UEL Archives: Research, Narratives, Ethics & Engagement

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Session Overview

- The aims for this presentation will include:
- An introduction to my role and the Archives at the University of East London
- An exploration of the Archives that we hold at UEL.
- Exploring the role and power of life histories and how they exist within the Archival environment.
- Use of testimonies as a means of bringing “humanity” into the Archives
- My presentation will be followed by the opportunity to ask questions and then a virtual practical session looking at different kinds of archival materials on the Living Refugee Archive.

Introduction and Background

- UEL Archives established in November 2002 with the arrival of the Refugee Council Archive.
- Initially preserve and make accessible unique collection dating from the early 1950's and make accessible for research (UEL's MA in Refugee Studies).
- Stabilise the archives in terms of managing the relationship between preservation, access and outreach.
- Develop a relationship of trust between the Archive and archival donors; institutionally; with students and researchers; and externally with communities and organisations.

Archives at UEL

- Physical Archive Collections held at UEL:
  - Refugee Archive Collections
    - Inc. Refugee Council Archive; Northern Refugee Centre Archive, & UNHCR Audio-Visual Collection, CARA Archive.
  - British Olympic Association Archive & Library
  - Eastside Community Heritage Oral History Collection
  - East London Studies Collection
  - UEL Institutional Archive
  - When Saturday Comes Football Fanzine collection.
  - Hackney Empire Theatre Archive

Refugee Archive Collections @ UEL

- Our refugee and migration physical collections include:

- The Refugee Council Archive
- Council for Assisting At-Risk Academics (CARA) Archive
- Northern Refugee Centre Archive
- UNHCR (London Office) Audio-Visual Library
- Information Centre for Asylum and Refugees (ICAR) Archive
- Charter 87
- Cambridge Refugee Support Group Archive
- Association of Ukrainian Women Archive (forthcoming)

Methods of collection - responsibility and practicalities

- Methods of collection has been a key approach to our work with the UEL Archives.
- Dual imperative of ensuring preservation of, and access to, the Archive collection whilst also supporting teaching and research needs.
- For example, the Refugee Council Archive for example brought in at behest of UEL academic colleagues on our MA in Refugee Studies Course at UEL, as it could no longer be maintained by the Refugee Council.
- Hackney Empire Archive = theatre studies; British Olympic Association = Sports Journalism & Local Engagement

History of the Refugee Council Archive

- The Refugee Council originated from two independent organisations, British Council for Aid to Refugees (BCAR) and the Standing Conference on Refugees (SCOR), which were both founded in 1951 following the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.
- Archive of the Refugee Council as an organisation, including correspondence, minutes, of meetings, case files and related materials.
- Thematic special collection of published books and journals, reports and grey literature incorporating working papers, conference papers, leaflets, newsletters, case studies, field reports, statistical data, press cuttings and audio-visual materials.
- Over 35,000 items have now been catalogued and we are still trying to add new materials to the collection.



Whilst the United Kingdom has a long history of immigration and emigration to and from our shores, “the common understanding of this history as passed down by the education system as well as by museums, archives and heritage sites, has often glossed over or ignored this crucial aspect of our island history.” (Stevens, 2009, p. 5).

Conceptual Framework: A Question of Narratives?

- Our work with the analogue physical collections of the Refugee Council Archive and related collections have raised a number of issues associated with how the narratives of the refugee experience are documented, preserved and subsequently made accessible for research.
- Refugee Council Archive:
  - A history of the Refugee Council as a third-sector organisation, documenting its working practices (e.g. minutes of meetings, correspondence, publicity, funding, internal research and reporting). A Narrative of the Organisation?
  - A special collection of grey literature encompassing research reports; conferences papers; press cuttings; magazines; and articles. Research on and about refugees and asylum seekers?
  - Where are the actual voices of and testimonies of the refugees themselves?

Narrative Engagement in the Archive

- Archives are home to a multitude of interacting stories, narratives and testimonies. Some rise to the surface easily, others are hidden.
- Opening the Archive to life histories of vulnerable communities raise a number of key issues:
  - Engagement: Engendering trust with communities and individuals to enable and facilitate life history work.
  - Representation: How do communities and individuals want their story to represented within the Archive?
  - Ethics: Ensuring that any life history work undertaken is ethical in its approach, ensuring participants are informed of the process from initial engagement through life history process and ending up with archiving and issues of accessibility.
  - The Archivist Researcher: An awareness of your own situated practice in relation to the Archive and the outreach work you are undertaking. Challenging yourself and the Archive.

