside the nation

space who draws the boundaries of proximity and distance, difference and sameness, and whom that very boundary-drawing process transforms into an exterior figure (S. Ahmed 2000, 3, 33–36). Gaonkar asks the timely question: ‘who can feel at home in society, and who has the power to *affectively evict* bodies from the community of the national home?’ (Gaonkar 2022, 127; emphasis added) Her question, and her study of cinematographic, literary, cultural and parliamentary political expressions of homesickness in Danish society, spur a question central to this book’s study of visual art emerging from similar conditions of postmigrancy, in particular my exploration of *100% FREMMED?*: Do artistic and curatorial practices have the power to *affectively include* bodies in the community of the national home?

In summary, the participants of *100% FREMMED?* took part in a project based on informed consent that was very much about claiming democratic rights, specifically the rights of refugees. To that end, the project sought to provide a framework for self-representation in public – even though it is evident, particularly in the photographs, that it was an assisted and mediated form of self-representation, where the artist remained the ultimate curator of the project’s individual representations and its overarching narrative. An additional point is that the majority of those who have seen one of the exhibitions or read the catalogue, and the pupils who have explored some of the individual stories in school, have probably not applied a top-down or ‘vertical’ birds-eye view. The curatorial design deliberately hampered attempts to survey the exhibition in its totality. Instead, it constructed for viewers/readers a ‘horizontal’ experience, in which they moved around the exhibition, or browsed the catalogue or the website, and let themselves be captured by the stories and portraits that aroused their curiosity. It was exactly this conscious curatorial organization of mediated intersubjective face-to-face meetings – i.e. encounters with one individual after another (rather than an encounter with a group or a mass) – that opened up the project’s narratives and portraits to different interpretations, identifications and counter-identifications by recipients whose position in relation to, and their affective response to, the depicted individual depended on similarities and differences in gender, class, ethnicity, age, experience, political conviction, hometown, country of origin, etc.

Hannah Arendt’s ethics of alterity

As a participatory project foregrounding both actual and imaginary intersubjective relations, *100% FREMMED?* offers a productive site for examining the ethical potential and dilemmas of representing refugees by speculating on what conflicts of domination and suppression the project involved, and how it may contribute new answers to vital questions on democratic participation, integration, belonging and citizenship. According to Ritivoi, Hannah Arendt ‘grounded ethics in aesthetics be-

cause she viewed aesthetic representation as a way of understanding how the world appears to different human beings. To let the imagination “go visiting” another’s world, as she put it, was all the more important when it could recover marginalized and repressed perspectives’ (Ritivoi 2019, 103).

As a Jewish refugee from the Nazi persecution and genocide of European Jews, Arendt emigrated from Germany to France in 1933 and came via Portugal to the US in 1941. Her essay ‘We Refugees’ was first published in 1943 in the Jewish-American periodical *Menorah Journal*, but its rhetorical construction suggests that it was addressed to a larger American audience as well, ‘the audience of citizens, rather than immigrants’ (Ritivoi 2019, 110). It would be fair to say that *100% FREMMED?* is also addressed to a larger audience, and notably one that includes both citizens and immigrants. Despite this difference, Arendt’s essay serves as a reminder of the pressure to assimilate that can be imposed on refugees – a pressure *100% FREMMED?* sought to counter by stressing how the navigation between different cultures has fostered in each participant a unique, *composite* character which does not conform to traditional notions of being Danish, born and bred. At the same time, the project explored the effects of this pressure by measuring the participant’s mixed feelings of belonging and unbelonging against ‘the official image of Denmark’.²⁰ Even if the project challenged the dominant image and proffered an alternative founded in an ethics of alterity, the curatorial framing nevertheless had to walk a fine line in order to steer clear of the subsumptive approach that overemphasizes resemblances and thereby subsumes minoritarian differences under a majoritarian umbrella of cultural commonality. Arendt can help us understand this probably unsolvable ethical (and political) conundrum of representation better.

The ‘we’ of Arendt’s essay fuses her own fate as a Jewish refugee during the Second World War with a general analysis of the predicament of refugees forced to settle temporarily or permanently in whichever country will receive them.²¹ She critically analyses the dual assimilative pressure put on refugees by the expectations of the receiving country and the efforts of the refugees themselves to blend in, as part of their process of building a new life and gaining recognition as a fellow citizen. Arendt describes, and not without humour, how Jews fleeing Nazi persecution rushed headlong to assimilate and become ordinary citizens of the host country (Meyer 2016, 45). According to Arendt’s analysis, refugees are driven partly by the desire to rid

20 ‘100% FREMMED?’, <https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/> (accessed March 30, 2025).

21 Hannah Arendt actually used Denmark’s provision of refuge for its Jewish citizens and some Jewish refugees during World War II as a historical asylum case. Nathan Bell has convincingly argued that Arendt’s use of the case of Denmark sheds light on her understanding of political responsibility and her influential notion of ‘the right to have rights’, i.e. the right of refugees to asylum: to be admitted to the territory and accepted into a political community to ensure that their human rights are upheld (Bell 2020).

themselves of the label 'refugee' and to erase all traces of refugeedom and a different heritage that may result in self-disclosure, and partly by the inducements and pressure of the host community: 'We were told to forget; and we forgot quicker than anybody ever imagined. In a friendly way we were reminded that the new country would become a new home; and after four weeks in France or six weeks in America, we pretended to be Frenchmen or Americans' (Arendt 2007, 265). In wartime US, German refugees were perceived not only as 'prospective citizens' but also as 'enemy aliens' (Arendt 2007, 266), so they were anxious to not convey their refugee status:

we are already so damnably careful in every moment of our daily lives to avoid anybody guessing who we are, what kind of passport we have [...]. We try the best we can to fit into a world where you have to be sort of politically minded when you buy your food. (Arendt 2007, 269)

As an antidote to this assimilationist erasure of the refugees' difference and past, Arendt proposes a new political self-consciousness of refugees who insist on the right to disclose their character, deviate from the norm and not subject themselves to 'the narrowness of caste spirit' (Arendt 2007, 274). However, the public appearance of such performances of alterity would require a change of attitude in the host community. Drawing on Arendt's ethics, Ritivoi suggests that '[t]o recognize and respect alterity requires us to understand another's standpoint and see how it came about, as well as what beliefs and values it makes possible' (Ritivoi 2019, 104).

Seen in the light of Arendt's ethics of alterity, *100% FREMMED?* presents as an ambiguous endeavour because it contributes to politically self-conscious processes of identity formation. Not surprisingly, the 250 individual stories and portraits reveal that the participants responded differently, some stressing their (partial) integration into and identification with Danish society, others their critical stance, their (partial) difference and their ties to their country of birth. Recapitulating Hall's point about the dual role of the subject in representation, this participatory project could be said to construct for recipients a vantage point or subject position from which it was possible to glimpse the diversity of standpoints taken by migrantized citizens as identifiable figures who have to continually negotiate their identity and subjectivity, and who do so in very different ways.

Interestingly, Arendt used the metaphor of the blueprint to explain how aesthetic representation can serve as exemplary. Writing on Franz Kafka, she likened his stories to a blueprint representation of a model or plan, i.e. a tool that enables us to imagine what a future construction will look like. The metaphor of the blueprint captures the *emergent* nature of aesthetic representation and also suggests that the audience needs 'to realize by their own imagination' the intentions of its maker and the future it envisions (Arendt 2007, 76–77). The metaphor thus suggests that it is indeed the indeterminate character of *100% FREMMED?* that enables us to see in it

the contours of a future plural society. In Ritivoi's accurate wording, the blueprint 'captures configurations in which we can discern both a world now around us and the world as it is most likely to take shape' (Ritivoi 2019, 107).

Transforming the image of Denmark

I turn now to the second phase of *100% FREMMED?*, in which participants from cities other than Copenhagen were photographed in local cultural landscapes and thus inserted 'in the official image of Denmark' in both a concrete and a symbolic way. These portraits raise the question of whether this approach represents an 'apparently consensus-seeking' update of the image of Denmark (Padovan-Özdemir 2020, 48), or, rather, as I would suggest, an intervention that reveals some of its cracks and changes. As my examples show, Nydal Eriksen was not content to merely state that citizens with a refugee background are also included in the Danish cultural landscape (Padovan-Özdemir 2020, 51). The portraits and stories did not leave the official image of Denmark unchanged.

Fatima Yassin, for example, was photographed together with some of the other participants from the town of Sønderborg at Dybbøl Mill. The image shows that they have come on Segways as tourists on a guided tour to one of the most important memorial landscapes in Danish history, Dybbøl Banke, the site of the war against the Confederation of German States in 1864 and a traumatic national defeat that nurtured an enduring fear of strangers from the south. Behind Fatima Yassin stands an elderly gentleman wearing a uniform jacket similar to those worn by Danish soldiers during the battle. Yet, his bicycle helmet suggests a different time and role – that of a Segway-riding tourist guide. The introductory text for the exhibition in Sønderborg described Dybbøl Banke as 'a memorial landscape of war and peace for two nations and a symbol of Danish identity and community'. It also explained that the visit reawakened the participants' 'own experiences of war and unrest, the delineation of borders, as well as minority and majority issues'.²²

22 The introductory text for Sønderborg is not on the project website. Quoted from an email from Maja Nydal Eriksen to the author, March 15, 2021.

Fig. 18: Maja Nydal Eriksen, portrait of Fatima Yassin, from 100% FREMMED? ('100% FOREIGN?'), 2018. Photograph, 110 x 100 cm. © Maja Nydal Eriksen.



The picture of Fatima Yassin and the others reveals nothing about how they each experienced their own history crossing tracks with Danish war history. It communicates a general message about the connection between past and future, anticipation and memory. The portrait plays on the contrast between the older man, a gatekeeper of Danish history, in the background, and the young woman in front who is eager to move on. Fatima Yassin stands still like a statue on her Segway, and even though the photograph freezes all movement, her figure nonetheless speaks of mobility and change. The bodies on wheels introduce today's motorized mobility into the representation of a commemorative landscape serving as a synecdoche for national history. At the same time, the female figure's latent restlessness supports the interview's narrative of a mother who came to Denmark from Syria in 2015 and who is now looking to a future where Danish culture has undergone some changes. As she observes, 'My children must learn both cultures, but I think they will become

90% Danish' (Jensen, Nat-George, and Eriksen 2021, 45–46). What the last 10 per cent of the children's cultural identity might include is suggested by Bosnian Danish Amira Saric's story: 'I love the Nordic names, but since both my husband and I are of Bosnian origin, it would be too strange. I would feel as if I had stolen the child of someone else. My middle daughter is named Esma, and one of her girlfriends has got a rabbit that she calls Esma. That's my secret plan. That it should not be abnormal to be named Esma in Denmark.'²³ This desire to make Denmark more culturally inclusive is akin in spirit to what I have described above as a postmigrant mindset, a mindset that will pave the way for an understanding of migration and sociocultural diversity as a normal and integrated dynamic in society.

Turning to the portrait of Alia Ismail El-Aynein from Vejle, it becomes clear that 'the Danish cultural landscape' must be understood in an expanded sense, which also includes the digital landscape and the way politicians use social media, and specifically Facebook (Jensen, Nat-George, and Eriksen 2021, 165–166). Most Danes will remember how, in 2017, a grinning Inger Støjberg posed with the crown jewel of the traditional Danish birthday celebration – the layer cake – to boast that she, as Minister of Immigration and Integration in Prime Minister Lars Lykke Rasmussen's Liberal government at the time, had implemented 50 tightenings of the immigration laws. Danish media willingly helped spread the controversial image of the minister with the layer cake adorned with Danish flags over interconnected media platforms, so that the image and everything it said about Danish immigration policy became an indelible part of the memory of citizens across the country – a part of collective memory. Nydal Eriksen, together with Alia Ismail El-Aynein, created a counter image to this piece of digital cultural heritage. El-Aynein, who runs a catering company in Viborg, presents a magnificent heart-shaped layer cake decorated with berries and flowers to the viewer. Behind her stands Amira Saric, who holds a small plate with a piece of layer cake and thus acts as an identification figure for the viewer, making it easy to imagine that you are receiving a piece of the cake yourself. El-Aynein is photographed at the Kongernes Jelling (home of the Viking kings) heritage site, the place where, in the Viking Age, two rows of stones formed the outline of the ship that, according to Norse mythology, sailed the dead to Valhalla. Today, the 'ship' is marked by large slabs of concrete. As in Fatima Yassin's portrait, there is a clear thematization of travel and mobility as integral to the Danish cultural landscape. El-Aynein stands at the head of the 'ship' like a traveller ready to walk down the gangplank. Just as Dybbøl Banke is portrayed as a place where different war memories intersect, Jelling is interpreted as the place where religions meet, because in this image the Old Norse faith intersects with both Christianity and Islam.

23 <https://www.100pctfremmed.dk/til-undervisere-1/amira-saric> (accessed March 30, 2025).

Fig. 19: Maja Nydal Eriksen, portrait of Alia Ismail El-Aynein, from *100% FREMMED? ('100% FOREIGN?')*, 2019. Photograph, 110 x 100 cm. © Maja Nydal Eriksen.



Nydal Eriksen has photographed from an angle, causing the two rows of concrete tiles to encircle El-Aynein like a mandorla, or the tapered oval halo which often encloses the entire figure in medieval Christian images, as in images of the Virgin Mary. As an art historian raised on Western pictorial traditions, this is my first association. El-Aynein's red scarf and red-edged clothing flutter in the wind, so the folds in the cloth create a visual abstract and spiritual dynamic around the figure, as seen in Renaissance and Baroque religious paintings, like Titian's famous altarpiece of the *Assumption of the Virgin* in the Frari Church in Venice (1516–1518). However, my association is quickly followed by another observation: El-Aynein's headscarf is a Muslim tradition. In the interview, she explains that it connects her with her roots in Lebanon, where she was born to Palestinian parents: 'When I came to Denmark, I did not wear a headscarf, but I started to miss it. I do not quite know why: Maybe you are looking for your roots when you come to a new country?' (Jensen, Nat-George, and Eriksen 2021, 165). Drawing on the political and popular meaning of the cake, the history of the site, the religious symbols and the visual composition, Nydal Eriksen, together with El-Aynein, has created a counter-image to Støjberg's image, which exposes the inhospitality of Støjberg's self-presentation and elevates El-Aynein to be the true defender of the layer cake as a positive symbol of hospitality and heart-warming generosity. She is at once portrayed as the newcomer who goes ashore in an unknown country, and the hostess who invites us all for cake.

A postmigrant transversal politics through art: Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have threaded a theoretical discussion through a case study to provide an answer to the question of what participatory artistic practices can bring to the ethical politics of representing refugees. To underscore the challenges involved in representing alterity, the chapter opened with Stuart Hall's observation that representation, especially the representation of 'difference', is a complex and contested matter that provokes strong emotions and conflicting sentiments. As a participatory project, *100% FREMMED?* took a collaborative approach to representation by 'speaking nearby' (Minh-ha). It brings to the ethical politics of representing refugees a transformation, firstly, of the way in which subjects of refugee backgrounds are depicted as identifiable figures by ensuring that each participant is portrayed as a unique individual; and, secondly, of the way representations co-construct subject positions for the audience. The latter is achieved by way of a 'horizontal' curatorial design that stages the visitor's encounter with the portrayed as a one-on-one encounter.

Through looking at a selection of four named and two anonymous portraits, I have shown how *100% FREMMED?* has contributed to creating a richly differentiated and inclusive narrative about identity, belonging and citizenship in Denmark. As I have argued above, this encompassing documentation of the experiences of those living in Denmark with a refugee background should not be read as mere documentary descriptions but, rather, as prescriptive statements claiming democratic rights (Foroutan 2019b, 158).

The ethics and politics that governed the collaboration on *100% FREMMED?*, as well as how the individual portraits and stories were curated to stimulate audience engagement, can be more accurately described through the feminist concept of *transversal politics*. A further reason for turning to feminist theory is the fact that Nydal Eriksen has consistently foregrounded a feminist notion of equality by including men and women in equal numbers, and, as previously explained, by consciously letting some women adopt a classical 'masculine' pose, as seen, for instance, in the image of Fatima Yassin leading the Segway trip to Dybbøl Banke.²⁴

The term *transversal politics* indicates vital links between political, ethical and artistic agency. As Chapter 2 explained, the feminist conception of transversal politics derives from the peacebuilding work of the feminist activist movement Women in Black in Bologna. From the 1970s to the 1990s they developed and used a method of working with conflicting national groups that they called 'transversalism'. Importantly, in the context of *100% FOREIGN?*, the different positionings and backgrounds of the participants are recognized and they are not perceived simplistically as mere group representatives. The Bologna feminists

24 Maja Nydal Eriksen in an email to the author, June 1, 2021.

worked with the dual concepts of ‘rooting’ and ‘shifting’ and from the idea that each participant would be rooted in her own membership and identity, but would also try to shift her position to establish a situation of exchange with women of a different membership and identity (Yuval-Davis 1994, 192–193; see also Yuval-Davis 1999). Thus defined, transversal politics can be seen as a practice of intersubjective exchange that is in agreement with Hannah Arendt’s idea of an ethics of alterity from the perspective of the refugee. Both are based on the conviction that to respect alterity, we need to recognize another’s standpoint and to understand how it came about, and what compatible values and beliefs it makes it possible to share. In addition, they both envision political community as an arena where individuals do not maintain a fixed identity but are defined by their actions and interaction with others. As the postmigrant motto goes: it is not about where you are from, but where you are at. Such transversal politics that seeks to bridge difference through intersubjective exchange based on the dynamic principles of rooting and shifting, and which moves beyond essentialisms and polite ‘tolerance’ towards the Other, is central to what I have termed above a *postmigrant civic ethics*.

