

Experiencing Mixed Emotions in the Museum: Empathy, Affect, and Memory in Visitors' Responses to Histories of Migration

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Museums and migration

Migration has come to dominate media headlines and political debates in recent years. In these spheres, contemporary migration in Europe is addressed through a variety of conflicting narratives. In some cases, we see expressions of empathy towards those fleeing the horrific conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East. Since the summer of 2015, these expressions have frequently related to emotionally charged news media reports and images that focus on the 'human tragedy' of migrant boats capsized in the Mediterranean, and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Calais. At the same time, we are also witnessing considerable hostility towards migrants as expressed by certain sections of the media, political figures and right-wing pressure groups. In particular, there has been a noticeable use of -- what has been called -- dehumanising language. Take, for example, the language used by UK's former Prime Minister David Cameron to refer to those attempting to enter Europe as migrant 'swarms' (Elgot and Taylor 2015). Such pre-existing trends have been exacerbated in the more recent context of Brexit and, at the time of writing, US President Donald Trump's rulings on immigration. In view of the above, the opportunity for museums to provide an alternative narrative of migration in the UK has never been more pertinent. This is particularly relevant given that museums are often celebrated as places for public debate and dialogue by those who advocate for their vital role in society. Motivated by a commitment to social justice, a

growing number of museums have chosen to address the topic of migration and to provide historical context for these contemporary debates.

This chapter aims to articulate how visitors draw connections between historical and contemporary migration in relation to what they encounter in museum displays. It is based on a small-scale research project conducted over the summer of 2015 with long-term residents who we invited to visit the permanent display, *Destination Tyneside*, at Discovery Museum in Newcastle, UK. In this chapter, we highlight how these research participants utilised not only resources such as museum objects and interpretive materials, but also childhood memories, debates in the media, and narratives about place, in order to make sense and review their position towards migrants. In so doing, we explore the different ways that the participants responded to the museum's invitation to empathise, and we investigate how affective responses are part of these experiences.

We argue that looking at the ways in which visitors negotiate empathy in the exhibition space through different kinds of 'memory work' provides a hitherto underexplored way to understand seemingly complex and contradictory visitor responses to migration displays. We show how, in their responses to stories of migration, some participants drew on particular narratives about post-industrial decline which circulate within the 'mnemonic communities' to which they belong (Zerubavel 1996). Our attention to mnemonic patterning in visitor responses to the museum addresses Margaret Wetherell's call to 'explore the format of patterns in people's affective lives through the practices that cannot be deciphered into separate "psycho" and "social" lines' (2012: 139). We emphasise how a long-term memory discourse of post-industrial decline intersects with time-specific contemporary news media, political debates about migration and autobiographical narratives.

By highlighting the role of different 'memory schemata' and 'narrative templates' in the participants' responses (Wertsch 2012), we identify complex interactions of self and other which show varied, and sometimes competing, empathetic responses to the exhibition. Our point is not to privilege certain responses over others but to highlight an inherent, and productive, instability of hierarchies within these responses. We argue that bringing understandings of the self and other into a new relationality is particularly important in a context where media and political discourses tend to essentialise and reify the distance

between those defined as insiders and outsiders; those who are seen to belong in specific places and those who are designated as always ‘other’.

Our research emphasises that the museum encounter is experienced by visitors as synchronous relations of past and present, and a constant slippage and relaying between different temporal registers, personal memories, memory communities and personal relationships. Our research aims to explore the situational and relational dimensions of the museum encounter by engaging with a small group of participants on more than one occasion. Our research process included, but was not limited to, a single museum visit. With this approach, our chapter builds upon the arguments around heritage, emotion, empathy and performativity in the work of Smith and Campbell (2015, see also Smith 2006). At the same time, it responds to Bella Dicks’ call to investigate intersections between ‘cultural framings’ and ‘narrative appropriations’ that pre-exist and go beyond the space of the museum (Dicks 2016: 61 with reference to Macdonald 2002, Wertsch 2002).

In the following sections we introduce the conceptualisation of empathy that informed this study, the specific exhibition, *Destination Tyneside*, which formed the basis of the research, and our methodological approach. We subsequently discuss the participants’ responses to the exhibition’s invitation to empathise, alongside a ‘thick’ account of the participants’ negotiation of meaning around migration, both in relation to their affective response to the exhibition and their personal and collective memory narratives as they emerged in the course of this study.

Empathy and the museum

Definitions of empathy are contested and contentious, as shown by Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie as they trace the term through decades of philosophical and psychological debate (2011). Such definitions matter because authors from across disciplines often (but not always) suggest that something is at stake, morally, ethically, or politically. While it is possible to tentatively point to a general consensus that empathy refers to ‘affective and cognitive engagement’ (Arnold-de Siminie 2013: 111), the extent to which these are coterminous is open to debate. This chapter takes Amy Coplan’s definition of empathy as its

starting point: ‘empathy is a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person’s situated psychological states [both cognitive and affective] while maintaining clear self-other differentiation’ (2011: 5). When successful, empathy results in imaginative perspective-taking or perspective-shifting (Coplan and Goldie 2011: xxxiii-xxxiv). For Coplan, the continued awareness of alterity -- the other-orientated rather than the self-orientated perspective -- is paramount. In this, she agrees with those critics who warn against problematic over-identification or ‘empty empathy’ (Kaplan 2011) and advocates instead a productive awareness of the limits of understanding another’s position, or ‘empathetic unsettlement’ (LaCapra 2001: 41).