Life Histories in the Archive: Engagement

- Engendering trust with communities and individuals to enable and facilitate life history work. Undertaking civic engagement and outreach work within local communities, e.g. oral histories of refugees in East London, Tate Lives project.
- Dangers of participant research overload and stories which have been developed for external consumption.
- Working with charities and third sector organisations who have undertaken life history work, e.g. VOKIM
- Support community organisations in undertaking life history work in their own communities, from funding application through training to completion of the project.

We as archivists, must continue to be aware that we `wield power over those very records central to memory and identity formation through active management of records before they come to archives, their appraisal and selection as archives, and afterwards, their constantly evolving description, preservation, and use.' (Schwartz and Cook, 2002, p. 2).

Narrative Engagement in the Archive: Situated Practice

Archival Challenges and Historical Loss

hackneychinese: We managed to retrieve the An Viet Vietnamese archive that was thrown on the rooftop by squatters, but they remain in a dreadful state. We're now looking for advice on how to save these valuable documents. Can you help? #vietnamesecommunity #historicalsite #help #archive

Campaign for Voluntary Sector Archives - https://www.voluntarysectorarchives.org.uk/



The Nature of Archives

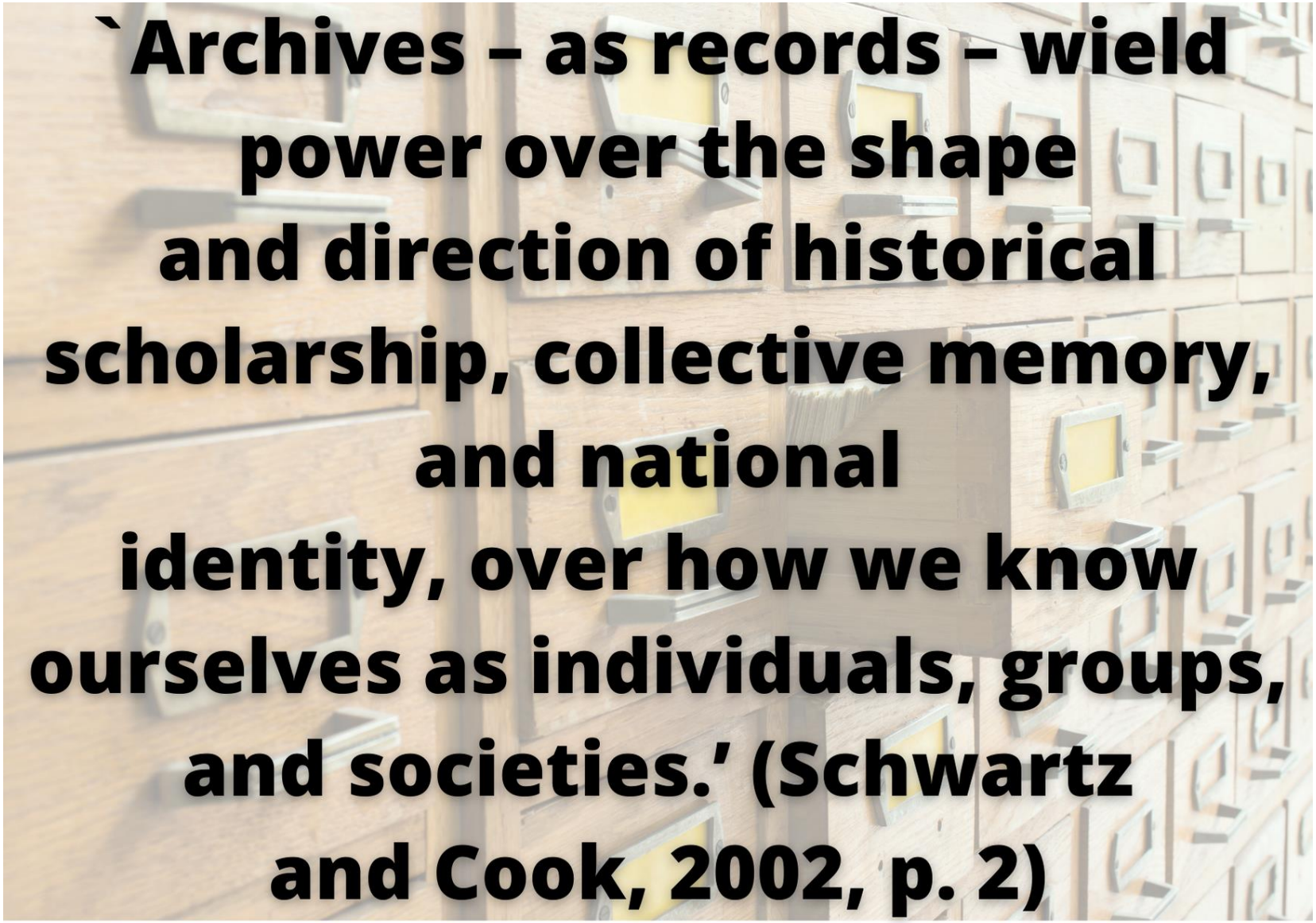
- Archives have the power to present a narrative determined by the documentary evidence that has survived and to empower a certain representation through the use of language.
- Notions of Memory and Identity
- Role of archives in enabling refugees to have a voice in the social, legal and political empowerment of their communities?
- Active role in documenting the heritage and hidden narratives of the refugee and migrant experience.
- Archives, it can be argues, represent "the basis and validation of the stories we tell ourselves, the story-telling narratives that give cohesion and meaning to individuals, groups and societies." (Schwartz and Cook, 2002, p.13).
- The archivist must research his community well and resist the temptation to "romanticize the marginalized, or feel elated for saving them from historical oblivion: some do not wish to be "rescued" by mainstream archives and seem feel their naming by archivists as "marginalized" only further marginalizes them." (Schwartz and Cook, 2002, p.26).