Like Meskimmon, I understand feminist transversal politics to have both political and ethical effects as it is founded in ‘situated and embodied forms of critical engagement’, acknowledges ‘epistemic location’ and calls for ‘dialogues in difference’ and ‘connective conversations’, as in the practice of rooting and shifting developed by the Women in Black in Bologna (Meskimmon 2020, 1). A postmigrant transversal politics can likewise be said, through art, to have such political and ethical effects. The dialogic dimension was obviously central to *100% FOREIGN?*. As a participatory, interview-based art project it foregrounds the ethical significance of dialogue and intersubjective exchange – the importance of listening to the voice of the other, of *speaking nearby* (Minh-ha). In doing so, it formulates an ethical critique of the exclusionary norms of the nation as an ideological infrastructure, as well as the affective unhoming and evictions (Gaonkar) that these norms produce. Instead, the project articulates and defends other norms as it seeks to engender ethical relationships among migrantized and native citizens that modify the social contract, thereby prefiguring a postmigrant civic ethics based on the fundamental acknowledgement of the migrantized other as one among equals in the imagined community of the nation. Crucially, as an art project that turned to ethics, it materializes an ‘aesthetics of ethics’, to borrow Beshty’s term, as its hundreds of images and individual stories act as the signification of this modified social contract (Beshty 2015, 19–20).

Like Trampoline House, *100% FREMMED?* was a durational project that built an infrastructure for collaboration (albeit one without a physical and institutional structure). Both projects brought people of refugee backgrounds and natives of Denmark together ‘transversally’ around a common politico-ethical cause: to dismantle the divisive logic of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ by imagining the national community otherwise. *100% FREMMED?*’s exploration of how people of refugee backgrounds have

emplaced themselves in Danish society brings political questions of migration, citizenship and borders in contact with ethical issues of hospitality, dialogue, openness to the other and cohabitation with others (as did Trampoline House). The project gathered together people of many different heritages and from all walks of life to collaborate on the production of portraits, stories, exhibitions, educational material, cultural events, and, importantly, *solidarity*, and what Foroutan has described as reshuffled peer groups or *postmigrant alliances*, where people of different ethnic, national and religious backgrounds come together because they share similar attitudes on equality and diversity as hallmarks of a plural democracy. Interestingly, with regard to the recipients' engagement with the exhibition, Foroutan notes that postmigrant alliances are 'also possible without contact or interaction' and that they can be forged on the basis of empathy and proximity, but also 'be more than just empathetic; they can be political or strategic' (Foroutan 2019b, 158).

I have used the Bologna feminists' terms to explain how transversal politics was practised in *100% FREMMED?* and to suggest that the project invited producers, participants and recipients to adopt the interactive approach of rooting and shifting. Admittedly, the audience for such an art project in public space would obviously also have comprised individuals who refused to be interpellated, or hailed, as an ally, and who remained critical, even hostile, to its ethics and politics of representing people of refugee backgrounds as included in the image of the nation. The project can be seen, then, as a continuation of the long tradition of using art exhibitions and art projects as instruments for the education of the audience or the public. *100% FREMMED?* provides an opportunity to discuss essential issues of democratic participation, recognition and belonging, and it gives those willing to listen some new answers to the question of what cultural citizenship is, and what a civic ethics from the perspective of the refugee can bring to a postmigrant society.

5. Bringing refugee memories and heritage into public view

Where does the past go?

When someone is forced to flee their home country, they leave behind their home, their friends and oftentimes also members of their family. Memory-soaked places of childhood, the view from the kitchen window in the morning, and the impression of light fading over one's neighbourhood at dusk. All the familiar soundscapes and other 'sensescapes' of everyday life are suddenly silenced and gone. They are lost, never to be recovered again as a lived experience, only as increasingly distant and hazy memories.

Even if the bond between a life and a particular world has been broken, the past does not remain in that world at that location, as if this ambience of time and place had been forgotten and left behind in the violent frenzy of flight. But where does the past go? There is some truth to the idea that we carry our past and our memories with and within us, but there is more to it than that. The stories that make up our memory are like living beings. With time, they transform themselves into other stories; they enter into new constellations with more recent events or are seen later from a different perspective. Sometimes memories perish or almost fade into oblivion. Trauma has this effect, as does the process of forgetting. Importantly, memories can only be relived in the present, and this requires a medium, a carrier. Art, in its many forms, provides fertile soil for such memory work. Visual art is one of the places where the memories of displaced individuals and people go, and where they can be articulated and communicated with nuance, care and an affective appeal to those willing to listen.

Memory studies scholar Alison Landsberg has coined the term 'prosthetic memory' to describe how mediated representations can transform individual and collective memories, usually geographically and historically specific, into symbolic representations that are not the property of a single person or group but can be transmitted across boundaries of time, space and culture. When serving as a prosthesis (i.e. as an external device supplementing a missing or defective part of the body – in this case, memory), mediated representations can open

up 'collective horizons of experience' which may in some cases 'pave the way for unexpected political alliances'; in other words, for solidarity and transversal politics that cut across difference (Landsberg 2018, 149; see also Landsberg 2004, 18–22). Landsberg's research from the 2010s focuses on film and mass culture, but as the American Studies scholar James Berger has noted, her concept of prosthetic memory is equally applicable to other artistic and cultural forms 'and, indeed, to symbol use per se' (Berger 2007, 597). Landsberg's concept addresses the way in which mediated representations enable individuals to relate to memories of events they did not live through, and the potential of such memories to produce empathy and historical understanding that might become the grounds for progressive politics. Her idea of cultural representations as transmitters of a combination of empathy and historical understanding points ahead to Christine Ross's critical discussion of how this transmission can play out in contemporary art using film as medium (Ross 2022; see also the Introduction). Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory is also related to memory studies scholar Astrid Erll's influential theory of 'travelling memory' or 'transcultural memory', which solidifies the argument that memories can be transmitted transnationally and transculturally when mediated by artistic and cultural representations capable of disseminating versions of the past across time, space and mnemonic communities (Erll 2011, 9). Erll's theorization of transcultural memory as travelling memory is a helpful tool. It is solidly founded in memory theory, and is attentive to the ways in which processes of remembering are interwoven with those of forgetting – for instance, the loss of memories or avoidance of remembering, which must sometimes be factored in when dealing with representations of memories of refugeedom suffused with trauma. Furthermore, Erll is very clear about the status of 'transcultural memory' and 'prosthetic memory' as analytical *research perspectives* that direct attention to the ways in which mnemonic processes unfold *across* and *beyond* the boundaries of cultures, rather than serving as labels for specific types or objects of memory (Erll 2011, 6–9 and 14).

Erll's understanding of travelling memory and the exploration of how memories of forced displacement can be represented and transmitted transculturally was at the heart of the exhibition *Forbindelser – danske kunstnere fra det tidligere Jugoslavien* ('Connections – Danish Artists from Former Yugoslavia') curated by Tijana Mišković for SMK, the National Gallery of Denmark, where it was shown from December 2022 until March 2023 (Mišković and Østergaard 2022, 2–5; Mišković 2023, 195). This award-winning exhibition showcased a group of recognized Danish artists, most of whom, like the curator herself, had come to Denmark in the early 1990s as refugees from the Yugoslav Wars, and more specifically from Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ismar Ćirkinagić, Nermin Duraković, Amel Ibrahimović and Vladimir Tomić. Alen Aligrudić and Ana Pavlović from, respectively, Serbia and Montenegro arrived in the wake of the conflicts in 1999–2000, while Suada Demirović was born to Macedonian parents in Denmark. *Forbindelser* paved the way for a broad public recognition of

these artists as well as for their incorporation into the history of art in Denmark. The exhibition formed part of Mišković's practice-based PhD project, which resulted in the exhibition as well as a pioneering thesis presenting an in-depth analysis of the transcultural connections that Danish artists from the former Yugoslavia articulate in their works. Acknowledging that the diasporic position of the artists and their shared Yugoslav cultural heritage are essential to their artistic practices, Mišković sought to contextualize their works in the exhibition, taking into account both the Yugoslav culture the artists came from and the one they are now a part of. In both the exhibition and her PhD thesis, Mišković argues that works by Danish artists from the former Yugoslavia can shed light on important transcultural connections between different times, places and cultures that were ruptured by the war and disconnected by migration. This chapter is indebted to Mišković, who is to be credited with introducing the concept of transcultural memory as a tool to explore the centrality of memory work to the above-mentioned artists.¹

Centring on Aligrudić, Čirkinagić, Duraković and Tomić, this chapter explores what can be learnt from their works about worldmaking in the wake of forced displacement. More specifically, I examine how violence and trauma is commemorated, and how memories of war, loss, displacement and origin are storied in the artists' works: How do artists with this specific background of forced displacement – having experienced the Yugoslav Wars as children – represent individual and collective memories of war, refugeedom, and what I term 'waithood' and a budding 'postmigrant subjectivity' in works that speak not only to members of the diaspora to which they belong but also serve as 'prosthetic' memories capable of engaging people with other histories of displacement as well as people who have not experienced forced displacement themselves?

The history of Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Wars is too complicated to be discussed here, yet some historical remarks are needed before considering the four artists' works.² The Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia consisted of six republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia) and two autonomous regions (Vojvodina and Kosovo Metohija). The Yugoslav federation was established in 1945 as a model Stalinist state with strategies to standardize

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- 1 I had the pleasure of serving as co-supervisor on Tijana Mišković's PhD project and thank her for everything I have learnt about the topic from our conversations and from seeing how the project evolved. In her PhD dissertation, Mišković focuses almost exclusively on the works in the exhibition *Forbindelser*. By contrast, this chapter considers additional works by Čirkinagić and Duraković which were not included.
 - 2 The primary source of the outline following is Mišković's insightful introduction to the visual arts, culture, history, dissolution and wars of Yugoslavia in her PhD dissertation, which builds on important recent historical studies. A particular asset of Mišković's account is that it focuses on aspects relevant to the artists' work and also considers migration from Yugoslavia to Denmark (Mišković 2023, chapters 4 and 5).

political discourse and develop the country's economy, with a focus on heavy industry guided by an ambitious five-year plan. Socialism and 'Yugoslavianness' became the political building blocks of the new state. As Mišković points out, the government's utilization of the narrative of the Yugoslav partisan movement's victory in the Second World War to unify the different peoples and ethnicities was a necessary strategic move to unite the country around a common reconstruction and generate a Yugoslav patriotism, but it meant that the internal nationalist war crimes were downplayed and relegated to oblivion (Mišković 2023, 43–45).

When the Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito died in 1980 after serving in positions of national leadership since 1943, a new chapter in the country's history began. There are several theories as to what led to the instability that resulted in civil war in the 1990s, with extreme forms of mass murder and the gradual collapse of Yugoslavia as a federal state. Most explanations tend to overemphasize interethnic hostility and ignore both the political and structural impact of a deep economic crisis. The former solidarity of the wealthier republics with those harder hit crumbled, and none of the subsequent presidencies managed to solve Yugoslavia's major problems of debt, oil crises and difficulties in obtaining loans. At the same time, the federal structure opened the door to growing ethnic strife and nationalisms, which prevented a common solution for the whole country (Mišković 2023, 55–56).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 caused further destabilization, compounded by the victory of nationalist leaders over the communists in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with the secession of the two prosperous republics of Slovenia and Croatia from the Yugoslav federation in 1991 (Nehrig and Weiss 2015). When Bosnia and Herzegovina attempted to secede in 1992 to avoid being incorporated into a Serb-dominated residual state, the already existing armed conflicts flared up and triggered Yugoslavia's brutal three-and-a-half-year-long civil war, unleashing a brutality that Europe had not seen since the Second World War. The brutality was caused by a campaign of ethnic cleansing, with the Muslim population being the largest victim group. Although ethnic cleansing was also carried out by Muslim and Croatian forces, the assaults by the Serbian forces on the Muslim population was particularly destructive. One of the most vicious atrocities was the massacre of 8000 Bosnian boys and men in the town of Srebrenica in June 1995. After the end of the Yugoslav Wars, it became the first legally recognized genocide in Europe since the end of the Second World War (Mišković 2023, 56–58).

The war and ethnic cleansing also forced 100,000 people to flee the former Yugoslavia, generating the largest and most challenging flow of refugees in Europe since the Second World War. Of these, 20,000, mostly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, were granted temporary protection in Denmark in accordance with the so-called 'Yugoslav Law', which was passed in 1992 and enabled the Danish authorities to post-

pone the processing of their application for asylum for two years (Mišković 2023, 101–102). Whilst the law ensured immediate protection, it also placed adults and children in the limbo of refugee centres without any possibility of integrating into the Danish labour market and educational system because they were not allowed to work, move into their own separate homes or go to Danish schools.

According to Birte Weiss, Minister of Interior Affairs from 1993 to 1997 and co-editor of and contributor to the 2015 volume *Og Balkan kom til Danmark. Om at være nærområde til krig og folkemord* ('And the Balkans came to Denmark: About being an area close to war and genocide'), the Yugoslav Law was based on a collective international misjudgement of the extent of the war and an optimistic expectation that the war would end sooner than it did, allowing refugees to return to their homeland.³ By December 1994, the two-year postponement of the asylum procedure for the earliest arrivals expired. About a year later, approximately 16,000 applications had been assessed, allowing the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina to obtain residence permits and integrate into Danish society (B. Weiss 2015b, 108). In January 1995, the so-called 'Bosnian Act' was introduced, which basically meant that refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina who had not been granted asylum would instead get a temporary residence permit that would automatically become a permanent residence permit after two years, along with access to integration programmes. In total, about 18,000 displaced Bosnians resettled in Denmark (Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielsen 2017, 47).

Og Balkan kom til Danmark was published 20 years after the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina arrived, coinciding with the arrival of refugees from the Syrian Civil War in 2015. Its retrospective look at the situation and the integration of the Bosnians thus offered an instructive perspectivation of the new refugee situation. The contributors look back not only on the Yugoslav Wars and the reception of the Bosnians but also consider the long-term sequelae and treatment of trauma among refugees, as well as amongst Danish UN soldiers, police officers and emergency aid drivers who were deployed in Bosnia during the war. Birte Weiss also puts the events into historical perspective, with surveys about the situation of Bosnian-born Danes over the age of 18, conducted together with Ankestyrelsens Analyseenhed ('the National Social Appeals Board's Analysis Unit'), Statistics Denmark and the Danish Immigration Service. These surveys showed positive results, especially on the education parameter: a large proportion of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 had entered higher education, surpassing Danes in the same age group (Mišković 2023, 103–104; B. Weiss 2015a, 171).

3 B. Weiss 2015b, 101. Weiss explains that, in 1992, the Danish Parliament, the Folketinget, decided to follow the recommendation by UNHCR to wait and see, initially granting temporary residence permits and freezing asylum applications for two years.

Greetings from a land that no longer exists

The four artists discussed in this chapter belong to the group who entered higher education as they were all educated at Danish Art Academies. Alen Aligrudić, for example, graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 2015. For the exhibition *Forbindelser*, Aligrudić created the installation *Greetings from Yugoslavia*, with postcards displayed on black shelves reminiscent of those found in many museum shops, except that these postcards were not for sale but for free distribution. Aligrudić's photographic memories of the Balkan region were thus not designed for the permanence of museum collections but for *travelling* and *scattering* across the world – like the Yugoslav diaspora itself.

The photos embellishing the postcards derived from two of Aligrudić's photographic series entitled, respectively, *(un)familiar(ities)* and *Strange Bedfellows/Jugolaboratorija*. The first explores the relation between the familiar and the unfamiliar; the latter is dedicated to the exploration of 'Yugoslavianness', in the light of the country's more recent history of war, migration and forced displacement (Mišković and Østergaard 2022, 10, 41).

What unites the different motifs of the postcard series is that they are all devoid of human presence and filled with an eerie atmosphere of loss and emptiness. Aligrudić deliberately used muted colours and contrasts as an aesthetic means to create a detachment from the motifs so that they are more likely to be read as dreamlike memories than actual places or situations. The postcards depict landscapes, cityscapes, new or converted buildings signalling a society in transition, but also socialist modernist monuments and buildings, and a rowing boat decorated with the Yugoslav flag sporting socialism's red five-pointed star. Aligrudić replaced the details on location and subject traditionally given on the back of postcards with a brief comment or introduction by the artist. The note on the postcard with the boat reads 'In the Same Boat' and is interpreted by Mišković as a reference to the fact that even after breaking away from Yugoslavia, the six independent states continued to struggle with the same kind of financial and political problems (Mišković 2023, 159). Many of the photographs are taken from a roadside or a path through the landscape, suggesting that the artist does not live here but is travelling on a road trip through the region where he grew up: 'Common to the motifs is that they are "coloured" by the feeling of revisiting a place that has changed, but has retained traces of something familiar.' (Mišković 2023, 161)

A postcard depicting a green wooden house at an old Christian churchyard has a note on the back headlined 'Driver's Grave' and explaining that the house is itself a kind of grave. Its roof is crowned with a red five-pointed star and a driving wheel, as emblems of the deceased's political conviction and his profession. Yet, in Aligrudić's symbolically loaded series these remnants of a Yugoslav past dominated by socialism and industrial progress can also be read in a wider political and historical context.