The role of affect in visitors’ meaning-making processes in museum and heritage contexts has long been the subject of debate (Gregory and Witcomb 2007). More recently, an emerging body of literature addresses affect and empathy as interconnected categories by seeking to examine empathy as an affective interpretative strategy (Smith 2011, 2016, Smith and Campbell 2015, Schorch 2014, 2015, Witcomb 2013, Whitehead et al. 2016). Exhibitions and display methods that deal with sensitive, contested and difficult histories and heritage(s), including migration, are often seen as the ideal *loci* for curatorial strategies that prioritise empathy. As an interpretive strategy, research suggests, empathy is often intended to be built through enabling the expression of subjectivity, fostering an embodied and visceral experience for the visitors and mobilising visitors’ imaginations.

Subjectivity and personalisation as interpretive strategies

Witcomb (2013: 257) argues that the ‘affective space is mobilised’ when subjectivities come into tension in the exhibition space. In this context, aesthetics and the language of creative practice and art installation that prioritises film, oral histories, talking heads, large-scale photography and art-installation works have become a significant delivery device for affective and empathetic exhibitions. This is because they foreground individual ‘expressions’ of human experience (Landsberg 2004, Hutchison and Collins 2009: 96, Purkis 2013: 53, Witcomb 2013), although these approaches are not without their critics (Arnold-de Simine 2013). Other authors call for a reflective approach in the use of multimedia in

exhibitions that deal with difficult topics (Bonnell and Simon 2007, Brown and Waterhouse-Watson 2014).

In particular, the trope of ‘meeting’ the other is often deployed to enhance visitors’ personal connection with the individuals included in the respective exhibitions. Purkis, for example, discusses this in relation to the exhibition ‘Destination Donegal’, which she curated:

[t]he exhibition was designed by the curator to allow visitors to get a sense of meeting the individuals in the exhibition space, with the aim of affecting an emotional response. This, it was posited, might lead to understanding and empathy towards different people’s lives and experiences (2013: 51).

Despite the growing literature and practice in this area, to date only a limited amount of research has analysed actual visitors’ responses to museums’ attempts to engender empathy (but see: Smith 2010, 2011, 2016, Schorch 2014, 2015, Smith and Campbell 2015).

Destination Tyneside

Destination Tyneside opened in 2013 in Discovery Museum, Newcastle, UK, as a permanent gallery that addresses issues of both historic and contemporary migration in the region. The gallery employs many of the interpretative strategies outlined above in an attempt to ‘engender an immediate and emotional connection’ to the stories of migration being told (Little and Watson 2015: 196). The empathic vision for the exhibition was informed on the one hand by Newcastle City Council’s acknowledgement that the gallery had:

the potential to contribute to promoting greater community cohesion and defusing tensions by: [...] encouraging a process of empathy and ‘perspective taking’, where a group that may previously have been viewed with fear, distrust and lack of understanding becomes more individuated (Little and Watson 2015: 195).

On the other hand, it also reflected the UNESCO-IOM Migration Museum Initiative's core objectives of migration museums to increase empathy by building awareness of why people migrate (Little and Watson 2015: 195).

Five aims were set out in the original brief:

1. To engage in an informed way with contemporary migration by promoting an historical perspective;
2. To encourage people to debate migration and identity;
3. To promote tolerance, alter perceptions on immigration and contribute to social cohesion by increasing understanding of the migrant experience;
4. To undertake an enabling role to show how the North-East can respond to and benefit from migration;
5. To show that Tyneside's history and identity is not fixed or immutable, we have always been an open society (Little and Watson 2015: 195).

The main interpretive strategy is that of first-person narration and personalisation of the past. Historic and contemporary migration is expressed through the stories of individuals who have migrated to Tyneside. The first part of the gallery is devoted to historic migration in the nineteenth century and follows the stories of six people chosen to represent 'the largest and most significant, immigrant groups at that time' (Little and Watson 2015: 196). They include the stories of Ali Said, one of the first members of the Yemeni community in South Shields; Lena who moved to Tyneside to escape Jewish persecution in Poland; Thomas from Ireland in search of work in the chemical works; and Angela who, with husband Antonio, started the Mark Toney ice-cream business, which remains a well-known local institution. Upon entering the gallery, visitors are greeted by an audio-visual display featuring these characters, depicted by actors, discussing their motivations for migration and explaining how they ended up in Tyneside. On the wall alongside this display a 'case study' of each of the six characters is provided, situating them within the wider migrant Yemeni, Irish, Italian and Jewish communities, alongside economic migrants from other regions in the UK.

< Figure 1 here >

The volume of people moving into and out of Tyneside is displayed through a wall of graphics with quotes from historians, statistics on population movement and historical documents including adverts for travel to the 'New World' and official migrant documentation. Historic images related to migrations are projected on a large size screen. A suitcase interactive encourages visitors to think about what items they would take with them on a journey to start a life in a new country. This is accompanied by a large display case with objects and photographs related to the six characters and their respective communities.

<Figure 2 here>

Alongside personal everyday objects, the display includes religious objects and objects associated with the characters' professions, including a pair of tailor's scissors and an ice-cream glass, to highlight the economic contribution of migrants through the establishment of businesses in Tyneside. In the centre of the gallery, there is an enclosed 'cinema' space, featuring an audio-visual display with first-person interpretation from each of the six characters, who look at and speak directly to the visitor about their experiences of living and working on Tyneside. These interactions vary in tone, with Ali Said angrily highlighting the injustices the Yemeni community experienced in the form of racial and religious prejudice, before 'remembering his manners' and offering the visitor a cup of tea.