Life Histories in the Archive: Ethics

- Ensuring that any life history work undertaken is ethical in its approach, ensuring participants are informed of the process from initial engagement through life history process and ending up with archiving and issues of accessibility.
- We have obtained official UEL Research Ethics approval for all of the projects we have undertaken, funded both internally and externally.
- This has required us to meet stringent requirements for how participants are recruited and informed about the project and what their rights are in terms of how their life histories are collected, stored, processed, archived and made accessible.
- Engenders confidence with organisations and individuals that we work with.

Narrative Engagement in the Archive: Representation

- How do communities and individuals want their story to represented within the Archive?
- Ongoing civic engagement and outreach projects looking at bottom-up oral history approaches towards exploring the "contradictory narratives of transcultural encounters of refugees and undocumented migrants in London" (Hashem and Dudman (2016) and beyond.
- **Community Gatekeepers:** Working with community gatekeepers has become a very important aspect of our work when working with local communities. Without their support, many of the projects we have undertaken would not have been possible.


`Archives – as records – wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies.' (Schwartz and Cook, 2002, p. 2)

How can archives approach the documenting of the life history narratives of refugees and migrants?

- Undertake your own life history project work on behalf of the Archive. Develop best practices for engaging with participants and develop a clear ethical policy.
- Work in collaboration to support work being undertaken by academic colleagues, e.g. Life History and Storytelling project undertaken by CMRB and CNR at UEL.
- Multi-modal approaches to collecting life histories. Think holistically – life histories are not just oral histories or written testimonies, they can be represented in other formats, e.g. theatre, dance, art, design, textiles and objects. Be creative!
- Be open to collaboration and be prepared to challenge hierarchies in support of projects that break the mode in terms of how often marginalised voices can be represented and showcased in new and different ways.

How Do Testimonies "Exist" within the Archive?