The artist's note invites such a conjectural interpretation by suggesting that the image of the driver's grave 'reflects on the paradigm metamorphosis happening in "the region"'.

Fig. 20: Alen Aligrudić, Untitled / Driver's Grave, from the series *Greetings from Yugoslavia*, (2006–2021) 2022. Postcard, 10.5 x 21 cm. Courtesy: the artist.



At this juncture it is worth returning to Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory. She stresses the general semiotic point that meaning-making is not the preserve of the creator. The 'encoding' of the production process is followed by the 'decoding' of the reception process, which means that there are always several possible readings of any 'text' (Landsberg 2018, 150; Hall 1994). This is especially true for artistic representations that often allow for a plurality of interpretations which will always hinge upon the background, knowledge and sensitivity the receiver brings to their encounter with the work. The artist cannot predetermine the outcome as the meaning is ultimately negotiated by the individual receiver. As regards *Greetings from Yugoslavia*, people who grew up in Yugoslavia, or live in 'the region', are more likely to have the prerequisite knowledge to read the signs, identify the actual places and know their history than the general audience, in Denmark and elsewhere. Although these differences seem quite obvious, they should be mentioned here because a distinct feature of the careers of the artists discussed in this chapter is that they exhibit their works both nationally and internationally, with the majority of exhibitions of their work taking place in Denmark, and secondarily in post-Yugoslav countries, especially Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

One of the major historical transformations to the Balkan region is the new nation-state borders that split up Yugoslavia. Aligrudić's series reflects this paradigm shift, too. A postcard with the note 'One Step over the Border' entices

the viewer's gaze to take an imaginative step onto a weathered concrete diving board to plunge into the calm water, cross the elementary boundary between earth and sea and head towards the distant shore, which the note suggests might entail crossing a national border. Thus, as Mišković suggests, the key message in Aligrudić's series is perhaps not to be derived from the places depicted but, rather, from the artist's travels and the routes that connect them (Mišković 2023, 162). *Greetings from Yugoslavia* is not so much a representation of the artist's original homeland as an expression of the artist's *diasporic relation* to his country of birth. As many scholars of diaspora studies have underscored, this orientation towards the original homeland and/or its culture is crucial to the formation of the complex transcultural sense of belonging to both the receiving country and the country of origin that characterizes diasporic existence. This also holds true in cases such as Yugoslavia, where the original homeland no longer exists as a nation-state; for a diaspora, the 'homeland' can be an actual place, an idea place, or the memory of one (Mišković 2023, 162; Sheffer 2003, 148–149).

Fig. 21: Alen Aligrudić, Untitled / One Step over the Border, from the series *Greetings from Yugoslavia*, (2006–2021) 2022. Postcard, 10.5 x 21 cm. Courtesy: the artist.



Aligrudić's diasporic experience of 'travelling back' to his country of origin on a road trip in pursuit of the past, only to discover that the country and culture have changed, as indeed has Aligrudić himself, is emblematic of how the Danish artists from the former Yugoslavia position themselves. Although Aligrudić's sense of attachment obviously distinguishes him from the tourist, *Greetings from Yugoslavia* suggests that the artist observes 'the region' with the detachment of someone who has repositioned himself by developing attachments to a lifeworld elsewhere.

Mišković introduces the term *the diasporic intermediate position*⁴ to capture the artist's dual belonging: 'It is precisely this diasporic intermediate position that prevents the artist from feeling completely at home in one location. Instead, it awakens the need to search for a stable foothold by moving between two locations.' (Mišković 2023, 161)

Because Alen Aligrudić is no longer part of the society he depicts, he notices the signs of transformation in the region and how traces of a waning socialism mix with signs of advancing capitalism. Within the group exhibition framework of *Forbindelser*, the title *Greetings from Yugoslavia* evokes the diasporic narrative of 'where we came from' shared by all the participating artists. Because the title refers to a no longer existing, socialist nation-state as if it still existed as a unified cultural and geopolitical entity, it evokes a twisted sense of nostalgic longing for what has been lost; twisted, because the phrase 'greetings from' suggests the leisure and pleasure of tourism and the joy of sharing travel memories with loved ones back home. A tension is thus created between the postcard as a border-crossing carrier of happy holiday memories and the ghosts of civil war, genocide and the splintering of a federal state, all conjured up by the name of the destination: Yugoslavia.

Diasporic memories of genocidal violence

The sharing of memories of Yugoslavia is as central to Ismar Ćirkinagić's artistic practice as it is to Aligrudić's postcards. Whilst Aligrudić focuses on the afterlife of Yugoslav culture in post-Yugoslav countries, Ćirkinagić works through the region's genocidal violence in ways that convey an unflinching anti-war and anti-violence commitment.

Ćirkinagić's starting point is the nationalist conflict that forced him to flee and the postwar investigations to locate Bosnian mass graves and identify the murdered. A series of photographs from 2005 all titled *Clothing* bears witness to the laborious forensic work following the opening of mass graves to identify the victims based on the human remains. They depict recovered bones and frail bits of clothing sorted with care into small piles of 'individual' evidence. Each photograph shows a pile close-up, thereby enhancing its particularity as a silent tribute to a singular unnamed victim. Two years later, in 2007, the artist travelled around Bosnia and Herzegovina to visit the sites of war crimes, documenting them in large-scale landscape photographs in which branches, thickets, grass and crops cover the soil where bodies were concealed. Only the titles – such as *Execution Place and Mass Grave LJJ1*, *Mass Grave JK1* and *Mass Grave L1* (all 2007) – reveal that these landscapes were once sites of killings committed in the name of ethnic cleansing (D.R. Jørgensen

4 In Danish: 'den diasporiske mellempositionering'.

2008, 22). It is important to note that Čirkinagić's pictures of landscapes and forensic evidence make no direct references to place names or to Yugoslav/Bosnian culture. Rather, they present themselves as documentations of atrocities in the recent past that could have taken place almost anywhere, opening up for transversal reflections on other histories of war and the traumatic memories that displaced people carry with them. Like the stories of the forcibly displaced – the survivors – the lush vegetation in Čirkinagić's landscapes also conveys the message that life goes on even if the memory of the atrocities remains powerful (D.R. Jørgensen 2008, 26).

Čirkinagić's insistence that the genocide should remain in public view – to ensure that it remains a part of collective memory and to circumvent the inclination that traumatized nations and families often have to silence the horrors in order to protect one another and 'move on' – is perhaps most evident in *Herbarium*, a series of about 250 herbariums dating from the period 2004 to 2022, when the artist collected plants from the mass graves around his hometown of Prijedor in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵ Whilst these herbariums are based on the traditional way of collecting and preserving plant specimens, they do not serve the purpose of classifying the flora and forming a botanical collection suggesting order and overview. They are, rather, commemorative markers of the mass graves where they were found. *Herbarium* can thus best be described with the German term *Mahnmal*, which denotes a memorial intended to keep something in memory that should be prevented from ever happening again.

Čirkinagić would dry and press the plants before mounting them on sheets of acid-free paper on which he also labels the specific plant, including its Latin name, the place and date of collection, as well as the number of bodies found in that particular grave. The plant label that marks Tomašica, the largest mass grave in Europe since the Second World War, is typical and reads: 'Plant name: *Lotus corniculatus*/Family: Fabaceae/Place: Bosnovi; Identity of the habitat: Dump on the hill 'Depo' at mine Complex Tomasica. Primary mass grave with about 800 bodies./Date: 1.9.2013.'

One of Denmark's major art museums, the ARoS museum in Aarhus, has a large collection of Čirkinagić's herbariums. When on display, they take up a whole wall, even if they are densely hung. The intimate format of each framed plant specimen requires the viewer to come close to be able to read the labels – uncomfortably close to uncomfortable truths. Yet, the visitor must also take a few steps back to gain an overview of *Herbarium*'s systematic mapping of the mass graves, which brings out the systemic nature of the horrific genocide itself. However, conceptually, the herbariums with the delicate dried plants also allude to the circular processes of

5 See Ismar Čirkinagić, *Herbarium*, <https://www.ismarc.com/portfolio-item/herbarium/> (accessed May 20, 2025).

nature where the bodies of the deceased nurture the plants, thereby assuming a new form of life.

Fig. 22: Ismar Ćirkinagić, from the series *Herbarium*, comprising about 250 herbariums, 2004–2022. Dried plants, variable sizes. Photo: Ziyah Gafic. Courtesy: the artist.



Landscape and garments come together in Ćirkinagić's installation *Cleaning Times* (2006). Originally featuring as the artist's contribution to *EXIT 2006*, the annual graduation show of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, it entered the collection of SMK, the National Gallery of Denmark, in 2020. Here, it was displayed together with a commentary by the artist explaining the significance of the title and the materials, which could not easily be deduced visually.

A tall plinth of ten bales of hay mown from one of the largest mass graves in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina supports a simple drying rack with used clothes belonging to victims who ended up in the graves. The title *Cleaning Times* is similarly loaded with dark political and historical references, sarcastically echoing the euphemism 'ethnic cleansing' used during the wars as a generic term for violent actions such as genocide, torture, rape, deportation, etc. Through use, the garments

have taken the shape of their former owners' bodies. These material 'memory imprints' serve as synecdoches for the victims, enabling the dead to be remembered as a defence against oblivion. In his commentary, Čirkinagić encourages the viewer to look beyond the specific political context and see the work as 'a universal struggle against oblivion. The hay comes from plants that spring from the soil at a site where they were nourished by minerals, salt and acid from the bodies of the victims of the ethnic cleansing. It is as if the past life has taken on new form, continuing the cycle of life.'

Using a concept coined by the art historian Verónica Tello, Čirkinagić's artistic idiom could be described as adhering to a 'counter-memorial aesthetics' that uses montage techniques to interconnect the otherwise vanishing images, voices, memories and histories of refugees that museums and archives often fail to document and preserve. Tello suggests that this aesthetics has been brought forth by 'an impulse that desires to memorialize or, more precisely, counter-memorialize experiences of refugeedom' in a way that appears heterogeneous and casts connections, dialectics and disjunctions between divergent bodies, objects and signifiers (Tello 2016, 2, see also 4).

Ismar Čirkinagić's *The House in the Forest by the Sea* (2021), shown in the SMK exhibition *Forbindelser*, scaled up the usage of clothing as synecdoches of victims of violence to a global statement. This monumental installation consisted of two elements: a horizontal representation of the stony remains of the foundation of a house reduced to rubble, and a vertical representation of the soaring sails of a ship patch-worked from clothing belonging to victims of armed conflicts, terror attacks and political violence. While the garments and rubble were sourced from fifteen conflict-stricken countries in different parts of the world, the title was drawn from the artist's research on war veterans who seek to cope with post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSD) by withdrawing from society and moving to the forest (Mišković 2023, 142–144). Thus, the objects on the floor were placed in a meticulous order as a kind of 're-enactment' of an obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) often caused by trauma. Here, ordering helps the subject remain calm and ward off fear in a situation experienced as unbearable. A specific source of inspiration for Čirkinagić was a picture taken by the photographer Don McCullin in 1982 shortly after the bombing of a hospital in Sabra and Shatila, the refugee camps in Beirut populated by Palestinian refugees. McCullin's photograph depicts a boy sitting alone on the floor arranging small pieces of rubble on a straight line as if he were playing undisturbed by the chaos around him (Mišković 2023, 143).

Fig. 23: Ismar Čirkinagić, *The House in the Forest by the Sea*, 2006. Installation. Clothes sewn together, debris and other materials. Variable sizes (minimum height 625 cm). Shown at the exhibition *Forbindelser – danske kunstnere fra det tidligere Jugoslavien* ('Connections – Danish Artists from Former Yugoslavia') at SMK (the National Gallery of Denmark). Photo: Thomas Andersen. Courtesy: the artist.



The inclusion of clothing belonging to victims links this work to *Cleaning Times*, but it also goes beyond it to state Čirkinagić's universal message more compellingly. In a video interview for the exhibition, the artist explained:

During my time at the academy, I was very interested in the war in the former Yugoslavia. When you talk about a particular war, you talk about all the wars we've

seen before. Today, just take the war in Ukraine, or the war in Iraq. The shock, the stress, the fear you have ... It's easier to understand or compare and come up with a work that talks about what you've experienced in a universal way.⁶

Tijana Mišković, who assisted the artist in obtaining clothes from the families of victims, has clarified how this installation uses the common symbols of the ship and sailing, well known from religious myths and rituals across the world, to articulate an almost universal or transcultural non-violence statement about human lives destroyed by violence and the passage from life to death:

Through this universal and transcultural symbolism, Čirkinagić's aesthetic language takes on an almost universal tone, that is, as a language that can be understood in many different cultures. The work thus rises above Čirkinagić's own experiences and testimonies from the war in the former Yugoslavia and links it to other similar atrocities, as he uses clothes that belonged to victims who lost their lives in wars, terrorist attacks and other acts of political violence to make the sail. The connection between the local and the universal is an important shift in perspective that places a specific situation in a larger context that concerns humanity. (Mišković 2023, 147).

The House in the Forest by the Sea can be seen as calling for responsible action to end and prevent wars. As the previously mentioned works, this monumental installation also offers itself up as a counter-memorial to victims of war and violence. Drawing on Michael Rothberg's influential concept of multidirectional memory, Mišković suggests that *The House in the Forest by the Sea* evokes a sense of multidirectional memory since Čirkinagić's ambition is to bind together diverse spatial, temporal and cultural sites of political violence in order to spotlight the shared experience of deadly violence, loss and grief (Mišković 2023, 145). Multidirectional memory is an accurate term here because it refers to the coexistence of multiple cultural memories being possible without the rivalry that is often produced when comparing 'major' and 'minor' historical atrocities (e.g. the Bosnian genocide and the Holocaust). The concept thus draws attention to how specific traumatic memories can serve as an analogy for other events and histories and to the dynamic transfers taking place between diverse times and places during the act of remembrance (Rothberg 2009, 11). To recall Landsberg's point on transcultural memory transfer, Čirkinagić's work serves as a mediating prosthetic representation that enables viewers to relate to traumatic events they did not live through (Landsberg 2018). From the acknowledgement that such experiences are shared beyond the specificities of local histories might spring a transnational and transcultural sense of solidarity. *The*

6 Quoted from the transcription of the interview included in Mišković 2023, vol. 2, appendix 2, p. 11.

House in the Forest by the Sea offers an alternative understanding of counter-memory beyond the usual dialectics of understanding counter-memory as based on binaries like victor and vanquished, victim and perpetrator, us and them, self and other. It thus conveys a profound understanding of the *coexistence* defined so accurately by Christine Ross as ‘the nondiscreteness of beings; the state, awareness and practice of existing interdependently’ (Ross 2022, 8).

Camp structures for a life between permanence and temporariness

Shifting focus from Čirkinagić’s commitment to anti-violence to Nermin Duraković’s persistent critique of the Danish asylum system, it is crucial to emphasize a fact that situates Duraković’s critique of this national system in a broader global political context. For many of the world’s refugees, mobility is followed by *immobility*. At the beginning of the 21st century, UNHCR estimated that around four in ten registered refugees lived in camp-like facilities, often for years or even decades (Gatrell et al. 2021; Gatrell 2013). In the camp’s parallel society, the lives of refugees are put on hold. An example is the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya – one of the world’s largest camps, which has endured for more than 30 years. Gerawork Teferra has shown how today this camp is still geared to handling people with refugee status for a supposedly short-term period before repatriation or resettlement elsewhere – which seldom happens. As a result, the Kakuma Refugee Camp has developed ‘pseudo-permanent’ structures, such as education, administration and elections for informal leadership positions, to accommodate people who must build what Teferra describes as ‘increasingly permanent lives in the camp’. Here they develop a ‘unique lifestyle between permanence and transience’ (Teferra 2022, 164). Teferra uses the term ‘waithood’ to refer to the ways in which the forcibly displaced handle ‘a prolonged encampment that could, in theory though not in reality, end at any time’ (Teferra 2022, 171). Waithood, argues Teferra, is ‘not social limbo but legal and bureaucratic limbo ... for an indefinite period’. Oftentimes, the uncertainty of waithood determines the nature of refugees’ social life and is detrimental to their physical and mental health (Teferra 2022, 175).

Since the arrival of large numbers of refugees from the Syrian civil war in 2015, it has also become frequent practice across Europe to leave refugees waiting for years in the semi-permanence of refugee centres while their asylum application is being processed. In the case of Denmark, such policies date back to the early 1990s when the country received about 20,000 Bosnian refugees (Hammer 2019, 86, 102) who were housed in temporary camps or ‘centres’ where they often ended up spending several years.