The second half of the gallery depicts contemporary migration, again utilising personal objects and audio-visual stories of individuals from the largest migrant communities in present-day Tyneside. The stories include the experiences of Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Chinese migrants to Tyneside, alongside those who live in Tyneside as refugees or international students. An adjacent area includes digital interactives such as a surname mapper and a British citizenship test, as well as community 'showcase' with rotating programming. The gallery concludes with a visitor feedback wall where visitors are invited to write their comments anonymously on luggage labels and affix them to the wall. The overarching interpretive narrative of the exhibition is that migration is 'a process rather than an event' (Little and Watson 2015: 197). According to the curators, visitors are encouraged to consider that 'migration is not an easy activity' (Little and Watson 2015: 201) and through the individual stories review their sense of belonging in the North East of England and develop greater tolerance towards migrant groups.

<Figure 3 here>

Methodology

Our methodology focused on gaining insights into visitors' 'entrance narratives' (Doering and Pekarik 1996) regarding their sense of place and belonging, and to what extent they consider migration to be relevant to their own lives. The methodological approach prioritised in-depth engagement with a small number of participants, to allow for a more nuanced understanding of how participants related the themes in *Destination Tyneside* to their own backgrounds (such as experiences of migration, age, ethnicity, length of time or family connections in the North East, first, second or third generation migration experiences and so forth). Although the overall study involved both long-term residents and recent asylum seekers in separate groupings, this chapter discusses our insights from our engagement with participants who are long-term residents in Tyneside. This allows us to put the spotlight on personal and collective memory narratives about the North East of England and how they interface with the exhibition-based experiences of the participants. In addition, a variation in methodology was adopted with the group of participants who were asylum seekers, which can be more aptly explored in future publications.

The study with long-term residents involved a total of twelve participants in two phases: in the first phase nine long-term residents in Tyneside were recruited through an open call to participate in an exploratory workshop about North East identity in the Discovery Museum. In spring 2015 two such workshops took place with four and five participants respectively, which were audio and video-recorded over the course of two hours.¹ The workshops involved a mapping activity, whereby participants were asked to respond to questions about where they felt at home, where they belonged and which other places that were significant to them and to mark these on a map. Throughout the exercise, many participants discussed their connections with places outside the region. This activity highlighted the importance of migration (often within the UK) to the personal histories of long-term residents in Tyneside, demonstrating a high level of mobility even amongst relatively 'settled' contemporary communities. Participants then took part in a broader group discussion about their feelings about living in Tyneside, which encompassed issues such as the changes experienced in the region during their own lives, including changes in employment and population demographics. It is worth noting that the majority of the long-term residents were retired, an

issue that emerged as significant within the narrative responses with regards to changes in employment in the region.⁴ There was no requirement of the participants to visit the exhibition in this phase of the study and indeed half of the participants had not visited *Destination Tyneside* at the time of the workshops. We did not discuss the exhibition with the participants at this stage. The purpose of holding these workshops from our perspective was to attempt to gauge a sense of participants' perspectives on issues of belonging, place and identity before they encountered the exhibition. Similar themes surfaced in the workshops around post-industrial decline, as were subsequently expressed again by participants in the post-visit exhibition.

Following the workshops, participants were invited to take part in the next phase of the study, which involved a visit to the *Destination Tyneside* exhibition with a member of their family or a friend. Four pairs took part in the second phase of the study; each pair was asked to visit *Destination Tyneside* for approximately fifteen to twenty minutes wearing glasses with in-built audio-visual capture. The glasses were worn by one participant and recorded everything the wearer saw and said, also capturing the responses of their friend (see also Allen et al. 2014).

The key advantage of this approach was that it enabled us to gain insights into the visiting behaviours and types of conversations triggered by the museum visit within the context of an existing relationship. Immediately after the visit, participants took part in a paired interview (lasting between one and a half and three hours) in which they first discussed their initial thoughts about the exhibition before watching and discussing the film of their visit with the researchers. The two-phase approach and the multiple points of engagement with a small number of participants aimed to develop trust among researchers and participants and to capture narratives around place, migration, memory and personhood as they evolved in a set of interactions, including the visit to the exhibition.

The rest of this chapter will provide a rich account of the experiences of three pairs of participants² who visited *Destination Tyneside* as part of this study, weaving together biographical elements captured in the first phase of this study with their experiences of their visit recorded through the glasses and their reflections during the follow-up interviews. The participants in these pairs shared commonalities that allowed us to delve deeper in their experiences and identify common threads. They were born and had lived in the region all

their lives. Furthermore, they had a long-standing link with and personal experience of migration either through ancestral connections or through their long-term residency in areas with migrant communities in the North East.³

The three pairs comprised a mother and daughter, Linda and Katie, two cousins, John and Elaine and two friends Janet and Maureen. Linda (age early 50s) and Katie (21 years old) were both born in the area and currently live in South Shields, a coastal town approximately 20 minutes from Newcastle. Linda describes herself as a 'Geordie' (i.e. someone from Newcastle), whereas her daughter has a much more ambivalent relationship to her North-East roots. Katie says she doesn't feel 'British' and expresses much more of an affinity for her Irish ancestors who migrated to Tyneside three generations ago. She has a strong desire to move to Ireland in the near future.

Cousins John (69 years old) and Elaine (late 50s/early 60s) both live in Hebburn, a town approximately 20 minutes from Newcastle. Elaine was keen to reconnect with her family history since the death of her mother earlier in the year and has traced Irish and Scottish ancestors who moved to Tyneside in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. John's grandparents were born in Scotland and moved to Hebburn, where his parents were born. He does not have Irish ancestors himself, but is a singer who enjoys Irish music and knows lots of descendants of Irish and Italian migrants living in Hebburn. Both pairs of participants are actively involved in genealogical research and this was a motivation for visiting the gallery and being involved in the research project.