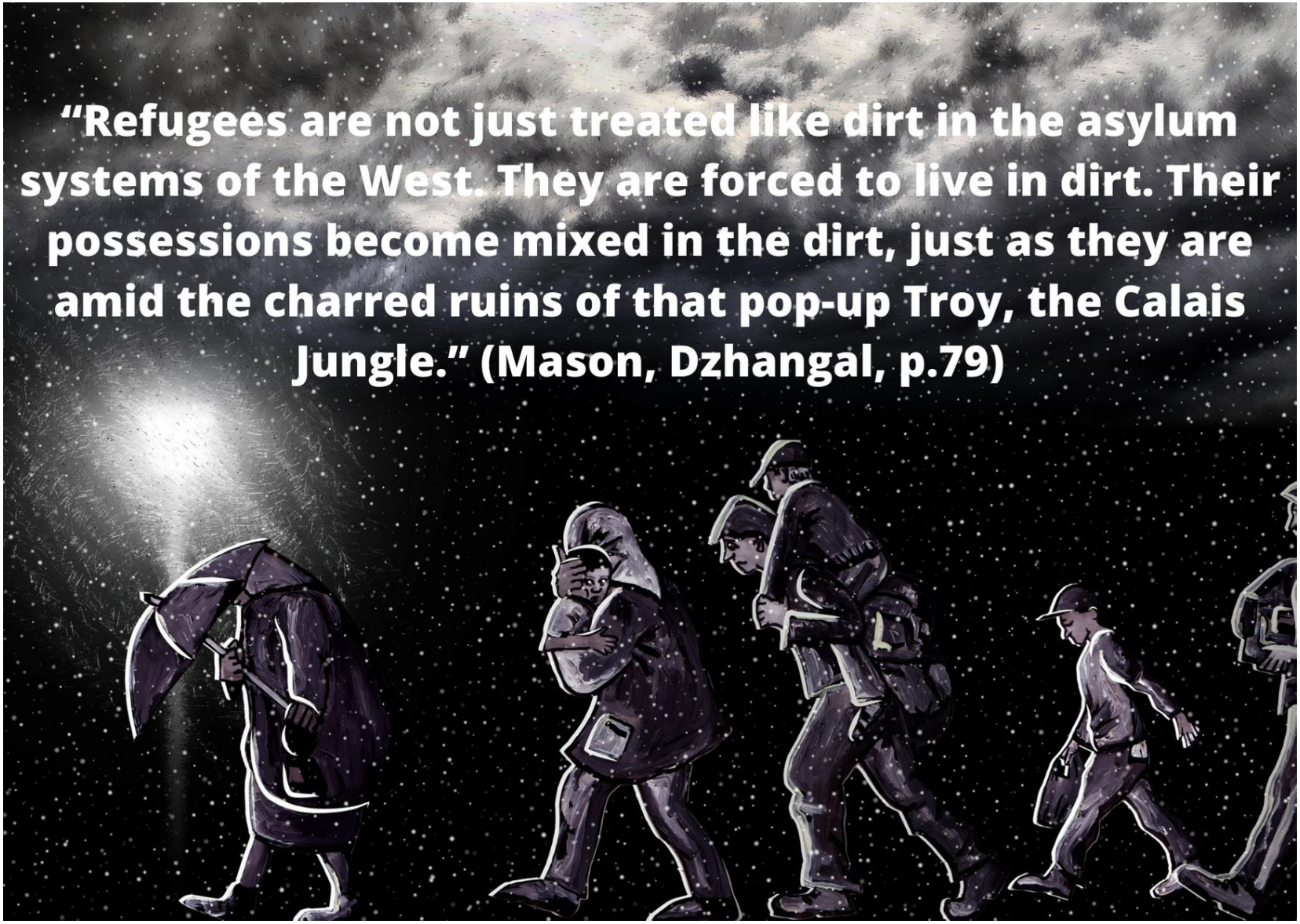
- For us, testimonies "exist" as a means of bringing some humanity to our archival collections.
- We have never wanted to fall into the trap of just being another University Archive, with a bunch of old documents gathering dust in the storeroom awaiting the occasional avid researcher to come in and discover us!
- Ways of working with people and the testimonies of those living now. Perhaps methods of collection stories - oral histories, any skills and considerations that will be transferable. I would also love the students to know about the work you do at LRA and the importance of recording people's stories, particularly those who are vulnerable.
- What can a life record 'look' like in within the Archive?