Although this kind of long-term encampment is often politically designed to separate asylum claimants from civil society (Kreichauf 2018), provisional infra-

structures are established, and informal encounters between refugees and residents unfold from early on. I propose, therefore, that the protracted wait for a – nowadays temporary – residence permit in a European country, could be described as a postmigrant condition. It is postmigrant in the obvious temporal sense that it is a phase ‘after’ the *act* of forced migration, but also in the sociopolitical sense, as refugees enter postmigrant societies embroiled in struggles over migration and integration that impact their situation – for example, when right-leaning parties and their constituencies perceive the increasing social and cultural ‘diversity’ as a threat to national monoculture and asylum seekers are perceived as enemies (Foroutan 2019b, 2019a). Refugeeedom, camp life and waithood have rarely been analysed as a postmigrant condition. The remainder of this chapter examines works by Nermin Duraković and Vladimir Tomić and develops from these analyses some methodological considerations of what a postmigrant frame of reading can contribute on life in European refugee camps, which generates, I argue, a kind of postmigrant subjectivity rarely singled out in postmigration studies.

Whilst the Prologue highlighted Duraković’s video work *Our Border* for the way he used the heavily surveyed border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to reflect critically on the interlocking Danish and European border regimes, this chapter foregrounds the refugee camp as a recurrent motif in his drawings and installations. Duraković’s commitment to interrogating the long-term encampment of asylum seekers links his work thematically and politically to the transnational community of Trampoline House and its embedded gallery CAMP (examined in Chapter 2), where one of his major early works, *(Re)arranging* (2009/2015), was shown at CAMP’s inaugural exhibition *Camp Life* in 2015.

As a student at the Funen Art Academy, Duraković had already developed an interest in migration politics, especially the spaces and systems society creates for asylum seekers. The artist had ample experience with them from the early 1990s when he spent four years in the Danish asylum system as a young teenager. What triggered his critical interest was ‘the discrepancy’ between the lived reality he had experienced and witnessed and the public narrative. This discrepancy came to inform several art projects centring on the physical structures of asylum centres and deportation centres (Duraković 2020, 1). In his 2020 essay ‘Addressing Migration Politics through Art’, Duraković describes these centres as ‘zones in which human life is reduced to an uncertain wait for either a residency permit or deportation [... and] where the experience of time is different from wider society’. He also notes that most asylum centres in Denmark are placed outside of urban areas, ensuring the absence of asylum seekers in the public places of Danish towns and cities – ‘and by extension preventing public interest in their existence’ (Duraković 2020, 2).

One of the first projects to spring from Duraković’s political indignation was the booklet project *Danish Asylum Guidebook* (2002), which offered an overview of all asylum centres in the country as of 2002, as suggested by the title on the booklet’s

cover: *Alle Danske asylcentre på ét sted 2002* ('All Danish Asylum Centres in One Place 2002'). Its intended readership was ordinary people who had never visited one of these isolated zones of waithood. The booklet was designed to look like promotional material, appropriating the layout of the *Danish Camping Guide* from the same year and offering descriptions in Danish of each centre through categories such as local area, transport, and the activities and education offered to the centre's inhabitants. Like *Our Border*, this project thus pushed back against the invisibilization of displaced people by making what was supposed to remain hidden publicly visible and accessible.

Unlike Aligrudić, Čirkinagić and Tomić, Duraković rarely makes any reference to his country of birth, the specific history of Bosnian refugees, or any personal experience of refugeedom (Mišković 2023, 180–181). His perspective is transcultural and political, as his primary matter of concern is the racializing and dehumanizing effects and the ethico-political implications of Danish and EU asylum policies. Duraković is acutely aware that an artist with a refugee background speaks from a position quite different from that of the refugee:

One of the reasons why, for me, dealing with people in need is one of the most difficult artistic subjects to work with is connected to the fact that as an artist I am placed in a privileged position that is not shared by the subject of my work. If there is one thing that I can draw from my own experience of having been in the position of asylum seeker, it is that being locked in the imprisoned limbo of the asylum system without significant legal rights, is absolutely a political issue. (Duraković 2020, 8)

As a vocal critic of the emotionally charged imagery of suffering refugees and migrants – overused by media and humanitarian organizations, as well as some artists, to evoke compassion and empathy – Duraković takes a different, conceptually oriented approach that focuses on spaces, structures and objects rather than human bodies. Accordingly, his project *Asylum Residency* (2005) offers viewers visual entry to the interior of centres but not access to the inhabitants or their stories. This series of graphic illustrations drawn with fine accurate lines depicts prototypical rooms in Danish refugee centres furnished with the standard equipment used in the 1990s, ready for occupants to take up residence. They can be seen as a kind of chart of the furniture and objects considered essential for establishing a home in Denmark. Duraković thus uses his personal history as a critical instrument with which to explore cultural notions of what basic needs must be met for people to be able to (re)create a home, and the importance of a home for developing a sense of belonging to a place. The series was originally designed to be displayed on overhead projectors where these 'blueprints' of refugee accommodation were transilluminated by a clinical white 'analytical' light exposing the inhumane character of these containers for

unwanted people and suggesting that these environments were not designed for worldmaking. *Asylum Residency* thus reflects the ambiguous character of these environments of care and control to which displaced people are (not) welcomed – the ambiguity that Derrida’s neologism *hostipitality* captures so eminently with its dual reference to a sociocultural and political conduct or climate that is both hospitable and inhospitable at the same time (Derrida 2000).

Fig. 24: Nermin Duraković, *Asylum Residency*, 2005. Drawing, 30 x 40 cm print on transparent paper. Courtesy: the artist.



This project is key to Duraković’s understanding of the Danish asylum system, as evidenced by his adaptation of the series to other formats suited to different exhibition contexts. In 2007, he used some of the illustrations for the poster series *My Temporary Asylum Residency* created for the group exhibition *How Do You Belong?*, organized by the curatorial collective Publik and displayed in Copenhagen’s public spaces.⁷ In 2015, the series was displayed in light boxes at his solo exhibition in Croatia at the MMSU (Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rijeka) and ICA

7 *How do you belong?* by publik, see <http://publik.dk/howdoyoubelong.html> and <http://publik.dk/nermin.html> (accessed January 9, 2025).

(Institute for Contemporary Art, Zagreb). The exhibition concept centred on Duraković's projects about the Danish immigration system from 2002 to 2015,⁸ and it should be mentioned here also as an event that exemplifies how the artists discussed in this chapter exhibit and make their mark on the Danish and the Croatian and Bosnian art scenes concurrently.

Fig. 25: Nermin Duraković, (Re)arranging, 2005/2015. Year of production: 2009. Exhibited: 2009/2015/2016/2022. Installation. Metal, plastic, wooden furniture, mattresses and restriction tape, size approximately 16 m². Courtesy: the artist.



Whilst *Asylum Residency* includes two-dimensional renderings of the basic equipment of rooms in 1990s asylum centres, the installation *(Re)arranging* includes the real objects: two red metal bunk beds with grey mattresses, two metal lockers, a red table and two red plastic chairs furnish a confined space of 14 m² whose walls are marked with white lines on the floor. The furniture evokes the aesthetics of the 1990s asylum centres, so anonymous and industrially standardized that it seems to be devoid of specific cultural connotations. The title *(Re)arranging*

8 Duraković 2020, 3–4; Wedel-Brandt 2015; see also the artist's website: <https://nermindurakovic.art/> (accessed January 9, 2025).

underscores this as it refers to the paradox that no matter how the occupants might rearrange the furniture, the aesthetics will remain almost the same (Duraković 2020, 5). The spatial aesthetics spotlights how inhospitable such accommodation is to worldmaking and points to the impossibility of turning it into your own (temporary) home. The fact that asylum seekers must live in the centres, as no other options for accommodation are available, emphasizes the unequal power relations of the camp. The furniture thus speaks volumes about the dehumanizing effects of a prison-like system which turns people into case numbers – asylum claimants sentenced to indefinite waithood.

(Re)arranging was also included in the SMK exhibition, *Forbindelser*. Mišković gives an account of the conversations it spurred when some of the exhibited works were used as reference points in a conversation on ‘home’ in an ethnographic workshop with participants of refugee backgrounds. Mišković recounts that the work had a powerful but differentiated impact on those who had ‘more or less traumatic memories of asylum centres in Denmark’ (Mišković 2023, 154):

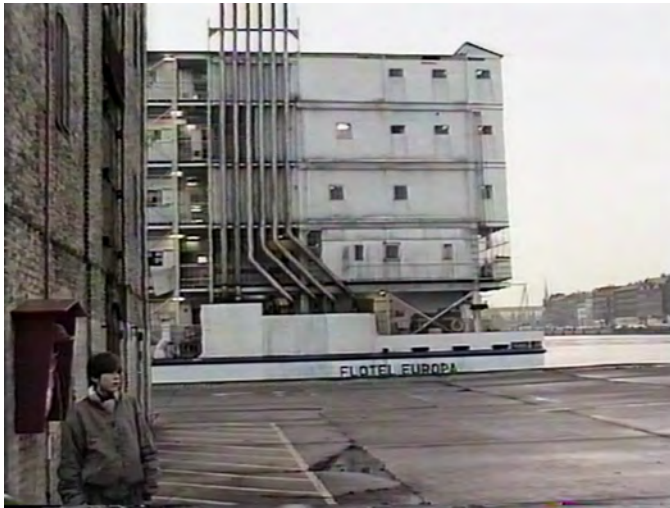
The workshop showed that for some the stay was a traumatic restriction, while for others it was a rescue that provided freedom and security. On the one hand, we hear an Indian woman talk about how the room in *(Re)arranging* reminds her of the fear and confusion she felt when she came to Denmark as a young woman with her younger brother, while on the other hand, we hear a young man from Eritrea talk about how it was in an asylum centre room in Denmark that he could sleep safely for the first time in his life after being on the run for three years. These clear identifications with the room illustrate how the work *(Re)arranging* channels the memories of different people almost like a portal, and at the same time reflects different political contexts and aspects of Denmark’s asylum and refugee policy. (Mišković 2023, 151–152)

Refugeedom and the limbo of waithood

How differently the long wait can impact people’s state of mind and everyday lives is reflected vividly in Vladimir Tomić’s video work (2015) and novel (2022), *Flotel Europa*. Flotel Europa was an old hotel-ship docked in Copenhagen Harbour to serve as a refugee centre for Bosnians. Run by the Red Cross, approximately 1000 people were housed on it, with each family allocated a cabin of 8m², with only a few that had windows but with a toilet and bath. On each of the crowded decks, the 200 residents shared a communal kitchen where there were approximately twelve hobs (Mišković 2023, 108). Both Tomić’s video work and his novel, identically named yet different, are compelling testimonies to how the early postmigrant transition phase was experienced by the residents in this floating refugee camp.

The video work and the novel are about the collective experience of refugeedom, as well as an autobiographical coming-of-age story about a boy named Vladimir. It thus integrates a situation of exception with one of normality. The video work places equal emphasis on the collective and the autobiographical story; it is a collective, multi-authored work in the sense that it is a digital montage of amateur footage recorded by different residents at the Flotel Europa. In the 1990s, it was expensive to make international phone calls, so someone at the Flotel bought two used VHS cameras, which were used to record messages to send to relatives back home, as well as for documenting everyday life and festive events on board. *Flotel Europa* thus also includes footage from a 'video letter' in which Vladimir's mother and her two sons describe their situation and send loving greetings to relatives back home. VHS tapes are fragile and degrade over time and with use. Signs of wear are apparent in Tomić's montage, suggesting distance in time as well as enhancing the fragmentary nature of memory. As the scholar of photography Mette Sandbye notes, these amateur recordings provide important insight into refugee life and serve as 'a kind of archival memorialization of the untold and seemingly unremembered between the personal and collective history' (Sandbye 2024, 43).

Fig. 26: Vladimir Tomić, Flotel Europa, 2015. Single-channel video, 70 min. Still image from the video. Courtesy: the artist.



In the video work, Tomić's personal story is foregrounded in some clips from a video letter from his mother to his father in which the two somewhat unwilling sons are also asked to tell their father about their lives in Copenhagen, but it is mostly

the collective experiences that come to the fore. In contrast to the video, the novel foregrounds the autobiographical story about Vladimir and his extended family. Accordingly, it includes more details on their life in Sarajevo before the war and their flight, arrival and resettlement as refugees in different Western countries – i.e. the production of a transnational diaspora.

Reading *Flotel Europa* through the lens of Teferra's concept of refugees' waitthood, I propose that a distinct form of postmigrant subjectivity emerges from the lived experience of refugeedom after the flight and then the arrival in a host country. I use the term *postmigrant refugeedom* to designate the specific forms of worldmaking between transience and permanence that the forcibly displaced develop as a mechanism for handling prolonged encampment and for developing a subjectivity and lifestyle tuned to the uncertain existence as a denizen without the foothold of a residency permit.

In the 1990s, Denmark was only on the verge of becoming a 'postmigrant society', as opposed to the Danish society of 2015–2022 in and for which Tomić created his works. This prompts the questions: What is gained by adopting an analytical lens that repositions 'refugees' as 'postmigrants'? How might artistic representations of 'postmigrant refugeedom' influence the hostile and polarizing discourse on migration in postmigrant societies? And can the analyst avoid the migrationist trap of 'migrantizing' the artist? I would argue that migrantization cannot be completely avoided. Because the novel and the video work are semi-biographical, and Tomić uses a first-person narrator, one cannot bypass Tomić's background, voice and body. His biography is integral to the works.

The last question can be formulated in more general terms: How do researchers who examine artistic and literary works that draw on their creator's refugee background navigate between Scylla and Charybdis? Between, on the one hand, a biographism that reads the works only in biographical terms and, in doing so, risks narrowing down the scope for interpretation to the artist's/writer's *exceptional* personal story of flight and victimhood; and, on the other, new forms of integrationist colour-blindness that silence stories of displacement and voices carrying different relations to languages, peoples and place-based knowledge? How can scholars reconcile the need to acknowledge that postmigrant refugeedom is distinctly different from the subjectivity of the descendants of immigrants with the need to undo the binary distinction between the newly arrived and the host population which is often used to label newcomers as outsiders? How can research into art and literature contribute to the recognition of forcibly displaced people as part of society, even when they are confined to the socially abject zones of camps and have not yet been granted asylum, a temporary residence permit, or the citizenship that has become increasingly difficult to get?

In Tomić's novel, Vladimir's story unfolds chronologically, starting with his arrival at Flotel Europa, with his mother and elder brother Goran, in December 1992,

and ending with their move to their own apartment in April 1996. It is interspersed with flashbacks to his family history and the increasingly violent enmity between ethnic groups back home, along with the fearful time they had experienced before fleeing. Readers learn that Tomić's family is composed of a complex mix of Serbs, Croats and Bosnians. Consequently, after the outbreak of war, they were constantly suspected of being enemies as others questioned which side they were on, and what blood ran through their veins. Yet, fleeing Yugoslavia did not mean that Vladimir and his family left this mistrust behind; his account of several incidents at the Flotel Europa indicates that the deeply ingrained ethnic conflicts travelled along with the displaced.

In the teenager's slightly naïve narrative, the anxiety, and the occasional shocks that the terror of the war and the fear of what has happened to Vladimir's father back home bring, blend into what gradually becomes everyday life. We hear about Vladimir falling in love with Selma, a girl on the ship who takes folk dancing classes, and about his friendship with other boys in the floating camp.⁹ There are stories about the Flotel's football team, teenage desire and group masturbation, and encounters with Danish people – from the teenagers' adoration of the pretty women at the Flotel reception desk, to the psychologist who inspects the Flotel and finds it unsuitable for long-term habitation, to Vladimir's discovery of rock music and concerts in the city. Near the end, Tomić turns to the difficult transition from a Bosnian to a Danish school with the bullying and linguistic hurdles this entails.

Fig. 27: Vladimir Tomić, Flotel Europa, 2015. Single-channel video, 70 min. Still image from the video. Courtesy: the artist.



9 The girl is named Selma in the novel and Melisa in the video work, but the stories match up.

Woven into Vladimir's story are tales about the tensions and solidarity between the Flotel's residents, about the black economy and recycling bottles to supplement their meagre allowance. There are also stories of anxious waiting: for news from back home and moving to a better place, for asylum, for a new life. One of the most piercing observations of waithood in both the novel and the video work is found in the scene in the TV room where many of the adults spend days and nights watching the news on Danish, American, French, and other channels, for a glimpse of someone they know. They looked, the narrator notes, as if the shape of their bodies slowly took the shape of the sofas they sat on: 'It was as if Flotel Europa and our refugee situation was a kind of vacuum in time and space, and the TV room at Flotel Europa's deck A was an additional vacuum within the vacuum' (Tomić 2015, 28:30–32:30 min.; 2022, 136–137).

I agree with the literary scholar Fedja Wierød Borćak that the novel is probably largely based on Tomić's own biographical details and reflects the vulnerability that the boy Vladimir feels while being emotionally split between fading Yugoslav ideals, new brutal militaristic nationalisms and 'the Danish population, welcoming with one hand and pushing away with the other'. Notwithstanding the centrality of the first-person narrator, *Flotel Europa* has a wealth of characters and is 'first and foremost a collective novel' that serves as 'an important testimony to a shared experience of disintegration, war and flight' (Borćak 2022, 21).

It is precisely the interweaving of the collective story of Bosnian displacement and camp life with ordinary and familiar coming-of-age experiences that enables readers and viewers to grasp how the processes of displacement and resettlement are interlinked. The Bosnians at Flotel Europa were both 'refugees' and 'postmigrants', albeit postmigrants in a different and much more precarious and marginalized situation than the 'postmigrant generations' of descendants born in the country. It is such features that make Tomić's depiction of youth life a narrative about postmigrant refugeeedom: the transition phase between flight and resettlement in the diaspora.