The third pair of participants are friends, Janet and Maureen, both retired and in their early to mid-sixties. Janet and Maureen are childhood friends from Gateshead; the town immediately adjacent to Newcastle with a well-established orthodox Jewish population, as well as more recent refugees and asylum seekers from countries like Syria. Both women are heavily involved in the local church and, through this, with charitable efforts to help and host migrants coming to the area. Maureen knows that her husband's grandfather migrated to the UK from Italy around 1900. Her own grandparents also moved as internal migrants to Tyneside from Plymouth, although she has not previously considered this as 'migration'. During the Second World War, her husband's grandfather was temporarily put into an internment camp because of his Italian surname [which Maureen has by marriage] and because he had lost his papers while serving in the British army at the battle of Dunkirk.

Responses to the museum's invitation to empathise

Our research showed that there were a range of emotions present in participants' responses, some of which, following Coplan's definition, could be described as empathetic. Our research identified that the audio-visual and analogue interactive interpretive strategies adopted by the gallery are particularly successful in engaging visitors with the intended themes and with personalised accounts of the past. We identify three main ways that the six participants above can be seen to respond positively to the gallery's invitation to empathise with migrants:

1. Perspective-taking

Perspective-taking can be seen in the following exchange by two of the participants, Linda and Katie, (mother and daughter, born and brought up in Tyneside) in response to the gallery's prompt: 'You are moving to another country with your family. Not all of our things will fit into your suitcase. What do you want to take with you?'

Linda : I think if I'd take maybe a handkerchief and a mebbes [*maybe*] a small bottle of perfume and a photo. Like a family photo, anything of your parents or your family

Katie: Or maybe something for your faith? Like I was seeing like rosary beads, that was a Catholic one, and then there was another one what was it? Was there a Hindu one or something like that as well? So I think something to do with your faith that you would put in there. Well, for me anyway. I think, think that's what got a lot people through when you were travelling to far places. That was something that you could have attached, something you could take from home that they could have. So I think that was something that was really important for them.

Later in the conversation...

Rhiannon (Interviewer): Do you think there's something you'll remember (from the visit)?

Katie: Probably that suitcase and the compartments. It does make you think, what, you know, we were talking about what we would take with us, but also seeing what they took, from China, or from India or Ireland. You know, what would... the diversity, one person would take that, one person wouldn't. What would a man who was leaving his family behind, what would he take? What would a man with no family behind, what would he take? I think it raises all kinda questions in me head. You know? It does leave you thinking...

As this exchange demonstrates, Katie and Linda both find the suitcase interactive combined with the textual prompt, a powerful cue to begin imagining what it must have been like for a migrant leaving their home behind. Katie, in particular, describes how she imagined different scenarios and subjectivities; a man with a family, a man without a family, people of different faiths. Other respondents also picked out the suitcase interactive as being particularly memorable and connected with it in similar ways.

2. Humanising 'the migrant'; personalising history

One of the intended consequences of encouraging visitors to imagine what it is like to be a migrant is to humanise the figure of the migrant. This was a key goal for the curators as discussed above. It is particularly relevant in the context of news media and public discourse which tends to stereotype and abstract the idea of migration through its constant discussion of migrants as either faceless hordes or depersonalised statistics. Our respondents remarked on how it made a change to see the faces, hear the accounts of individuals and to recognise migrants as people with individual stories. In particular, the audio and visual interpretive techniques which used first-person narration and personalisation techniques (film, digital storytelling, large-scale photographic portraits) were identified as powerfully bringing this message home to visitors. Objects relating to named individuals also supported this response. In the post-visit interview, Katie and Linda discuss how the gallery prompted them to think again about views they had encountered in the news media and broader public discourses on economic migration:

Katie: [...] Because you have so much bad stuff in the newspapers, you want to get to the bottom of it and to the reality of it. It's (*meaning migration*) not anything bad, it's just people looking for work. I mean...

Linda : Yeah

Katie: And I mean, it really opens your eyes, that these are just genuine people. You know, they've got a family and they want to make a living and that's normal, that's ok, you know [...]

Linda : When people come from other countries and they're trying to live like that and you've got people going 'there's no room for us' and 'there's no jobs for us'. But you've got them themselves there talking on a screen [gestures in front of her - makes TV shape] and you think 'God it actually happens'. It's like Katie says, you're reading the paper and you think 'nah, that's rubbish' but you see people's faces ... it actually hits home to you

Katie: Again, because you've got something that you can relate to as a person, there's something in front of you that makes it real...

3. Reframing histories

These examples of productive, other-orientated processes of empathetic involvement are accompanied by ways in which some of the interviewees reframed and recontextualised their own lives in relation to migration histories. In the post-visit interview, long-term residents, John and Elaine from Hebburn, reassess their childhood memories of migration within their community:

Elaine: I think for me it (*meaning the visit to Destination Tyneside*) just prompted, it made me think, ... I've lived in Hebburn all my life ... the Italians came over like Maria Rabbotti who had the ice cream parlour and Bracchi's who had the fish and chip shop. When I went to school I sat next to Tony Bracchi. Just things like that that you don't realise, you don't really think about it when you're younger, I don't think. And when you get older you can think about all the people that you spent childhood with ... where their parents came from

Janet and Maureen also found that the gallery prompted them to reflect again on the region's history in relation to contemporary perceptions of migration:

Janet: And we were just saying as well when we were talking there, people in London seem to think that they invented being the first people to, you know, ... first immigrants and everything, but people in the North East have just been coming all the time and getting on basically, haven't they?

Maureen: I think it was quite interesting because they [*meaning in the display*] had people from Cumbria, as well as the Irish and the Italians and the Polish. I thought that was kind of ... you know, you don't think of immigrants from Cumbria.