Refugee Archives – Oral History

- Oral history-based collections:
- Gujarati Yatra Oral History Collection. Exhibition held at the Museum of Croydon.
- VOKIM: Voices of Kosovo in Manchester Oral History Archive. Manchester Aid to Kosovo.
- Healing the Wounds. Irish Community Services Oral History Project documenting the Irish community in South East London.
- Crossing the Borders Oral History Archive. Documenting the Chinese community in Manchester.
  The Wai Yin Society
- Eastside Community Heritage: Projects on Somali Seafarers ;
  Ugandan Asians; refugees from the Hungarian Revolution.






“Refugees are not just treated like dirt in the asylum systems of the West. They are forced to live in dirt. Their possessions become mixed in the dirt, just as they are amid the charred ruins of that pop-up Troy, the Calais Jungle.” (Mason, Dzhangal, p.79)

Refugee Storytelling - The Active Citizens Sound Archive, Athens

- *'A critical mass of articles and incendiaries, reflections and rallying cries, has skewered the notion that refugee storytelling is somehow inherently useful, and that 'giving voice' is a benevolent practice.'*
- *Through the recording of sound and production of the archive, Tom describes how people perform, protest and ultimately remake citizenship as something that is 'emergent and iterative' rather than the static and dominant tropes of 'refugee crisis,' enabling citizens, refugees and hosts alike, to reclaim storytelling as a 'craft that allows for the fullness and complexity of experience' and challenge hierarchical structures of power and inequality.*
- Western, T. (2020) 'The Active Citizens Sound Archive', *Refugee Hosts*, 2 April. Available at: https://refugeehosts.org/2020/04/02/the-active-citizens-sound-archive/ (Accessed: 24 May 2020).

Through the website it is hoped there will be engagement with both traditional and creative forms of representation, but new creative methods of presenting the testimonies of migration is vitally important, to `help disrupt stereotypical representations of refugees and asylum-seekers , [and] emphasising the extent to which historical processed inform current ideas.' (Sunga, 2019).

Examples of Civic Engagement

- "**Supporting Refugees into Higher Education: A Research Hub for London":** A project designed to create an online resource hub of higher education resources for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. This formed part of our wider Erasmus+ funded OLIve (Online Learning Initiative) course. Link: https://www.uel.ac.uk/schools/social-sciences/olive
- **"Democratic Access or Privileged Exclusion: Civic Engagement through the Preservation and Access to Refugee Archives."** To engage with local communities to establish a Living Refugee Archive and to promote and enable accessibility and engagement through the collection of oral histories. Link: http://www.livingrefugeearchive.org/
- **Refugee Mental Health and Wellbeing Portal**: A project to develop an online resource portal specifically for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Health and Social Care Professionals. Link: https://www.uel.ac.uk/schools/psychology/research/refugee-mental-health-and-wellbeing-portal
- "***Performing the Archive*: Living Narratives and the Politics of Performance**." Working with undergraduate theatre studies students to create performance theatre based upon narratives discovered in the Archive. Link to full performance: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLjQvOZdnjo&t=18s

Living Refugee Archive

- Living Refugee Archive Online Portal - https://www.livingrefugeearchive.org/
- The Living Refugee Archive was established as a portal to help facilitate access to digital archive materials and existing archival collections including the Refugee Council Archive at the University of East London.

LRA Activities

- Digital Archives:
  - E.g. Voices from the Jungle Digital Testimony Archive - https://www.livingrefugeearchive.org/voices-jungle-testimonies/
- Virtual Exhibitions:
  - E.g. Amin Kamrani's 20/20 - https://www.livingrefugeearchive.org/exhibitions/20-20-virtual-exhibition/
- Displaced Voices: A Journal of Archives, Migration and Cultural Heritage - www.livingrefugeearchive.org/researchpublications/displaced_voices/
- Internal and External Collaborations

Amin Kamrani's 20/20 Exhibition

- Image: "Bazaar."

- The images presented in the gallery can also act as a means for new engagement and interpretation. Amin reflects that the framing of each photograph was a spontaneous and improvised moment that captured his attention and when he had his camera ready to hand. The photographs were taken in Malaysia (three in Kuala Lumpur, one in George Town, one on the road to Genting Highlands, and another at Cherating Beach); with a further nine having been taken in Iran; and the remaining four in the Turkish city of Antalya, adding a nuanced and global dimension to his work.