An intriguing aspect of both the novel and video work is Tomić's complex temporal and spatial positionality. In these works, he is embodied by the teenage refugee narrator Vladimir growing up at the Flotel in 1990s Copenhagen; yet as a writer, he speaks from a position as a Danish citizen and a highly esteemed visual artist educated at art academies in Copenhagen and Vienna in the 2010s, narrating the story of his youth and the sociopolitical circumstances that shaped it. Borrowing a term from Tijana Misković mentioned above, the positionality that the novel constructs for Vladimir/Tomić could be described as a 'diasporic intermediate position' (Mišković 2023): a positionality straddling past and present, 'refugee' and 'citizen', Denmark and what is today known as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia.

But there is an additional layer that transcends the historical specificity of Tomić's story and has to do with art and literature as instruments of empathy

and transversal solidarity. Tomić's works about the post-Yugoslav refugees speak to the way the history of war and displacement repeats itself. The video work was released in 2015 when displaced Syrians arrived in Europe, coinciding with the 'paradigm shift' in Danish migration and asylum policies that worsened the conditions for asylum seekers and refugees on temporary residency permits (see the Introduction and Rytter et al. 2023). The novel was published some years later, in September 2022, only months after millions of Ukrainians had fled to Europe following Russia's military invasion. Tomić's works make no mention of transversal solidarity between different diasporic groups who share the experience of war, displacement and resettlement. Yet, in the historical contexts of their making, it would certainly have been possible to read them as expressions of solidarity across differences. The literary critic Thomas Thurah's observation that it is impossible to read this novel with empathy for the refugees' situation captures this implicit solidarity: 'In this way, the novel also becomes an ever-relevant depiction of the camp, of people crowded together in very little space, deprived of most things and subject to the rules of others. This can be done out of humaneness and yet feel like a loss of humanity.' (Thurah 2022)

What can be learnt from Vladimir Tomić's *Flotel Europa* about the place of refugees and asylum seekers in Europe's postmigrant societies? As newly arrived, they do not belong to the postmigrant generations of descendants whose cultural productions and lifestyles have been thoroughly analysed by postmigration scholars such as Mark Hill and Erol Yildiz (Yildiz and Hill 2017). They are, arguably, positioned differently. In Tomić's novel, it is the narrator's experience with particularly language barriers, when entering a Danish school, that suggests that refugee youth are positioned as social and cultural 'outsiders' rather than as 'outsiders within' who are familiar with their country's social codes, norms, language and mainstream culture.

My analysis suggests that critical postmigration studies needs more fine-grained distinctions between different postmigrant positionalities and subjectivities to more accurately describe the 'place' of refugees and asylum seekers in society. I have used the term *postmigrant refugeedom* to name this transitional stage between flight and diasporic resettlement. My analysis also suggests that literary and artistic narratives are key instruments in helping 'us' – the motley crowd of citizens and denizens that make up postmigrant populations and readerships – understand better the condition of waithood. *Flotel Europa* offers some insight into refugees' worldmaking, into how they are suspended between a country recently lost and a country they cannot yet claim as theirs, between normality and a state of exception – and the creative agency and resilience it takes to make a world for oneself and develop a postmigrant subjectivity in waithood's zone of indeterminacy.

Waithood, trauma and prosthetic memory

This chapter has explored worldmaking in the wake of forced displacement. It has analysed how violence and trauma is commemorated, and how memories of war, loss, displacement and origin are storied in works by Alen Aligrudić, Ismar Ćirkinagić, Nermin Duraković and Vladimir Tomić. The chapter has also demonstrated how Duraković and Tomić have represented 'waithood' and the formation of a germinating 'postmigrant subjectivity' in artworks that are capable of engaging people with similar or other histories of refugeedom as well as those who have not experienced forced displacement themselves.

The introduction to this chapter stressed that processes of remembering are interwoven with those of forgetting, including the loss of memories and the avoidance of remembering – an issue quite common in representations of memories of refugeedom that are riddled with trauma. Trauma is unrepresentable, and yet it must be dealt with. This is one of the reasons for the tensions involved in representing refugees, argues Mieke Bal in her 2023 essay 'Refugees and Representation: An Impossible Necessity' (Bal 2024, 9–11, 21–23). Trauma cannot be represented 'for reasons of psychic foreclosure, which is the defining aspect of trauma; it must not because trying to do so would entail being trapped in voyeurism, the lack of modesty, but neither can it be ignored' (Bal 2024, 11). Bal emphasizes specifically the difficulty of incorporating trauma into narrative memory because trauma disrupts or 'splits off' experiences from the main narrative, thereby disrupting its coherence (Bal 2024, 23). The predilection for juxtaposing or combining divergent objects, motifs and fragments that are somehow interrelated, yet do not 'cohere' to form an organic unity, is a representational mode favoured by all four artists and could be seen as a way of acknowledging the need to work around that which cannot and should not be ignored. As with, for example, Aligrudić's fragmentary greetings from unnamed places in 'Yugoslavia'; Ćirkinagić's use of clothes, flowers and stones as synecdoches for traumatizing conflicts and genocide; Duraković's spatial montage of refugee camp furniture as tokens of debilitating waithood; and Tomić's recollection of scattered episodes in teenage and community life under the conditions in a floating camp.

For audiences without a background of forced displacement, many of these works can serve as prosthetic memory that can potentially call forth empathy. Empathy is not a purely emotional response like sympathy, but has a crucial cognitive component and takes work and thought to achieve (Landsberg 2018, 147). To draw the strands of this chapter together and link it to the next, I would like to recapitulate Landsberg's proposition that prosthetic memory transmitted by mediated representations (including artworks) enables individuals to relate to memories of events they did not experience, potentially leading to empathy and a historical understanding which might pave the way for progressive politics. The

book's concluding chapter on the predicament of the Palestinians will explore this proposition further by turning to Christine Ross, whose analysis of contemporary art's prosthetic transmission of memories of forced displacement will add critical nuance to Landsberg's hopeful proposition.

6. Killing time in Gaza and speculative Palestinian futures

A book on the representation of refugees in contemporary art from Denmark would be incomplete without a consideration of artists who have engaged with the plight of the Palestinians for the long haul: deeply committed artists whose engagements began a long time before the recent conflict ignited by Hamas's deplorable terror attack on Israeli civilians on 7 October 2023, killing approximately 1200 Israelis and foreign nationals, including at least 809 civilians, and taking 252 hostages – acts considered as war crimes (UN Human Rights Office 2024a; Muller 2022). They were followed by Israel's subsequent military intervention into Gaza and disproportionate retaliation, causing a horrendous number of civilian casualties among children, women and the elderly, leaving most cities in ruins and the survivors starving because the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza was strategically blocked. When Hamas and the Israeli government finally agreed to a fragile six-week ceasefire in January 2025, which did not last for long, about 46,000 people had been reported killed, although the actual death toll was assumed to be higher (R. Berg 2025). Half a year later, a famine in Gaza was confirmed by FAO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (WHO 2025), and the death toll had risen to more than 60,000 people according to the Palestinian health authorities (Al-Mughrabi and Farge 2025; OCHA 2025). In addition, about 90 per cent of the population have been forcibly displaced – many repeatedly, some ten times or more (UN News 2025; OCHA 2025). On top of the humanitarian disaster, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have destroyed an estimated 60 per cent of all buildings, including homes, schools and hospitals, and in northern Gaza probably more (UN News 2025a). In April 2025, The UN estimated that approximately 92 per cent of all residential buildings in Gaza – around 436,000 homes – have been either damaged or destroyed since the start of the conflict (UN News 2025b). Israel has also committed a 'scholasticide' by systematically wiping out the educational system in Gaza (Desai 2024a, 2024b). In the spring of 2025, Hamas still held 59 hostages in captivity, with more than half of them believed to be deceased (Cramer 2025), thereby providing the Israeli government with a reason for letting the IDF continue its onslaught on civilians in Gaza. Following mounting international pressure, the

surviving hostages were finally released in October 2025, and an uncertain peace process began.

In this study of art on forced displacement, it is important to mention that some 70 per cent of Gaza's inhabitants were already registered by the UN as refugees before the onset of the IDF's intervention (OCRA 2018), and that many are descendants of the Palestinians who were forcibly displaced in the Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe of dispossession in 1948. In short, already before the Gaza war, the occupied Gaza Strip was the territory of refugees.

For the Palestinians, the Arabic word Nakba refers both to the establishment of the state of Israel and the widespread exile and destruction of the Palestinian community following the creation of Israel. During the 1947–1949 war fought in the territory of Palestine under the British Mandate, more than 700,000 Palestinian Arabs, or almost two-thirds of the population, fled or were driven from their homes. During the war, Israel occupied 78 per cent of the territory, while Jordan and Egypt occupied the rest. Israel did not allow the Palestinian refugees to return after the war but destroyed hundreds of deserted villages while Israeli settlers repopulated empty neighbourhoods. In June 1967, Israel seized East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights from Jordan, Egypt and Syria during the so-called Six Day War, also known as the June War. Sinai was returned to Egypt in 1979, but Israel continues to occupy the rest of the territories seized in 1967. Therefore, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are referred to collectively as the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The occupation has remained contested, and in July 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion stating that Israel's prolonged occupation of this territory, its settlement regime and violation of the indigenous Palestinian population's right to self-determination is illegal in its entirety (UN Human Rights Office 2024b).

Of particular relevance to this book's examination of forced displacement is the category 'present absentees' created by the state of Israel in 1950 as part of the Israeli Absentee Property Law to designate those Palestinians who were absent from their homes during the Nakba, and whose properties were confiscated by the state while they themselves remained in Israel, now as 'internal refugees' within their own country, and without a home (Masalha 2012, 231–233). As the historian Nur Masalha notes:

Today almost a quarter of all Palestinian citizens inside Israel are "internal refugees" or "present absentees" (*nifkadim nokhahim* in Hebrew). Inside Israel, after the Nakba, the key stipulation was (as it still is) that it was a state created for Jews; non-Jews, both present and "present absentees", were treated as foreigners in their own homeland, despite being the indigenous inhabitants and formerly resident in the country. (Masalha 2012, 231; see also Sneineh 2022)

The Gaza-based writer and activist Ahmad Abu Artema's personal story exemplifies this collective dispossession as well as the Gazan sense of living in an open-air prison. Artema was born in Rafah refugee camp in Gaza to parents displaced during the Nakba from the city of Ramle in what is now Israeli territory – a family home he has never visited: 'My children have never seen anything beyond the confines of Gaza and the siege. [...] they do not know a reality beyond the sound of bombs, the darkness of night with no electricity, the inability to travel freely – or the fact that these things are not normal. Nothing about life in Gaza is normal.' The peculiar nature of life in Gaza thus epitomizes Palestinian statelessness, displacement and refugeehood that is captured accurately in Artema's observation: 'The Nakba is not a just a memory, it is an ongoing reality.' (Artema 2018, n.p.; see also Mirzoeff 2023, 229). The Nakba indeed continues, as also suggested by the prominent Palestinian slogan *al-nakba mustamirra* – the catastrophe is ongoing (see also the Introduction).

Only six months into the brutal conflict between Israel and Hamas, in March 2024, the UN's Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories, Francesca P. Albanese, stated that there were 'reasonable grounds' to believe that Israel was committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. Albanese's reasoning is worth quoting here, because she stresses that this conflict should not be considered as 'new' but as the most recent and most destructive stage in the long history of suppression and displacement of the Palestinians which the artworks discussed here in Chapter 6 grapple with:

Specifically, Israel has committed three acts of genocide with the requisite intent: causing seriously serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, and imposing measures intended to prevent birth within the group. [...] the genocide in Gaza is the most extreme stage of a long-standing settler colonial process of erasure of the native Palestinians. [...] For over 76 years, this process has oppressed the Palestinians as a people in every way imaginable, crushing their inalienable right to self-determination demographically, economically, territorially, culturally and politically. (Albanese, quoted from UN News 2024, n.p.)

As Albanese points out in a study co-authored with a fellow scholar of international law, Lex Takkenberg, the Palestinian refugee situation presents some unique characteristics: the homeland from which they were displaced in 1948 and/or were never allowed to return to no longer exists as a political and administrative entity:

[T]he root causes of their displacement remain unaddressed; and displacement from and dispossession in the territory that Israel occupied in 1967 continues unabated. These elements are of fundamental importance to the Palestinian case. This uniqueness overshadows that in other respects the problems faced by Pales-

tinian refugees may not be markedly different from those faced by other refugees worldwide, almost two-thirds of whom also find themselves in protracted exile. (Albanese and Takkenberg 2021, 12)

The political scientist Gabriel Scheffer's distinction between stateless and state-linked diasporas can aid a better understanding of the complexity of this situation, and, more specifically, of how the histories of the Jewish and Palestinian diasporas are intertwined. During extended periods, the Jews had no sovereign national state in the territory they regarded as their homeland. In the wake of the Holocaust and the Second World War, the Zionists in the Jewish diaspora achieved their goal of founding an independent state with support from the international community. However, the 1948 Middle East war that resulted in the founding of an independent Jewish state also uprooted many indigenous Palestinians and caused both forced and voluntary increases in the Palestinian diaspora. As Scheffer explains, the transformation of the Jewish diaspora into a *state-linked* diaspora caused the emergence of a substantial *stateless* Palestinian diaspora (Sheffer 2003, 148–149). A Palestinian state was never created. Some of the works discussed in the following reveal that art is one of the incubators that sustain the hope that one day there will be one.

Palestine seen through contrasting artistic lenses

The aesthetic idioms of the artists discussed here could hardly be more different. Whilst the stark realism of Kent Klich's photographs and the speculative science fiction-based films of Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind represent divergent artistic visions, they are nonetheless all committed to keeping the Palestinian cause and history in public view. Klich, Sansour and Lind have grappled for years with the complicated situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, along with Palestinian history, identity and loss. They also have in common a complex transnational relation to Denmark and Palestine. An introduction to their respective backgrounds is therefore in order.

Kent Klich is a photographer who has for more than three decades explored subjects such as drug addiction, prostitution, homelessness, war and broken families. The common denominator of his work is a commitment to human rights and social justice and a profound belief in the power of photography to raise awareness of inequality, injustice and the violation of human rights (Sandbye 2017, 193). Klich was born and raised in Sweden by a Swedish mother and a Polish father who had spent five years in a concentration camp during the Second World War before resettling in Sweden.

Klich initially studied psychology at the University of Gothenburg before turning to photography (and film). After studying photography at the International Center of Photography in New York, he joined the Magnum co-operative of photographers in 1998 and left in 2002. He eventually settled in Copenhagen, which has remained his base, but nationality has always been somewhat fluid for him (Sandbye 2017, 193), as it has for the Danish artists of Bosnian origin discussed in Chapter 5.

Klich has a preference for using different modes of storytelling, including modes grounded in collaboration with a range of different people such as local informants, human rights activists and scholars. It is perhaps most evident in his predilection for the photo book – a medium that has a narrative inflection and an enhanced potential for visual storytelling compared to the independent single shot's capture of a 'decisive moment'. Documentary photo books often rely on photographic design formats combining visual and textual narratives. The art historian Birgit Mersmann has suggested that a photo book can be considered a design object with spatial qualities that requires the viewer-reader to turn the pages to initiate the book's visual storytelling where texts and images interact to generate a book length, intermedial narrative (Mersmann 2024, 70).

Klich's photo books cultivate the interconnection between disciplines, including having authors write texts specifically for his books, which all have an ample list of thanks. The list in *Killing Time* (2013), for instance, includes more than a hundred people, from Palestinian civilians who have lent him family photographs, to his interpreter and other collaborators on the project, and even the philosopher Judith Butler for writing the text that only they could (Klich 2013, 215). His images never stand alone but enter into an interplay with different types of texts and documentation. Klich has photographed in Gaza since 2001, i.e. for over 20 years, leading to some of his most notable projects. All his photo books from Gaza have been made in collaboration with the Danish artist Tina Enghoff, with whom he also created a monumental commemorative installation about Danish asylum centres, *In the Past We Made History* (2025), to which I will return in the Conclusion.

The Palestinian Danish duo Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind have collaborated formally since 2016 (Muller 2024, 1) but have worked together for longer. Sansour was born in East Jerusalem, grew up in Bethlehem and studied fine art in Copenhagen, London and New York. She received Danish citizenship in 2009. Working primarily with film, Sansour also creates installations, photographs and sculptures. Sansour does not have a refugee background, but much of her work is deeply intertwined with her own biographical and diasporic experience, and her work revolves around Palestine, addressing contemporary social and political issues as well as exploring the history of Palestine. The Danish author, director and scriptwriter Søren Lind has a background in philosophy. Lind authored books on language and the mind as well as novels and short stories before turning to film and fiction. Most of Sansour and Lind's collaborative works are film-based, with Lind developing the manuscript,

Sansour in charge of the visual aspects and a broad crew of professionals contributing to the actual production of their films, which may sometimes generate spinoffs in other media.