As these three examples suggest, the museum's invitation to empathise was successfully accepted by these visitors at these moments and can be clearly identified as such. Yet a focus *only* on these responses fails to capture a series of more complex navigations that were also happening between embodied experience, empathetic identifications and social relationships. The following examples of affective and mnemonic patterning were elicited by the multifaceted methodology which opened up a space within the discussions for its emergence. We would argue that these affective responses may well not have become apparent without this methodology.

To be clear we are not suggesting that certain responses are somehow more authentic or 'real' than others. Neither are we suggesting that it is possible to ever fully 'capture' an *a priori* account of what the visit means to visitors. What visitors come to think, feel and say about the exhibition experience is situational and realised through the different interactions that we as researchers have with them as well as their through interactions with their companions. This is an inevitability of any research methodology that intervenes in the museum visit in the way ours did and which prompts people to actively reflect upon it. It does, nevertheless, raise the methodological question of whether what the visitors came to articulate was in fact a product of our methodology. However, in our view, the varied responses would not have been articulated as they were without the enabling framework offered by the exhibition. Evidence for this can be found in the way that visitors explicitly reproduced the same three conceptual framings (humanising the migrant, perspective-taking and reframing migration histories) and the general language of the exhibition in their own discussions of what they encountered. The combination of methods that allowed us to take account of the participants' encounter with the exhibition as it happened, without the presence of the researchers, as well as their post-visit reflections through conversation provides a rare opportunity to witness how

the visiting experience became a resource for the participants in their effort to make sense of both the exhibition as well as contemporary debates around migration.

Emotion and an affective loop

The exchange between friends, Janet and Maureen, illuminates both the affective nature of the museum visit and the extent to which the affective aspect of the visit is framed for the pair by the migration crisis of the summer of 2015 and its contemporary media reporting. At the same time, the way that the exchange below plays out within the interview demonstrates how the affecting experience of the visit evolves through a series of interactions, not only during the visit but also post-visit as part of reflection and social interaction. Alternatively, another interpretation is that the following exchange indicates how the participants prefer not to dwell on what might be perceived as upsetting material leading to a loss of self-control and inappropriate public expression of emotion arising from their empathetic response.

Initially, the interviewer [Katherine] asks at 4.50 minutes into the post-visit interview:

Katherine: And how did you feel after the visiting the gallery?

Janet: Nothing in particular

Maureen: Well, I identified with it.

Janet: We're quite museum visitors aren't we?

Maureen: Yes. Obviously I quite identified with, I'd never thought about the, about the [my] Grandparents as being immigrants into Tyneside.

Janet: Mmm

Maureen: My grandparents ... because they came from Plymouth, and we discussed that

Janet: And obviously with having a name like Lorenzo [Maureen's married Italian name] ... cos we looked for the Italians.

Janet: I think always after you've ... visited any exhibition you sort of think differently for a bit after ... for a couple of days and see things differently

Here Maureen expresses more of an identification with the topic of the gallery presumably because of her already confirmed migrant-descendent identity, although she simultaneously

states that she had not previously thought of her own grandparents in the category of immigrants to the area. However, at this point neither mentions what, later in the interview, transpires to be a strongly, affecting response. At almost twenty minutes into the post-visit interview, Katherine asks:

Katherine: Has the visit changed how you feel about Tyneside in any way?

Janet: No. Well, the reason I've brought Maureen is she spends six months here and six months in New Zealand, so every time she comes back she looks at things differently. *[Referring to a film they are now watching about leaving home which plays outside the cinema space in the gallery and which is playing in the film recording of their visit that they are now watching with the researcher]*

[The glasses are now recording Maureen looking at a panel]

[She reads aloud in the film]: 'Imagine leaving home. Imagine not returning'.

[In the post-visit interview still commenting on the film of their visit that they are watching] Maureen: Well these people won't nowadays, will they?

[What follows is all in the post-visit interview] Maureen: Didn't I say that *[referring to the text panel currently in view in the film]* that was relevant for today?

... And obviously I compared that to today. I have great difficulty with all these people leaving their homes.

Katherine: Is that ... because you're leaving for six months of the year?

Maureen: I suppose so yeah. And I'm thinking then I can come back and all my friends are there to support me.

Janet: It's the upheaval of just going with small children

Maureen: Yes, yes, I couldn't...

Katherine: So were you thinking about the stuff that's been going on over the summer? *[referring back to Maureen's comment above about people leaving their homes]*

Maureen: Yes, yes. I've got issues with that, when you see them setting up their camps on those Greek islands in those flimsy tents.

[...]

Maureen: And should they stop? *[meaning stay where they are]* ... but with the bombs and things like that ... should they move with their small children? I was quite

distressed. You know, when you think of all things that our children have got. Ok, you get children that are socially deprived in some ways, but *[goes on to describe how her charitable work with refugees has brought her into contact with people fleeing their own countries]* you're bringing them from witnessing all this aggro and, you know, you're seeing all these police holding them back with kids on their shoulders and babies in their arms! *[sounds tearful]...[sniffs]...sorry.*

Kat: No, it's really distressing

[Long silence... No-one speaks as they all watch the film of Janet and Maureen looking at the museum displays of more recent immigration, including Mela performers and asylum seekers]

Maureen: And obviously these people *[meaning recent migrants shown in the media]* came over in the same way *[as those in the display]*. But I don't think they were fleeing from...well they were, they were fleeing from bad places, weren't they? Would it have been better for them to stop where they were? I dunno.