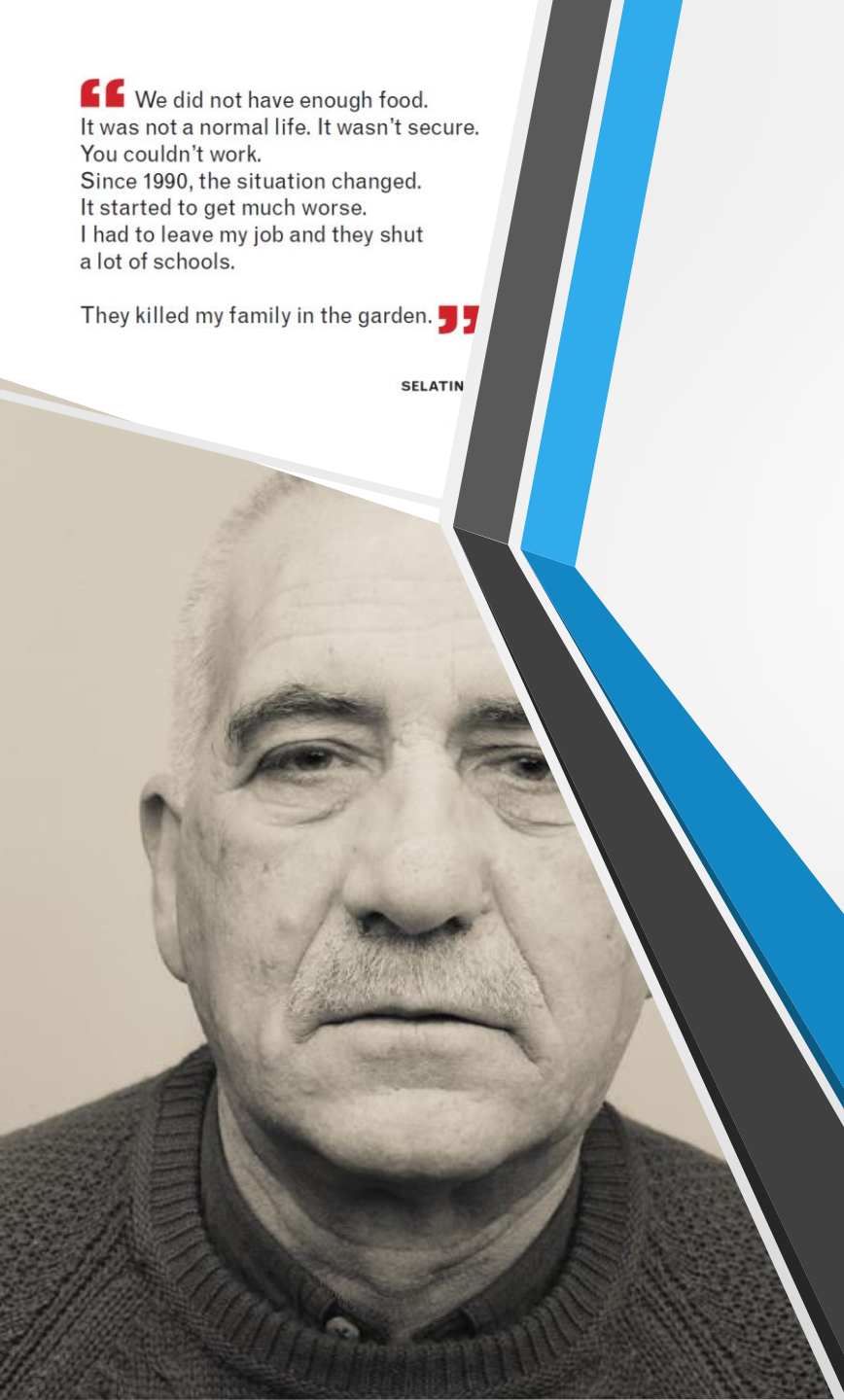
Group Activities

- Group/Activity 1: Voices from the Jungle Digital Testimony Archive.
- Group/Activity 2: Voices of Kosovo in Manchester oral history testimonies and accompanying exhibition images.
- Group/Activity 3: Chile Materials. Textiles and Objects.
- Group/Activity 4: Aberystwyth Conflict Textiles.
- Group/Activity 5: Hackney Empire Theatre Archive Posters.
- Group/Activity 6: David Oluwale. Individual Narrative Reflections.