Although the pair has lived in London for more than a decade, they have a strong presence on the Danish art scene thanks to their participation in film festivals, solo and group shows. Highlights are their exhibition *Heirloom* in the Danish pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019, and their solo exhibitions *Tomorrow's Ghosts* at Kunsten Museum of Modern Art Aalborg in 2023 (Muller 2024, 1) and *These Moments Will Disappear Too* at Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, in 2025–2026. What Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind share with Kent Klich, in addition to their concern with Palestine, is a collaborative practice that relies on storytelling to explore Palestinian worldmaking processes and how Palestinian worlds are destroyed but nevertheless continue to exist thanks to Palestinian steadfastness, or *sumud*.

Radical waithood and responsible empathy

To date, Kent Klich has published five books on Gaza. The cornerstone is his 'Gaza trilogy' – *Gaza Photo Album* (2009), *Killing Time* (2013) and *Black Friday* (2015). In 2017, he published a book with selected images from his projects on Gaza on the occasion of his solo exhibition *Gaza Works* at the Hasselblad Center in Gothenburg. In 2024, Klich responded to the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza by publishing *GZA On Land and Air*, donating 200 copies to Palestinian solidarity groups in Sweden, Denmark and Norway – countries with a legacy of leftist Palestinian solidarity groups going back to the 1960s and 1970s (Haugbolle and Olsen 2023, 130).

Klich's background in photojournalism is visible in his work, but he has long since transgressed the boundaries of this *métier* to position himself within the field of artistic photography. As Louis Wolthers notes, his works show 'how photography can be used in ways that go far beyond the immediacy of photojournalism while never losing sight of its ultimate goals: to expose the unrelenting injustice taking place in Gaza and to foster transnational solidarity' (Wolthers 2017, 10). In doing so, Klich's photo books reflect a broader development where the modern tradition of photojournalism is increasingly merging with the tradition of the conceptual and investigative photo art book to form new transmedial and experimental forms of photographic documentary storytelling (Mersmann 2021, 70).

The photographer's awareness of his own role as an outsider looking in is felt in his photo books about Gaza, which all result from collaborative efforts involving interdependent tellers and listeners. To gain access to images, information, people and places, Klich depends on local informants, local journalists, organizations and NGOs working in the Occupied Territory; conversely, they also have an interest in the foreign photographer's ability to reach a world beyond Gaza and to communi-

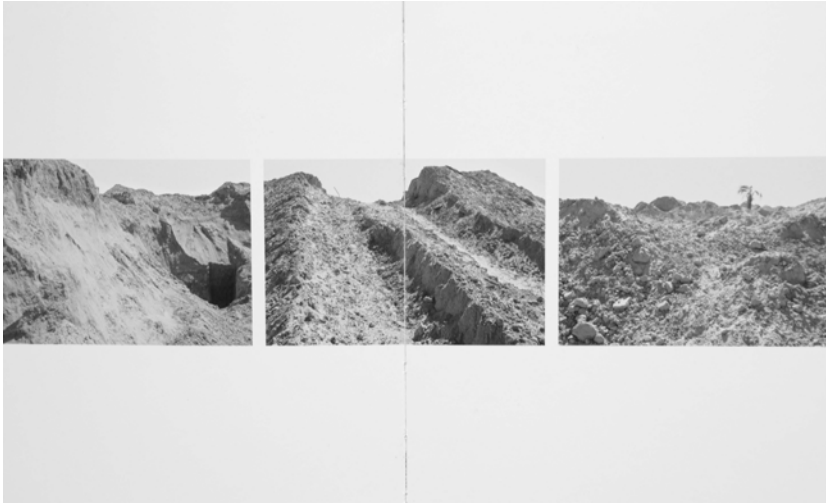
cate their stories in a compelling way to empathic audiences. In a conversation with the American documentary photographer Susan Meiselas, she suggests that they are not the kind of image makers that organize the world aesthetically for others to enjoy. They care that the image is imbued with aesthetic power, but their main concern is that the social context is meaningful to engage with. Klich agrees and elaborates:

It is not the image that is the end product. It is part of the work, the relation with the people, whatever dialogue it can invite, and whatever it can change. [...] When you come as an outsider with your inadequate knowledge it is important to work together with those who know. My work in Gaza would not have been possible without the cooperation with the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture. (Klich in Meiselas and Klich 2017, 187).

It was criticism from a Palestinian in Sweden of Klich's earliest photo reportages and stories from Gaza that made him aware of the overemphasis on armed resistance, violence and victims in his journalistic coverage of the conflict, and the need for telling more personal stories (Meiselas and Klich 2017, 185–186). The Gaza books thus testify to the multifaceted strategies employed by Klich to uncover the effects of war on civilians and the less spectacular aspects of life in the aftermath of military interventions that are seldom covered by news media: elements such as daily life under the Israeli occupation, the consequences of the blockade and the subtle signs of resistance (Wolthers 2017, 10). Klich's Gaza books can thus be seen as complex visualizations of destruction, displacement, homelessness, absence and resilience that deploy what Verónica Tello calls a counter-memorial aesthetics to perform a kind of commemoration (Tello 2016). His books evoke and represent places and people that no longer exist due to the ongoing armed conflict; people who have almost been erased from public view and consciousness – internal refugees consigned to oblivion as unimagined communities (Nixon 2011). As Louise Wolthers notes in her sharp-eyed analysis of Klich's Gaza works, Klich consciously uses the fragmentary character of photography and the incorporation of other types of material to defy a totalizing gaze. His books are, rather, multiperspectival compilations relying on a method that Mette Sandbye describes as 'multi-representational slowness' – multi-representational because a broad range of photographic formats have been used, such as conceptual colour images, black-and-white reportage photos, satellite photos and existing family snapshots, usually in an interplay with various forms of text. His books are also characterized by a sense of slowness, in the dual sense of requiring the photographer to work for years on a project and for the viewer to slow

down to explore the interaction between the different aesthetic forms (Sandbye 2017, 193).

Fig. 28: Kent Klich, page spread from the photo book *Black Friday*, 2015, 16 x 24 cm. Courtesy: the artist.



This is particularly noticeable in the project *Black Friday* (2015) about the consequences of the IDF's attack on Rafah on one single day, August 1, 2014, following reports that Hamas had kidnapped an IDF officer. More than 130 mostly civilian Palestinians were killed, and many buildings and greenhouses were destroyed. In *Black Friday*, Klich's own photos of the site where the officer was allegedly taken prisoner and sites where Palestinians were killed serve as 'forensic photography' zooming in on details of a landscape or street to expose the traces left by violence in the sand or asphalt. These close-ups are interspersed with maps, satellite pictures and excerpts from a report on the events of Black Friday by Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture. A whole section of the book commemorates the victims by including a list of their names and a photographic portrait (where available) compiled by the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights. Yet, Klich's strangely vacant and uneventful photos make no claim to provide 'evidence' of what killed these individuals to be used in court; they are, rather, 'subjective witness statements from an embodied photographer of the aftermaths' (Wolthers 2017, 16). The subjective perspective and the careful effort by Klich and his collaborators to put a face to each named victim underscore *Black Friday's* rehumanizing ethical appeal. This approach

seeks to counter the dehumanizing media narratives that regularly reduce victims to the latest numerical calculations of the total loss. Furthermore, the tactile mode of communication which characterizes the photo book medium strengthens the personal address to the embodied recipient, who must physically touch, handle and interact with the object for its narrative to unfold (Mersmann 2024, 94). This is especially the case with *Black Friday*, whose pocketbook format enhances the intimacy of this personalized and tactile connection, making its impact potentially more profound.

Fig. 29: Kent Klich, from Killing Time, 2013. Still image from a smartphone video. 19 x 14.5 cm. Photo: Qareeb Omar Abed. Courtesy: the artist.



The project *Killing Time* comprises a video installation and a book of photographs and documentation with a preface by Judith Butler. The installation was based on a montage of videos filmed with cellphones belonging to people living in Gaza before and during the first days of the IDF's military attack on Gaza codenamed Operation Cast Lead, from December 27, 2008, until January 18, 2009, following the firing of rockets into Israel from the Gaza Strip. Thirteen Israelis died during this attack, including three killed by the rockets. More than 1400 Palestinians were killed, including about 900 civilians, and about 5000 people were wounded. The damage to the housing stock was also severe with more than 2000 houses completely destroyed and about 20,000 damaged (Klich 2009, n.p.). The video installation, made in collaboration with the film director and editor Anders Rafn, shows people of all ages 'killing time': smoking, resting, playing, waiting. At the end, when viewers learn that the main characters were all among the casualties of the heavy attack, the installa-

tion is suddenly transformed into a memorial. A whole section or 'chapter' of the book *Killing Time* consists of slightly blurred frame grabs from these low-resolution videos printed on a mournful black background. The video installation and the stills, where the movement of life has been frozen, revolve around the tension between peaceful everyday life and the sudden killing of civilians by the IDF, pointing forward to *Black Friday's* concern about civilians killed in a similar attack in 2014.

In a photo book like *Killing Time*, a narrative unfolds, but how? Butler's preface 'Fragments of Lost Life' is preceded by a visual prologue with a selection of Klich's first black and white photographs of everyday life and landscapes in Gaza from 2001–2002. Butler's insightful essay is followed by a visual 'chapter' titled 'From a Distance', with what were then new colour photographs taken by Klich from Israel looking towards Gaza and overlooking the so-called 'buffer-zone' of 300 metres of Palestinian territory that Gazans can only enter at the risk of being killed or injured by Israeli border guards. Here, barren deserted landscapes alternate with cultivated fields and grass meadows. This is followed by the chapter 'What Life Looks Like 2009–11', with images from photo albums belonging to Gazan families who selected photographs and gave Klich the permission to use the pictures when he visited them: they depict happy days on the beach, family gatherings and children, relatives and friends – the loved ones. Glimpses of what those lives were like in the periods between Israeli military operations. This chapter forms a sharp contrast to the commemorative section, with frame grabs from the above-mentioned cellphone videos of people killed during Operation Cast Lead. These have been inserted in the middle of the chapter on 'Life', so that they literally, as well as symbolically, rupture it, with the black background marking that the perspective shifts to that of the victims. Then follows the chapter 'Homes 2009', with a selection of photographs of private homes damaged during Operation Cast Lead; these were previously published in Klich's photo book *Gaza Photo Album* (of which, more below). *Killing Time* concludes with an extensive list of thanks, followed by a visual epilogue with Klich's black and white photographs of the general unrest in Gaza in 2001–2002, suggesting that the conflict and Palestinian resistance to the occupation are ongoing.

Klich's representation of Operation Cast Lead thus departs in several ways from the typical photojournalistic focus on acts of warfare and traumatized victims. Firstly, *Killing Time* focuses on the conflict's destructive impact on civilian lifeworlds and the loss of loved ones; and secondly, it includes representations by Palestinians themselves of how they wish to represent themselves and the lifeworld they have built.

To understand better what difference this makes, it is helpful to turn to Mieke Bal's narratological concept of *focalization*. This refers to the way the perspective from which a situation is perceived or imagined shapes the narrative (see Chapter 1). Bal draws attention to the tendency of visual representations to include – as a *depicted* figure – an internal or embedded narrator-focalizer, whose perspective differs from

that of the author/image-maker (Bal 2021, 14). Klich activates this ability to not only talk about how others perceive a situation but to actually *show* it by including many different narrator-focalizers (and their perspectives) in his photo book. In Klich's hands, 'figuring' or 'imaging' these narrator-focalizers by reproducing their own images becomes a tool to make the difference between the reality status of what they see, and the imagined vision of the photographer-outsider stand out more clearly.

In her essay, Butler dwells on the implications of the title *Killing Time* – a common phrase referring to passing the time with trivial activities to keep oneself busy while waiting for something else to happen. The word 'waiting' implies that there is a future, the anticipation of change that it is believed will happen, or a change that one has the agency to bring about. Conversely, 'killing time' implies that one's agency and sense of the future is eroded by a certain kind of temporal destructiveness. Butler suggests that this difference is crucial in Gaza's case:

But perhaps living in the time between bombings, without work and without a clear sense of future, is not quite as agentic as waiting. Is there a way of living in time when the future is closed that is precisely not waiting, but rather killing time – not quite the same as wasting time? [...] the title, *Killing Time*, opens up a problem of agency; "killing" shifts our understanding of action from an infinitive to a continuous present, one in which the beginning and the end of action cannot be properly identified. (Butler 2013, 19)

Taking my cue from Butler, I propose that the conditions of worldmaking in Gaza under the Israeli occupation, blockade and military interventions could be understood as an extreme form of refugee waithood. As explained in Chapter 5, the term *waithood* refers to the limbo and the ways in which forcibly displaced people handle a prolonged encampment by developing an exceptional lifestyle between permanence and transience (Teferra 2022, 164). In this case it is extreme, because the indefinite encampment does not offer protection, only continual exposure to violence and killings.

But how do we approach the visual imagery of the video grabs and photographs in Klich's book? As Butler notes, the images seem to have survived the lives and homes they recorded. In effect, the phone videos surviving the person could even be seen as 'a kind of testament or archive of a lost life', i.e. they serve a commemorative function (Butler 2013, 19). At first glance, Klich's photographs of devastated homes seem to serve a different purpose because they are all about having been dispossessed and forced out – forcibly displaced, again. Yet, as such they are also testimonies, not to the fate of individuals but to the fact that the most recent conflict that began in 2023 has precedence in previous acts of dispossession of Palestinians. Klich's *Killing Time* is from 2011, but it could just as well have been created in 2025. His works retain their validity and urgency.

Refugeedom constitutes an undercurrent in *Killing Time*. In *Gaza Photo Album*, it is the central theme. This photo book is also concerned with the consequences of Operation Cast Lead, but it is dedicated solely to Klich's stark pictures of damaged and sometimes irreparably destroyed dwellings. It thus invites recipients to reflect on the fact that this offensive forced 50,000 inhabitants from their homes (Klich 2009, n.p.). The damaged and deserted private spaces are the silent, yet powerful testimonies to this mass displacement and attack on the fundamental human right to shelter where a feeling of safety prevails, and to intimacy and privacy. In these photographs, intimate items of furniture such as beds, wardrobes and chairs, each evoking multiple stories and layers of association, are now covered by rubble and a grey layer of dust. Walls are scarred with bullet holes and watery streaks of soot, and the gaping holes in the outer walls that once protected the family's space are legion (Wishah 2009, n.p.; see also Wolthers 2017, 11–12). There is a strong sense of ambiguity involved in scrutinizing these pictures: whilst the photographer's attention to details such as used towels, a colourful bedspread, a torn mattress and undamaged glass chandeliers in an otherwise ruined interior 'take us far into the remnants of quotidian life' (Butler 2013, 23), the aesthetic care with which he has depicted these vacated domestic scenes denaturalizes the homes and makes them disturbingly *unhomely*.

Fig. 30: Kent Klich, from *Gaza Photo Album*, 2009. Photograph by the artist of Mohammed Shuhada Ali Ahmed's destroyed home at Tuffah, Northern Gaza Strip. 25 x 17 cm. Courtesy: the artist.



The title *Gaza Photo Album* and the flower-patterned cover come from an actual photo album shown to Klich by an elderly man whom he met when he was visiting devastated homes to photograph them. By approximating the genre of the family photo album, Klich's photo book provides a subjective supplement to more official archives such as 'A Verification of Building-Destruction Resulting from Attacks by the Israeli Occupation' – the archive that the Hamas-run, Gaza-based Ministry of Public Works started after the Israeli bombardments in 2008–2009. Like the official archive, *Gaza Photo Album* can serve as a basis for a historical, political and sociocultural interrogation of the violence and displacement. The founding director of the research agency Forensic Architecture, Eyal Weizman, calls this archive the 'Book of Destruction' in the exhaustive analysis that he contributes to Klich's *Gaza Works*. As Weizman observes, the visible ruin plays a crucial role in the public display of domination and violence: 'it demonstrates the presence of colonial power even when the colonizer is nowhere to be seen' (Weizman 2017, 166; see also 168). His conclusion regarding the Israeli offensives against the densely populated residential areas in Gaza, resulting in a disproportionately high number of civilian deaths, is still alarmingly valid: 'The war on refugees is an ongoing form of violence that seeks not only to destroy refugee life and property but also to restructure "refugeeness" – a feature of Palestinian political identity' (Weizman 2017, 169).

But there is more to Klich's appropriation of the family photo album genre. War and occupation are implicit, but *Gaza Photo Album* stays focused on the destruction of the refugees' possibility of domestic worldmaking and thriving. In Butler's lucid formulation, the camera perpetuates the convention of the family album as if it were unable to recognize the loss: 'The camera continues to take those shots capturing life in the home as if the camera does not know that the family is gone [...] as if it were itself stunned or traumatized' (Butler 2013, 23). Thus, Klich's album does not convert into a story of family life but keeps, rather, mechanically repeating the same conventional frontal setup in newly demolished homes, expressing a subdued form of outrage and mourning. In Klich's colour photographs, the individual details of these dwellings stand out clearly, yet all the homes look the same: damaged, deserted. Hence, they harbour the paradox of family photographs: on the one hand, they represent something extremely personal and dear to the individual or family; on the other, they are so permeated by pictorial conventions that virtually anyone can project themselves into their ordinariness (Sandbye 2017, 197). The possible flash of identification – the sudden realization that this photo could have been of your home and the absent family could have been your own – brings us to the question of empathy already touched upon in Chapter 5. It is illuminating to address this question from the perspective of documentary photography, which has a long history of combining the provision of visual evidence and documentation with affective qualities that invite empathy (Wolthers 2017, 12).