[Another long pause...no-one speaks]

Janet: It is a bit artefact thin

During this exchange, Maureen becomes visibly and audibly affected as she recalls images she has seen recently in the news and connects them to this larger history of migration, as represented with the display and through her own experiences of refugees through her charitable work over the years. Mixed in with this, she is also connecting these thoughts to her personal family history, including the memories passed down from her husband and his grandfather, and the reasons she imagines her own family members and other migrants must have had for leaving their homes. She begins to sound tearful and her voice catches with emotion as the images and associations seem to be coming thick and fast, one after the other, and as she recalls the previous emotional experience of being 'distressed'. At the height of the affective episode she apologises to the interviewer for her emotional response and temporary loss of composure. At this point what the transcript does not easily show is that the silences between the comments increase noticeably to the point that they turn into awkward

pauses; both interviewer and the interviewees seem to be at a loss for words or a way out of this moment.

What happens next is revealing in terms of what it tells us about how museum visitors are situated within a nexus of emotional and personal relationships uniting those visiting together. Maureen's friend, Janet, intervenes to provide a safe route out of this affective moment. She says: 'It is a bit artefact thin.' Her comment is pointing out that the display is lacking the level of objects which might normally be expected in a 'successful' museum display. This is a common criticism of migration displays because museums tend not to be able to access the same level of objects as they might in other subject areas. People fleeing war and hardship are unlikely to be able to bring many objects with them and are often -- understandably -- unwilling to part with those few precious keepsakes which they do have. However, the primary purpose of Janet's transition into a technical register, and the broader discursive shift she makes towards talking about museum practice, is clearly a deliberate move to put the conversation onto safer, more emotionally neutral ground. It is a kind, understated gesture of friendship from Janet to Maureen in response to her friend's distress and a move which speaks volumes about their long-standing relationship and care for each other.

As a whole, this exchange demonstrates that when we are attempting to understand museum visiting and emotional, empathetic or affective encounters in these spaces, we need to be attentive to the ways in which such responses will ebb and flow across the time of the visit. We need to be careful about taking self-reporting of the experience at face-value because there may be complex processes of disavowal, embarrassment, self-consciousness and post-hoc rationalisation at play. People's reactions will always be imbricated in a web of experiences, emotions and perceptions which stretch in many different, temporal directions simultaneously. There are processes at work here of rethinking and revisiting long-held memories and histories. Running simultaneously, there are highly, contemporary and time-sensitive experiences weighing on the visit, for example, of contemporary media events over the last few weeks and months. And as these are recalled, these triggers send people back to the place -- emotionally -- where they last engaged with such issues -- 'I was distressed'. The affective dimensions of the encounter can therefore be understood as looping forwards and backwards as they play off the triggers in the display. At the same time, these responses are also relayed through the exchanges and relationships of the particular visitor-group

combination and in this case -- the personal histories and friendships they bring to the encounter.

Revisiting past-present relations

As we suggested above, the visit prompted Elaine, Janet and Maureen all to reframe their history of Tyneside as a history of migration, but for Maureen the visit and attendant research process also prompted her to emotionally reframe her own family history. What the interview transcripts also show, however, is that accompanying such personalised, autobiographical reframings is a reframing of a different kind, one which draws on wider cultural narratives and memory communities. The curatorial intention had been to focus visitor attention on migration to the local area. The goal was to highlight how this influx of foreign labour was an essential factor in enabling a period of peak industrial productivity on Tyneside from the latter part of the nineteenth century. Our research showed that participants did recognise this narrative of the intertwined nature of past economic growth and the ensuing diversity of the local population. However, for the long-term residents, this discussion of local history also led them to reflect more on the general rise and decline of heavy industries and resulting unemployment.

In the post-visit interview, Katie, for example, expressed a positive sense of pride in the achievements of her individual ancestors and their contribution to the making of modern Tyneside. In comparison, for her mother, Linda, the gallery and subsequent discussion triggered more comments on the contrast with today and the effects of deindustrialisation she has witnessed in her lifetime.

Linda: ... How they travelled from Ireland over here was fascinating and there's a lot of us now going to Ireland looking for work and going to London looking for work. This was, the North East, a real heart for the jobs like. I tries to explain to you (*to Katie*) didn't I? You says 'why did they come?' I says, 'cos this is where the jobs were'. And now look it at. ...

Similarly, in Elaine and John's post-visit discussion, they coupled the post-industrial restructuring of the economy in Tyneside -- away from mining, factories and shipbuilding towards culture and leisure -- with a discussion of how this had changed the nature of community in their lifetimes and locality:

Elaine: It must have been, at first there mustn't have been enough shops and places to accommodate all these people you know and houses. All of a sudden the sky opens and well obviously there was more than one shipbuilder wasn't there? There was a few small ship builders and as the word spread and they all came around at the same time. It must have been massive. [...] I mean even when I was a kid I can remember you could have set your watch by the buzzers because there was 7:25, and you had 5 minutes to get there and everyone would be running along for 7:30 and then there was 9 o'clock tea break. And then the church bells to be going as well because everybody went to church. Because we were Catholic and you went to church practically every single day. And then 12 o'clock lunchtime ... just the throng of people because hardly anybody had cars. So they'd all walk up the Bank from Hebburn

[...]

Elaine: I think it's sad to look at how quiet the river is now compared to how busy it was even when I was a child. Because it was so busy...

John: That is one of the saddest things to, you know, really, the demise of industry you know what I mean it's just it's affected the community that much, I think, in a lot of ways

Elaine: [...] What attracted people? Well, it must have been the river mustn't it? That attracted all these...

John: coal mining

Elaine: ...people to the area in the first place. And why have they all disappeared? because we don't make anything anymore

[...]

John: And lads going straight from school to be an apprentice in that sort of environment. And it was just tremendous, really to have that sort of opportunity

John: ... And now that you have people working in call centres, you know and zero hour contracts. There's no sort of continuity, it's terrible. But, like I say, it's not exclusive to Tyneside, is it?

Elaine: I can't imagine they get any work satisfaction out of being in a call centre. [...] Having the different generations coming together and treating each other with respect and looking out for one another, learning a trade. That's lost to us now. And you just think when the river was so busy then, why is it not busy now, why is it not?