[Voices from the Jungle Digital Testimony Archive.]







Voices of Kosovo in Manchester oral history testimonies and accompanying exhibition images.



Gujarati Yatra Trailer

https://vimeo.com/236392486

Chile Materials. Textiles and Objects.





[Aberystwyth Conflict Textiles](#).

Hackney Empire Posters

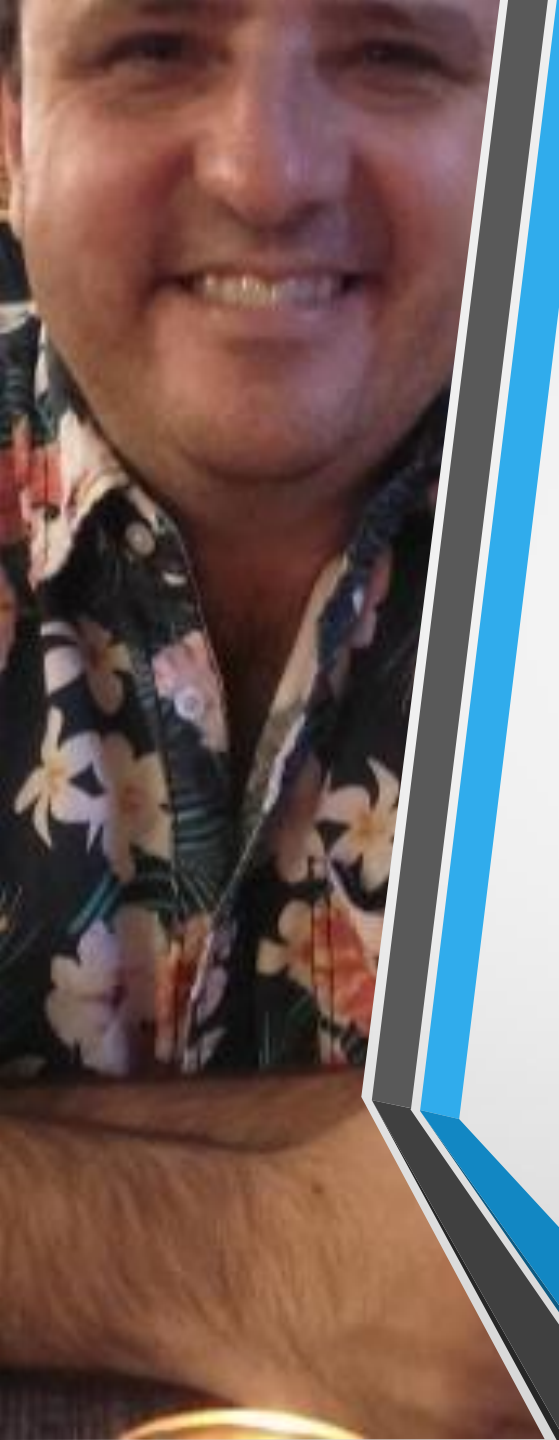




David Oluwale

Group Activities

- **Link to Introductory Page for Group Resources:** https://www.livingrefugeearchive.org/collaboration/uel-collaboration/living-refugee-archive/
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Contact Details

- Appointments:
- I am happy to make virtual appointments during this semester to help with any enquiries that you may have.
- Contact Me via Teams
- Contact me, Paul Dudman, on:
  - Email – p.v.dudman@uel.ac.uk
  - Telephone – 020 8223 7676
  - Twitter - @refugee_archive / @pauldudman

Key References

- Dudman, P. V. and Hashem, R. (2015) 'Democratic Access or Privileged Exclusion?', *Living Refugee Archive*, 25 June. Available at: http://www.livingrefugeearchive.org/about/democratic-access-privileged-exclusion/ (Accessed: 20 July 2019).
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