In her seminal study *The Art of Coexistence: Unlearning the Way We See Migration*, Christine Ross subjects the fundamental ambivalence of empathy to a critical analysis that can help shed light on the ambiguity of *Gaza Photo Album*. Ross develops an accurate concept of empathy which acknowledges that empathy is key to the affective ways in which much art moves audiences. By the same token, she cautions her readers about its common pitfalls: ‘feeling the pain of others is not in and of itself prosocial’ (Ross 2022, 180), and ‘empathy can go wrong’ and distort intersubjective relations – for instance, when it is based on ‘the false consensus effect’, i.e. the tendency to assume that others will feel the same way the self does (Ross 2022, 167). In other words, empathy may involve bias and the vampirism of others’ emotions (Ross 2022, 178). Moreover, sometimes the emotional response that images elicit is not proper empathy but, rather, sympathy for people perceived as pitiful victims. Empathy is thus what Ross calls a *pharmakon*, a concept she uses throughout her book to capture the ambiguities, antagonisms and paradoxes of the impact artworks may have as both a poison and a remedy/cure. Ross suggests that in an age of migration and forced displacement, empathy is key to coexistence. She defines empathy as ‘a coexistence in which a being feels and understands the distress lived by another being but without living that distress (not “as if” experiencing that distress, however, as is the case with sympathy)’. Furthermore, she calls for ‘responsible empathy’ based on ‘prosociality’, that is, the capacity to notice the distress of others and to be moved by it – a critical component of what is called prosocial behaviour: the attempt, or desire, to help other individuals, groups or communities whose pain we feel and comprehend (Ross 2022, 157).

Ross argues that not all art on forced displacement invites responsible empathy (Ross 2022, 179), because this requires the affective response that the artwork stimulates to be ‘prosocially effective’. Engendering a prosocial form of empathy with and through art requires, argues Ross, ‘a certain level of perspective sharing’ as well as ‘a certain level of historical contextualization that is detailed enough to disclose the structures of inequality, injustice, and violence inherent to contemporary migration’ (Ross 2022, 178). Empathy is thus a tricky strategy, yet indispensable in art. Therefore, Ross concludes that:

[E]mpathy is a *necessary* but *ambivalent* and *insufficient* condition of possibility for prosociality and more reciprocal forms of coexistence. [...] This is how artistic practices addressing present-day migration explore empathy as an aesthetic strategy: they uphold its ambivalences without presuming to resolve them but struggling to have them or allowing them to unfold prosocially. (Ross 2022, 174; emphasis added).

This is precisely the aesthetic strategy deployed by Klich in *Gaza Photo Album*: the pictures of destroyed Palestinian homes uphold the ambivalence of familiarity and

defamiliarization in a way that allows the recipient's empathy to unfold prosocially. Correlated with the written accounts which outline the historical context of the IDF's Operation Cast Lead, Klich's photo album ensures that the historical contextualization is sufficient to disclose the mechanisms of occupation, violence and forced displacement, as is required for it to be prosocially effective.

Imagining possible futures for Palestine

Although Kent Klich's documentary realism and Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind's science fiction-based aesthetics represent contrasting artistic idioms, these artists share a concern with home and homeland, loss and absence. Moreover, they have a predilection for visually oriented narrative genres, the photo book and science fiction, respectively, and they approach narrative in ways that are at one at the same time artistic, explorative and investigative. While Klich's *Gaza Photo Album* focuses on the absence felt in forcibly vacated domestic spaces, much of Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind's work focuses on haunting ghosts and haunted places. It reflects a general turn in Palestinian visual art towards the spectral as an animating rather than a nihilistic force, identified by the postcolonial studies scholar Anna Ball. Here, ghostly motifs become 'a means to celebrate the resilience of life-even-in-death, rather than to mourn a condition of death-in-life' (Ball, quoted in Muller 2024, 2).

In her PhD thesis on contemporary art in the Middle East, the curator Nat Muller, who is the foremost expert on Sansour and Lind's work, explains why Larissa Sansour, along with many other artists from the region, have turned to science fiction – or sci-fi – in the past two decades. This expansive and fluctuating genre often considers themes of space- and time travel, utopias and dystopias, sex and gender, encounters with aliens, alternate histories and parallel universes. The germinating industrial revolution, unfolding from the late 1700s over the next few centuries, infused this form of fiction with a deep fascination with the impact of actual or imagined science upon society or individuals that still characterizes this speculative genre. Sci-fi asks: 'What if?' It speculates on the possible outcome, allowing itself ample scope for moving beyond the present and the possible (Amos Rex 2024). The science fiction theorist Darko Suvin thus defines sci-fi as a genre of 'cognitive estrangement' in which an empirical novelty or 'novum' is introduced, often serving as a disruptor that produces the estrangement while simultaneously creating a fictional imaginary.¹

Thanks to its worldbuilding and imaginary qualities, sci-fi, suggests Muller, is capable of articulating and proposing alternatives to a societal situation of 'social,

1 Darko Suvin's foundational essay 'The State of the Art in Science Fiction Theory: Determining and Delimiting the Genre', *Science Fiction Studies* 6:1, 1979: 32–45, is quoted in Muller 2022, 4.

political and identitarian unrest, polarisation and estrangement' (Muller 2022, 3). She argues that the interest in sci-fi among artists in and from the Middle East was born from the proliferation of cataclysms that have befallen the region. These crises impelled artists to look for agential tools, enabling them to take stock of the past and present and to acknowledge darkness and loss while still sustaining the hope for change and looking at possible futures. In the tropes of sci-fi they find an instrument that enables them to explore 'the dynamic between loss and the creative and critical potential for speculative repair though this recent history'; a genre that allows for commemoration of loss while also operating as a recuperative device, albeit a flawed one that can nevertheless help envision possibility and futurity and instil a sense of hope into audiences (Muller 2022, 2, see also 1 and 7).

By quoting Susan Sontag's proposition that disaster, not science, is the driving heart of sci-fi, Nat Muller provides an explanation why sci-fi has become Sansour and Lind's preferred genre. One of the most traumatic and protracted disasters of the Middle East is the 1948 Nakba. The ongoing dispossession and displacement of indigenous Palestinians from their land renders the historical event an event without closure. This has made it difficult for Palestinians to think about futurity (Muller 2022, 8). As Muller notes, seen from the vantage point of the early 2020s, 'the longing for a viable Palestinian homeland might [...] seem more fantastical than a Palestinian lunar colony as seen in Larissa Sansour's *A Space Exodus*' (Muller 2022, 9).

In this short video work from 2008, the well-known music of Stanley Kubrick's 1968 sci-fi film *2001: A Space Odyssey* is transformed into an Arabic-style soundtrack matching Sansour's vision of an outer-space world where she is the astronaut on a journey searching for a territory on which to plant the Palestinian flag, suggesting, ambiguously, both a stateless people's desire for a homeland and colonial land grab. The film also reflects the feminist foundation of Sansour's work, where women are often cast in leading roles of power (Murney and Sansour 2023, 60). Re-enacting the first moon landing in 1969, the artist also reformulates Neil Armstrong's historic words: 'That's one small step for a Palestinian; one giant leap for mankind.'²

A Space Exodus asks the question about nationhood and self-determination as the first part of a science fiction trilogy that also includes *Nation Estate* (2012) and *In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain* (2016).³ Tinged with a bleak sense of humour serving as a weapon to puncture the politics of representation in Palestine (Murney and Sansour 2023, 58), these works all explore different aspects of the political turmoil in the Middle East under the common themes of loss, belonging, heritage and national identity.

2 Larissa Sansour, *A Space Exodus* (2008), official selection on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggk78Wxy12M> (accessed March 31, 2025).

3 *Nation Estate* predates Sansour and Lind's formal collaboration, but Lind is listed in the credits as co-director and author of the manuscript.

Fig. 31: Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind, *Olive Tree (Nation Estate)*, 2012. C-print.
 Courtesy: the artists.



In contrast to the surrealistically hopeful *A Space Exodus*, the single-channel video *Nation Estate* conjures up a Palestinian state squeezed into a single high-rise in the West Bank as if all land had been lost. Here, the internal focalizer is a Palestinian woman who enters the building with her unborn child to usher in a dystopian future. The audience follows her going up in the lift past floors with geographical destinations such as Jerusalem and Tulkarm until she exits at the Bethlehem floor – a vertical itinerary indicating that the ‘nation estate’ is also the nation partitioned and stacked. Its interior is embellished with national symbols such as plates decorated with the black and white *keffiyeh* pattern commonly associated with Palestinian solidarity and resistance. However, in this sleek, high-tech environment the symbols are barely more than nostalgic decoration, having lost their cultural and political moorings as well as their ability to support identity and nation building. Unlike its predecessor, *Nation Estate* does not envision a ‘solution’, and the glimpse of the alluring slogan ‘Nation Estate – Living the High Life’ is sarcastic, at best. Sansour, rather, uses sci-fi to exaggerate the facts on the ground under the Israeli occupation, as experienced by the artist herself in Bethlehem where she grew up. In a 2023 interview with the art historian Anastasia Murney, Sansour stressed how she often uses personal experience to address collective issues. ‘Her city’, Bethlehem, is completely surrounded by the Israeli security wall, and Israeli settlements move closer every year:

Bethlehem is becoming an open-air prison disjointed from other towns and cities. This is happening to so many areas in Palestine. It makes it hard to imagine a viable Palestinian state when you take into consideration the little land left for Palestinians. *Nation Estate* is a direct comment on that. [...] *Nation Estate* mocks an

actual solution to the Palestinian problem if things continue to develop the way they do at present. (Murney and Sansour 2023, 61–62)

That humour and narrative can be brought into play for critical ends is even more apparent in the single-channel film *In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain*, in which archaeology is weaponized in the battle for Palestinian self-determination (Murney and Sansour 2023, 58). Again, Sansour's hometown of Bethlehem is invoked, serving as the abstracted backdrop of a story about a resistance group that produces and hides deposits of exquisite *keffiyeh*-patterned porcelain in the hope that it will be discovered by future archaeologists. The work intervenes in Israel's ideological and territorial usage of biblical archaeology to construct origin myths and land rights exclusively for Jews in order to legitimate a Jewish 'return' to an ancestral homeland. *In the Future* reverses these claims (Muller 2024, 11). It suggests that historical narratives are based as much on discourse as on facts – for instance, when the protagonist, who calls herself 'a narrative terrorist', states that 'fiction has a constitutive effect on historicity and political reality' (Sansour and Lind 2016, 8:38 min.). Her mission is to rearrange the archaeological 'facts' used to support the dominant narrative, and she suggests that, if found, the porcelain artefacts would provide evidence of the existence of an ancient Palestinian people who 'ate from the finest porcelain' and thus rewrite the historical narrative of which people(s) can claim to be the original inhabitants, in support of any descendants' claim to the land. However, *In the Future* is not so much about demands for a nation-state as the restoration of historical presence by refuting systemic erasure (Muller 2022, 154).

In the opening scene of *In the Future*, darkness has descended upon a squadron of locust-shaped spaceships taking off from a post-apocalyptic landscape. Throughout the course of the video, Sansour and Lind populate the desolate landscape with archival images of, among others, Ottoman soldiers, British Mandate soldiers, Israeli soldiers, Palestinian Bedouins, Palestinians in traditional dress from the early 1900s, as well as members of the Palestinian middle class and Palestinian refugees. In doing so, they achieve two things: they establish a colonial timeline as well as visualizing and establishing Palestinian identity and habitation (Muller 2022, 155).

Sansour and Lind thus use a sci-fi narrative that incorporates historical documentation to introduce a different, speculative perspective on Palestine, insisting that past, present and future must be seen through one lens if one is to make sense of the deadlocked Israeli–Palestinian conflict and envision ways to move beyond it. In their work, sci-fi signals loss (of homeland, heritage, rights, citizenship, homes and lives), but as Muller has rightly pointed out, sci-fi is also used as a recuperative device, albeit an imperfect one: what has been lost is not what is recuperated, but sci-fi imaginaries nevertheless 'manage to create oxygen in settings where there is deemed to be none' (Muller 2022, 7).

Fig. 32: Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind, *In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain*, 2016. Single-channel video, 29 min. Installation view: Larissa Sansour, Amos Rex, 2024. Photo: Tuomas Uusheimo. Courtesy: Amos Rex and the artists.



Interestingly, *In the Future* was first developed as a performance work based on the plan to bury ‘artefacts for the future’ in multiple locations across Israel/Palestine (Murney and Sansour 2023, 63). The project *Archaeology in Absentia* (2016) builds on this initial idea while also expanding on the previous work. Combining sculpture, photographs and in-situ interventions, the project experiments with turning the video’s fictional narrative into real and tangible objects. The photographic part ‘documents’ keffiyeh-ornamented plates being buried across historical Palestine. This action was undertaken by Lind who, courtesy of his Danish passport, was permitted to travel without restrictions around Israel and the West Bank, unlike Sansour who, as a Palestinian, cannot travel freely in Israel and the West Bank area (Muller 2022, 159; 2024, 11). The sculptural part is an installation displaying fifteen bronze ‘crockery bombs’ fashioned after those dropped over the barren landscape by the returning spacecrafts in *In the Future*. On closer inspection, the bomb capsules resemble opened Fabergé eggs. Their porcelain cargo is missing, but engraved geographical coordinates on their inside suggest where each has been hidden, since the engraved longitudes and latitudes identify places ranging from Nazareth, Jericho, Ramallah and Jerusalem to Bethlehem and the Dead Sea. The plates thus become proxies for what Israeli law terms ‘present absentees’ – the internal refugees

(Muller 2022, 159). In the installation *Archaeology in Absentia* (2016), the claims for historical acknowledgement put forward in the film are not only articulated but also made 'material', with the fabricated artefacts masquerading as 'solid proof'. *Archaeology in Absentia* is thus essentially about the power of storytelling to turn fiction into historical fact.

Fig. 33: Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind, *Archaeology in Absentia*, 2016. Fifteen bronze sculptures, 20 cm each. Installation view: Larissa Sansour, *Amos Rex*, 2024. Photo: Tuomas Uusheimo. Courtesy: Amos Rex and the artists.



Like *In the Future they Ate from the Finest Porcelain, In Vitro* (2019) explores Palestinian heritage, identity and psyche, but this black-and-white two-channel film adds to this thematic a concern with epigenetics, a discipline that studies the intergenerational transfer of trauma at a genetic level. *In Vitro* also links the ongoing disaster of the Nakba to the unfolding disaster of climate breakdown. It centres on the survivors of a climate disaster in an abandoned bunker below Bethlehem that has been converted into an enormous refuge and orchard where a group of scientists are preparing to restore life on earth from heirloom seeds collected before the disaster. *In Vitro* formed the centrepiece of Sansour and Lind's exhibition in the Danish pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019. While the Latin title *In Vitro* ('in glass') refers to scientific procedures in an artificial space and

to in vitro fertilization, the exhibition title *Heirloom* gestured towards the ambiguity of inherited material as burden (transfer of trauma) and potential (transfer of resilience and new life).

Fig. 34: Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind, *In Vitro*, 2019. Two-channel black and white HD film installation, 28 min. Installation view: Larissa Sansour, *Amos Rex*, 2024. Photo: Tuomas Uusheimo. Courtesy: Amos Rex and the artists.



In Vitro's speculative narrative unfolds as an intense conversation between the ailing woman, Dunia – founder of the orchard and representative of a bygone age – and her young successor, Alia – a clone engineered from the DNA of townspeople who perished. Alia is likened to the daughter Dunia lost in the disaster that drove survivors underground, suggesting her role as a surrogate daughter and foregrounding the intergenerational disagreement between the older generations of forcibly displaced Palestinians and their descendants who do not share the older generation's dream of restoring the past but want to define their own future. One way of reading *In Vitro* is thus as a meditation on the intergenerational disagreement between the forcibly displaced generation wanting to 'return' both temporally and spatially to the lost land as they remember it, and their descendants who envision a different future. It is obviously shaped by history, but it will take the new generation in a different direction. For them, the present is not the limbo of 'waiting time'

before the desired 'return'; it is their 'lifetime'. As Alia says to Dunia, 'Our grief is different' (Sansour and Lind 2019, 15:40–16:00, see also 16:00–18:00; and Muller 2022, 82–83).

Alia was born and raised underground and has never seen the city and homeland she is expected to replant and repopulate. However, she remembers it thanks to the artificial or prosthetic memories she has 'inherited' from the persons she replaces, along with the dream of restoring the past, which Alia is now rejecting. Hence, *In Vitro* does not represent time as linear. Different layers of time coexist under the condition of cumulative disasters where the chronology of the respective cataclysms have become blurred (Muller 2022, 80). Much of *In Vitro*'s storytelling is communicated through the dialogue between Dunia and Alia that loops back and forth between past and future, sometimes changing direction without warning. And this dialogue is itself set in the present tense of an imagined future dystopia, an unsettled presence without a foreseeable future.

Fig. 35: *Kent Klich*, from the photo book *GZA On Land and Air*, 2024. 38 x 25 cm. Courtesy: the artist. *GAZA International Airport*, GZA, 2016–2017.