John: Well, it's globalisation isn't it, you know what I mean [laughs], the curse.

Elaine: I mean I certainly wouldn't want to go back to, my youngest son is 12, going down the mines a 100 years ago. I certainly wouldn't want that because it was such a hard life

John: ah yeah, there were good sides to it and bad sides to it,

Elaine: Certainly some things have been lost

What stands out palpably is the sense of the very visible nature of community and prosperity so that, as Elaine describes it, you could see the community thronging in the streets, all sharing the same routines and schedules. While there is a realism about the dangerous nature of the past industries like coal-mining, there is a clear sense of a regret over the loss that the cohesive nature of community which certain kinds of blue-collar industries previously generated. The overarching narrative here is one of feeling marginalised by the anonymous forces of 'globalisation', as John says. Elaine elaborates on this theme with a revealing anecdote about where they live, Hebburn:

Elaine: I can't imagine anyone thinking that 'I want to move to Hebburn, because I want to move to Hebburn'. This guy stopped me and my friend the other day. The guy said 'is this the through road to Jarrow?' and I says, 'no this is Hebburn'. Because he didn't know, he just thought it was the way to Jarrow. He just thought this was a long road, a through road to Jarrow. Hebburn has just been forgotten about. Whereas 100 years ago, people from Scotland would have known where Hebburn was, because you went there for work.

These exchanges encapsulate people's feelings of being both geographically and economically peripheral, in contradiction to the picture painted in the museum display where Newcastle is very much positioned as a centre point which previously pulled people towards it. This sense of marginalisation clearly evokes sadness and frustration. At the same time, both speakers recognise that Newcastle, as opposed to its suburbs, has undergone significant rebranding and regeneration through culture and leisure. They pick out the River Tyne and

the Quayside as focal points where this transition from industry to culture and leisure is manifested through its cluster of art galleries, bars, new bridges, cultural venues and tourist activities.

This discourse about the effects of post-industrialisation on the area is apparent in other respondents' comments too and in the broader conversations which took place in the two workshops that preceded the exhibition visits. Crucially, this discourse is intertwined with people's understanding of contemporary migration and globalisation. In Katie and Linda's post-visit interview comments, for example, they make several references to the idea that there are not enough jobs for local people, 'like us', so they wonder how will it work for migrants coming to look for jobs. In this sense, they appear conflicted between a recognition of how others are understandably looking for work, just like their own relatives did when they migrated to the area, with a concern about the lack of jobs in the area today. While the long-term residents to whom we spoke recognised the gallery's depiction of Tyneside as historically heterogeneous, for them this historical diversity was mediated by the shared daily routines and experiences of the mining and shipbuilding communities. This resulted in the perception of these place and industry-based communities as also relatively homogenous, in comparison with the contemporary diversity of ethnically-defined communities. These long-term participants regretted this loss of solidarity within present-day communities.

In part, this post-industrial melancholia is arguably as much about the more fragmented experience of work-patterns and employment opportunities (or lack of) in today's globalised societies, rather than a comment about migrants per se. However, it is wrapped up with an underlying sense of how community on Tyneside is different from the more apparently coherent world depicted in the gallery. This is significant given how the gallery was attempting precisely to stress how Tyneside's recent past was itself much more diverse than is usually recognised. The human effects of processes of economic globalisation are, in fact, key to understanding both participants' responses and the stories of migration in the museum gallery, although these linkages are not necessarily foregrounded in this way in the display.³

Nostalgias and mnemonic patterning

The fluid combination of sentiments of sadness, regret and pride focalised around the built environment and physical markers we identified in the participants' responses is similarly identified in Bonnett and Alexander's (2013: 9) study of nostalgia and memory amongst ex-residents of Newcastle:

Repeatedly during our interviews, it was the same specific features of the urban landscapes ... that participants brought up and wanted to talk about at length. These acted as what Meusburger et al. call 'mnemonic devices; as the storage vessels of cultural identity and information . . . as triggers for sensations, emotions, and sensibilities' (2011, 8), and as 'spatial anchors for historical traditions' (Foote et al. 2000, 305) (Bonnett and Alexander 2012, 9).

Based on our findings at *Destination Tyneside* and earlier research (Mason et al. 2012), we support Bonnett and Alexander's (2012) observations that nostalgia cannot be clearly separated into 'productive' or 'simple', 'good' or 'bad' types. Instead, participants' responses indicate a complex intertwining of different kinds and scales of collective memory and nostalgic sentiments, some of which are reflective and aware of ambivalence (Boym, 2001: xv). In this respect, we argue that the museum display prompted and resonated with wider collective memory discourses beyond those intended by the curatorial team and the interpretive focus of the gallery. As indicated above, the gallery positively celebrates the booming industries that attracted migrants to the region in the past. However, many local visitors expressed emotions of disappointment and sadness about the perceived loss of local and national pride due to the post-industrial decline of the heavy manufacturing industries that have marked this area's recent history. These emotional narratives clearly frame these visitors' responses to the gallery. Moreover, these commonly-expressed emotions are articulated through recurring tropes and narrative structures which, we argue, cumulatively function as memory 'schemata' which operate through 'narrative templates' (Wertsch 2012).

For Wertsch, these narrative templates can be identified where a '... storyline is used repeatedly by a mnemonic community to interpret multiple specific events by fitting them into a specific plot line' (2012: 175). Wertsch's point is that, although the details may vary (the exact location in question, the specific time, or the particular community), these 'generalised schematic structures' can accommodate the overarching account (2012: 175).