This temporal disorientation presents an obstacle to viewers seeking to identify the series of logically and chronologically related events which would normally constitute the *fabula* of a conventional narrative; however, it also foregrounds the temporal disjuncture in the lives of Alia and Dunia that locks them in different experiences of time. As Muller observes, 'for Dunia this life is *in vitro*, outside her

natural habitat; while for Alia this is life *in vivo* (Latin for ‘within the living’) – this is her natural habitat’ (Muller 2022, 86). The temporal structure and texture of *In Vitro*’s narrative is thus heterogeneous, i.e. it is characterized by what Mieke Bal calls multitemporality and heterochrony (Bal 2021, 100–101). As Bal notes, film and video are ‘technically able to make multi-temporality visible and the experience of heterochrony tangible’ (Bal 2021, 117). *In Vitro* exploits this potential to the fullest.

The film’s disjointed multitemporality amplifies its gloomy perspective on a forced displacement that is political and historical but also ecological since the boundary between human and natural disaster has been undone and survivors have been forced to take refuge in the brutalist bunker’s underworld. Yet the clone Alia articulates the idea of, and the hope for, a new beginning and a forward-looking stance.

In Kent Klich’s most recent photo book on Gaza, *GZA On Land and Air*, conceptualized and published together with Tina Enghoff and the Gazan writer and human rights advocate Muhammad Shehada in 2024 as a response to the extensive attacks on Gaza, the photographer seems to have chosen a similar strategy of complicating linear historical time to inspire hope in the midst of cyclical destruction and displacement. The bulk of the material in the book is archival material depicting and describing the glory days from November 1998 till October 2000 when the Gaza International Airport, GZA, was in operation, and Palestine had launched its own national airline – a key component of modern nation-building. At that time, the airport was seen as a symbol of hope for an independent state of Palestine, and future plans for Palestinian Airlines included services to Frankfurt, London, Rome and Paris (Klich et al. 2024, n.p.). The airport was shut down and then destroyed by Israel in 2001–2002. Some of Klich’s own photographs taken on a visit to the ruins of GZA in 2016–2017 are also included. At the time, the airport attracted visitors and school classes from all over Gaza, who came to this former gateway to/from Gaza to get ‘a glimpse of what could have been and what is desperately needed to plug some life back into Gaza’, as Shehada explains in the essay ‘Gaza Past, Present and Future’, completed in January 2024. His essay is ‘prefaced’ by an inserted document, a reprint of a 2005 plan for the reconstruction of the airport by the Palestinian Ministry of Transportation. This historical source provides an antidote to the fresh testimonies that have been inserted into the book’s historical documentation of GZA, reactivating it: these testimonies are ‘tweets’ from the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), written by Hind Khoudary, a Palestinian journalist based in the Gaza Strip and using X to report on the first four months of Israel’s attack. Like Shehada’s essay, Khoudary’s tweets are printed in both Arabic and English. Two early tweets read:

Day 7: On Friday, those who could packed as many people as possible into cars bringing with them little more than the clothes they wore and drove out of Gaza

City. A steady midday stream of vehicles along the costal road, leading south from Gaza City, became an afternoon traffic jam.

Day 10: I wished I had had the time to grab my favorite blanket from home, and say one last goodbye to my family house, in case it gets bombed before I can return.

In the first tweet, note how the description of mass displacement is likened to the mundane non-event of a traffic jam, signalling that this is not an uncommon occurrence in Gaza, the territory of refugees. In the second tweet, observe not only Khoudary's mournful regret, but also her hope of returning.

The historical documentation of GZA's construction, destruction and potential reconstruction tells a different story about mobility and enforced *immobility*. Yet, it also conveys a sense of hope by suggesting that it is possible to learn from history to build a different kind of future in which Palestinians are granted 'normal, free, and dignified lives, whether in an independent sovereign state of their own, in one bi-national state or in a confederation' (Shehada 2024, n.p.).

Importantly, *GZA On Land and Air*'s activist or rather 'artist' way of harnessing history, along with older artworks, exemplifies how Klich's photographic works, as well as Sansour and Lind's sci-fi works, are reactivated every time the Israeli–Palestinian conflict flares up, testifying to their extraordinary aesthetic, affective and political power. Sansour's reflections in a 2024 interview on how the present bears on their older works also applies to Klich's work:

What we are witnessing now is unbearable, not only in terms of innocent lives lost, but also in terms of the ethical corruption of humanity. Looking at previous works now, I see them in a completely new light, with an added immediacy, certain dialogue fragments written in an equal air of mourning and premonition, which in itself only confirms the cyclicity of the atrocities and injustices committed in Palestine. (Sansour in Tuomi 2024, n.p.)

Conclusion: Refugees and representation

When the present reactivates the past, it is possible to see both in a new light. This understanding of the significance of historical reflection and narrative was at the heart of the art project *In the Past We Made History* by Tina Enghoff and Kent Klich, in collaboration with the artist and writer Anastasija (Nastija) Kiake and a group of 22 Danes with refugee experience.¹ This collaborative project focused on strategies of remembering and bearing witness to refugee histories that are often left out of official history writing and archives. In 2025, this project assumed the shape of a major archival installation comprising photography, photogrammetry and video installations exhibited as a comprehensive integrated whole at an eponymously named exhibition at Copenhagen's Fotografisk Center ('Centre of Photography').

It is appropriate to end this book with a closer look at *In the Past We Made History*, as this project is basically concerned with individual and collective processes of storying and worlding – the leitmotifs of this study. As an archival project focusing on refugee reception in Denmark since 2015, it spotlights 'the paradigm shift' in Danish refugee policies, from welcoming refugees to pursuing the restrictive asylum policies that many of the artworks and projects discussed in the previous chapters have responded to. *In the Past We Made History* also summarizes key themes of the art on refugeedom emerging from the Danish art scene: the articulation and transcultural transmission of memories of refugeedom; the critique of refugees' waithood and the Danish asylum system; the preservation of histories of refugee worldmaking; and crucially, the usage of collaborative artistic practices to bring recently displaced people together with citizens to collaborate on giving voice to refugees as a key component of their claim to cultural citizenship.

In *In the Past We Made History*, Enghoff and Klich explored photography's potential as a method for creating a space for narrating or documenting the collective history of asylum seekers of different origins. Relying mostly on visual

1 The 22 participants with refugee experience, with their invaluable knowledge and input, also contributed to selecting images for the project. As some participants preferred that surnames were omitted, it was decided to do so for all; they are named as Abiel, Abood, Adnan, Ahmad, Fili, Eden, Ghazanfar, Ibrahim, Katja, Khaled, Mazen, Moutaz, Rahima, Rohin, Ruta, Sahl, Shoukrullah, Senait, Senait, Shewit, Yasin and Yousef.

material and only a little on textual testimony, this project could be said to be more about preserving place-based knowledge in a poetic and evocative way than recording testimonies, yet oral storytelling was nonetheless central to its creation.

The project interweaves photographic ‘memory fragments’ of 89 locations in Denmark serving as asylum and aid centres for forcibly displaced people arriving in Denmark in the years 2015–2018. In 2022, Enghoff and Klich began the laborious two-year long process of documenting this architecture that had provided an everyday environment for newcomers. They took thousands of photographs of buildings, rooms, worn surface textures and old furniture, along with other traces of life in the former centres before they were demolished or repurposed. In doing so, they sought to preserve the traces of refugee presence before it is completely erased from local and public memory. From Klich and Enghoff’s photographs, the participants with refugee experience selected images that somehow resonated with their memories of living within the confines of the asylum system, thus making a contribution themselves to deciding what is worth preserving. How much of their individual experience and knowledge they have invested in making this recent refugee history a part of Danish collective history is suggested by the comments in languages other than Danish scribbled on to some of them as material traces of the oral storytelling that was integral to the process of co-creating *In the Past We Made History*. By focusing on the living spaces, the project avoids the common tropes of humanitarian photography and the pitfall of positioning refugees as victims and figures of crisis.

The visually generous and complex exhibition at Fotografisk Center had four aesthetic layers or visual strands. They comprised, firstly, *The Memory of Salt*, a series of 35 large, framed black and white photographs documenting spaces in asylum centres. Secondly, there were two video works: the fifteen-channel video installation *Second Place*, documenting the disappearance of buildings of former centres due to demolition or repurposing, and the single-channel film *Rohin*, recalling visually the memory of a twelve-year-old, unaccompanied asylum seeker of being given a set of domestic objects upon her arrival at a refugee centre for children. Thirdly, the photogrammetry-based film *Earth, Soil and Stone* showed 3D renderings of the contours of the sites where the eighty-nine centres were located. Anastasija (Nastija) Kiake was responsible for the 3D modelling for *Earth, Soil and Stone* and edited all the videos. Finally, the exhibition’s most spectacular and monumental component was an installation of twelve, six-metre-long textile banners onto which approximately 1500 photos had been carefully sown by Ulla Enghoff to create the impression of a collective stream of consciousness flowing through these photographic tapestries. Long, winding threads hanging from each photograph enhanced the impression of a meandering stream of memory fragments and countless little timelines that bent the past and the present in different ways, often tangling together, touching one

another. Everything in this collaborative work was treated with great care: the places of the past, the materials, the memories, and, crucially, the people involved.

Fig. 36: Tina Enghoff and Kent Klich, Untitled, from the series The Memory of Salt, 2025. C-print, 90 x 90 cm. The series is part of the project and exhibition In the Past We Made History, 2025. Fotografisk Center, Copenhagen. Courtesy: the artists.



Most of the photographs on the tapestries were snapshots of details from the interiors of the former centres of such things as kitchen utensils, empty cupboards, old mattresses, signs, heaters and other fixtures and fittings that had been left behind; but there were also stairways that seemed to lead nowhere, dust on the floor and paint peeling off walls as well as nearby bus stops – significant markers of the connection to the civil society outside the centres. As already mentioned, the participants with refugee experience had added personal comments on some of the pictures in their native language, suggesting that the image had stirred a memory.

Furthermore, Enghoff and Klich's pictures were juxtaposed with older photographs from local archives from across the country where a broader history of migration had been documented. Most of this material related to German refugees in the Second World War, Vietnamese boat refugees in the 1970s and the Bosnian refugees of the 1990s.² On their visits to local archives, Enghoff and Klich discovered that there was virtually no material for the preservation of the contemporary history of forcibly displaced people in Denmark. The artists decided, therefore, to try to remedy this neglect by creating an archive for the hitherto undocumented history, including in it the memories of some of those who have sought safety through the Danish asylum system since 2015. They then sought to inscribe it all into Danish history by using the art institution as a platform for making the archival material publicly visible and accessible.

Because asylum and aid centres were found in all regions of the country in 2015–2018, they could be seen as a 'national heritage' fading into oblivion with their closure. In her speech at the exhibition opening at Fotografisk Center, the Danish writer Kirsten Thorup described this recent refugee history as 'a black hole in Danish storytelling' because hardly any documentation or images have been collected by local and national archives, in contrast with refugee reception in earlier times. Here, it is tempting to interpret this institutional negligence as a temporal extension of the policy of isolating asylum seekers outside urban areas, thereby 'preventing public interest in their existence', as Nermin Duraković has put it (Duraković 2020, 2; see also Chapter 5). Enghoff and Klich tasked themselves with arousing public interest by filling this 'black hole' in national memory and preserving fragments of a shared 'cultural heritage' in collaboration with the people who had lived experience of the centres and who had become part of Danish society as denizens with refugee experience.

The title *In the Past We Made History* does not give a straightforward answer as to who 'we' are but activates the speculative power of doubt: Should 'we' be interpreted as a reference to the creators, in particular the people with refugee experience who 'made (Danish) history'? Or should it, rather, be understood as the co-creative 'we' of civil society: the asylum seekers, refugees and Danish citizens and politicians making the thorny history of refugee reception *together*?

2 Kent Klich in conversation with the author on February 27, 2025.

Fig. 37: Tina Enghoff and Kent Klich, installation of textile banners (Klötzel) with photographs, 90 x 600 cm, part of the project and exhibition In the Past We Made History, 2025. Fotografisk Center, Copenhagen. Photo: Enghoff/Klich/Kiake. Courtesy: the artists.



Fig. 38: Tina Enghoff and Kent Klich, installation of textile banners (Klötzel) with photographs (detail), 90 x 600 cm, part of the project and exhibition *In the Past We Made History*, 2025. Fotografisk Center, Copenhagen. Photo: Enghoff/Klich/Kiake. Courtesy: the artists.



The project also raises the question of how the audience was positioned. I would like to suggest that the archival material not only positioned visitors to the exhibition as virtual witnesses,³ but also positioned most viewers as what Michael Rothberg has termed *implicated subjects* who – in their capacity as citizens, voters and taxpayers – bear a responsibility for their country’s policies (see the Introduction and Rothberg 2019). When positioned *physically* within the exhibition environment, in the midst of the archive, visitors were at the same time positioned *ethically* within a framework of political implication that urged them to engage with the archive’s representation of refugee experience, in the spirit of what Christine Ross calls re-

3 The phrase ‘virtual witnessing’ was first employed by Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer in 1986 to describe the ‘literary technology’ by which early modern experimental philosophers convinced readers of the reality they sought to describe, as if they, too, had been present when the experiment was performed. In Enghoff and Klich’s project, photography, with its generally acknowledged reality effects and truth-claims, provided the testimonies and the ‘visual technology’ for constituting matters of fact by serving as ‘a technology of trust and assurance’ (Shapin and Schaffer 2011 [1986], 60; see also 61–65).

sponsible empathy, founded in historical understanding.⁴ However, *In the Past We Made History* could also make visitors aware of their privileged position in relation to the precarious lives whose history (or histories) Enghoff and Klich's alternative archive sought to preserve. The archive confronted Danish citizens in particular with the question of how they themselves were implicated in the way refugees have been received in the country since 2015, and if (and if so, how) the closure of the 89 asylum centres was connected with the paradigm shift in Danish asylum policies and the surge of anti-immigration sentiment in most European countries. As the Introduction to this book emphasizes, Denmark's immigration and asylum policies are among the strictest in Europe, but they reflect broader political changes in Europe and beyond, as evidenced, for example, by the European Commission's 2025 proposal for the establishment of 'return hubs' for rejected asylum claimants outside the EU, and the deportation threats and stricter immigration policies in the US under Donald Trump's second presidency.

In the Past We Made History invites everyone to reflect on migration history, and how forced uprooting can remake local histories when displaced people with translocal connections resettle and become part of the asylum centre community as well as the local area. Newcomers develop a placed-based sense of belonging to the community and the surroundings, which may be short-term or long-term, positive or negative, depending on the duration and character of their stay, and whether they are moved around between centres. Even if they are treated as outsiders by some locals, they still share the reality of local life, and this, in turn, allows for a broader understanding of migratory patterns as a normal way of being connected and of living interconnected with many places (Hallesleben 2023, 2).

As this book has shown, Tina Enghoff and Kent Klich are not the only artists in Denmark who have contributed to telling the stories and documenting or facilitating the early worldmaking endeavours of asylum-seekers and refugees. This book has examined works and projects emerging from the Danish art scene in light of the wider historical shift in the European border and migration regime, as well as the transformation of its Danish counterpart. Based on in-depth analyses of key art projects and works, the book has given a set of answers to the questions of how

4 See Chapter 6 in this book and Ross 2022, 157. Fotografisk Center's exhibition leaflet gave basic information on the history of the asylum centres from 2015 to 2018 and the project's objective. Further insight into the historical background was provided by a string of panel discussions held in the exhibition space and featuring project participants, scholars and intellectuals who discussed the historical, political and artistic issues addressed by the archive. While this exhibition was still on, the artists also initiated the publication of a photo book about the project. In addition to images from the project, the book will include essays by Michelle Pace, Mohamed Al-Zaqzoq and Anastasija (Nastija) Kiake: Tina Enghoff and Kent Klich, *In the Past We Made History*, edited by Anastasija (Nastija) Kiake, published by Dogwalk Books (Sweden) and RSS Press (Denmark), forthcoming.

artists and curators active in the country have responded to the predicament of refugees, and how they have contributed to easing the unresolved tensions between refugees and hosting communities. My overarching point is that the majority of these artists and curators have been directly or indirectly motivated to engage with refugeedom by the increasing political hostility to asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants. Yet, by ensuring a scope for ambivalence, tensions and a plurality of voices to enter their work, and by upholding the ethical principle that not everything can or should be revealed about people who share their experience of forced displacement, the artworks and projects discussed here also show that there are no easy or unambiguous answers to such displacement, or to the question of how to 'represent' refugees.

Worlding and Storying Forced Displacement: Contemporary Art and Refugee Experience in Denmark has explored how artists, curators and other cultural workers have stood in solidarity with refugees and displaced peoples and helped to push back against stigmatization and social injustice. The multilayered term *representation* has been used to encapsulate the versatile contributions of artists to the development of civic coexistence in the 21st century. I have contended that representation – as in visibilizing and giving voice – is crucial to the formation of cultural citizenship among refugees and asylum seekers. I have also argued that, by activating art's capacity for creating worlds and stories, the artists and curators under study have transformed art into a powerful tool for deepening the understanding of refugeehood in the receiving country and for transforming unimagined communities and subjectivities into imagined ones. In doing so, they have enhanced the potential of contemporary art to provide meaningful, cross-cultural conversations in a space where we may imagine ourselves as fellow human beings who discard with the fixed categories (such as the other, the asylum seeker, the refugee) and open ourselves to listening to the stories of others and rethinking our beliefs.

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