Such accounts are powerful in terms of supporting mnemonic communities and collective memory as discussed by Zerubavel:

The collective memory of a mnemonic community is quite different from the sum total of the personal recollections of its various individual members, as it includes only those that are commonly shared by all of them (in the same way that public opinion, for example, is more than a mere aggregate of individuals' personal opinions). It thus involves the integration of various different personal pasts into a single common past that all members of a particular community come to remember collectively (1996: 293-294).

Reiterating Zerubavel's last point about the scope of this mnemonic community this narrative template of post-industrial decline was only invoked by, and available to, the long-term residents group. The post-visit interviews further emphasised that such schemata are acquired through socialization. Katie at age 21 has, arguably, little first-hand experience of the direct effects of deindustrialisation but belongs to the mnemonic community in which that knowledge continues to circulate and through which it is intentionally passed on:

Linda: I tries to explain to you (*to Katie*) didn't I? You says 'why did they come' I says 'cos this is where the jobs were'. And now look at it.

Conclusion

What emerges clearly from our study is the importance of taking account of other pre-existing, emotionally-charged narratives which come to the surface for many long-term local residents when visiting such displays. Visitor analysis needs a methodology that is complex enough to able to begin to identify such different forms of emotional response and affective patterning and to acknowledge that they may evolve through interactions during and post-visit. As Sharon Macdonald has argued, competing processes of 'framing' are always in operation during any museum visit (2002). While the gallery was, as Macdonald has put it elsewhere 'concerned with setting the scene so that certain connections [would] be made rather than others' (2002: 250), a different set of broader cultural framings were being

referred to by the interviewees to make sense of their visit. As a result the ‘visions and work’ of the curators ‘were set in a context which gave [the exhibition] inflections they had not anticipated’ (Macdonald 2002: 255). At one level, we could say this is always the case with museum displays, as Macdonald’s (2002) study of the Science Museum amply demonstrates. However, we are specifically concerned with the implications of this argument when thinking about how the museums might be aiming to build and foster empathetic responses around migration stories, as discussed above.

Specific memory schemata related to post-industrial nostalgia result in particular outcomes relevant to empathy and migration. The interviews we conducted, which provided opportunities for reflection by reviewing recordings of the visit with the participants, suggest that the presence of these schemata complicates the way that empathy is operating; it may result more readily in expressions of empathy for those within one’s own memory community rather than outside it. Imaginative identification in this case appears to become refracted through affiliations of class -- as epitomised by an understanding of a lost work-community in an alienating globalised world -- and, more implicitly, in terms of ethnicity and ideas of ‘otherness’. While the synchronic intersections of framing and schemata suggest that it is more appropriate to talk about active communities of remembering, the extent to which interpellating such communities through empathetic strategies can be transformative, in the sense envisaged by the gallery, is less certain. Our conclusion is that diverse narratives of migration, and of self and other, compete for prominence as visitors assemble, and then reassemble, their own account of their visit to the museum.

This is where we diverge from the idea as suggested by Wertsch, for example, that memory schemata are inherently politically conservative (2010). At some moments the participants in our study recognised and responded powerfully to the invitation to empathise. Yet, at the next moment, attention and emotion appeared to be heading off in another direction altogether, triggered by specific memory narratives. What is abundantly clear is the extent to which people engage emotionally with museums in multifaceted ways. Sometimes the responses might be complementary, sometimes in conflict. Furthermore, those responses are not explicitly connected to certain interpretive and exhibitionary media. Crucially, they can change throughout the context of the visit – identification and dis-identification, empathy and nostalgia, can happen almost concurrently. One important implication of this finding is that museum and heritage studies, therefore, need better methodologies that can capture the ebb

and flow of people's responses across different moments within their visits, and which are able to capture and make sense of the 'felt experience' of the visit. Moreover, we continue to need to understand, not only how museum visits relate to people's lives, memories and experiences beyond the museum, but, crucially, how this connects with wider memory practices and mnemonic communities.

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated the ways in which unanticipated, wider memory schemata interplay with the emotional responses expressly invited by the museum display. It thereby raises important questions about the complexity of understanding the museum visit in terms of affective practices and emotional responses. It prompts us to pay more attention to how different kinds of emotions may come into conflict with, frame, or support, one another. It also alerts us to the importance of attending to the interplay between individual, personal emotional responses to specific displays and those which are connected to broader discourses of identity and place circulating within certain memory communities.

Acknowledgements:

Our thanks to Kylea Little, Curator of Destination Tyneside, for her advice and insights and to TWAM for allowing us to carry out this research in their spaces with their visitors. We acknowledge the Newcastle Institute for Social Renewal (NISR) at Newcastle University for its financial support of this research project. We also acknowledge the inspiration for the methodology and this line of enquiry which arose from the EU funded MeLa project. Thanks to all the colleagues and friends who gave us feedback and encouragement for this paper at seminars and conferences. Last, but not least, we gratefully thank all the participants who so generously shared their time, stories and memories with us and, without whom, the paper would not have been possible.

Notes

¹The variation between the total number of participants involved and the numbers attending the initial workshops was due to the fact that some of the initial participants subsequently

brought along a friend, who had not been in the first workshop, for the paired exhibition visit and post-visit interview.

² Subsequent publications will address the responses of the asylum seekers group and our reflections on the overall methodology.

³ Names of participants have been changed to provide anonymity, as have the names of other people mentioned by participants. All participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and agreed to take part voluntarily. Consent forms cover the use of the data collected in all phases of the study.

⁴ We acknowledge that the long-term residents' responses are undoubtedly influenced by their age and life-stage; a younger group may well have placed less emphasis on the issue of post-industrial decline. At the same time, it was evident that these participants' were endeavouring to pass on this collective memory to their children, so that younger generations may well still be familiar with this particular memory discourse.

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