Past, Present, Future

SENTIO
Journal

An interdisciplinary
social sciences journal

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Edited by

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Connie Hodgkinson Lahiff, and Adele Wylie.

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Editors' Letter

Dear Readers,

We are delighted to present Issue 5 of Sentio Journal on the theme of "Past, Present, Future".

Sentio is an interdisciplinary social science journal founded in 2018, led by doctoral researchers part of the ESRC-funded South East Network for Social Sciences (SeNSS) Doctoral Training Partnership. Sentio – or 'I sense' – aims to provide a forum for the cross-pollination of ideas, conversation, and knowledge exchange through social science scholarship. Seeking nuance and advanced debate from an array of epistemological, ontological, and methodological perspectives, Sentio is proud to offer a supportive and respectful environment for emerging and early-career scholars wishing to share their knowledge and experiences, and provides opportunities for collaboration between students and established researchers alike.

The theme of "Past, Present, Future" presented an opportunity for all researchers to reflect on the known past of their research area, or perhaps the lesser-known past, consider the present landscape of research, and drive to push the boundaries of interdisciplinary research in the future. "Past, Present, Future" is a universal concept that every researcher can draw upon, and indeed each reader, whether in relation to building on knowledge from those before us to help those that will come after us, or discussing how we are best placed to tackle current issues brought from the past, to ensure they do not affect or damage our futures.

The authors of this issue interpreted the theme in a myriad of ways, sharing with audiences innovative research articles, thoughtful features, and compelling reflective accounts. Lily Gibbs begins the 'Articles' section by walking readers through the often used, but rarely defined, term 'tradition' and how its meaning has evolved through colonialism to oppose notions of modernity and progression. Next, Katrine Callander discusses how participatory autistic narrative research would impact our understanding of autistic self-construction, help us move beyond medicalised frameworks, and increase agency and empowerment for autistic people. Dr. Martyna Surma then critically examines whether and how the pre-pandemic research on physical workplace environments and employee engagement can sufficiently address the post-pandemic hybrid workplace context, and provides insights into how the transition to hybrid working and contribute to more sustainable employee engagement. The author of the next article, Dario Giuffre, presents an overview of how place branding has developed and discusses business clusters as place brands. Asserting that place branding research is still lacking in conceptual clarity, Dario argues that

interdisciplinary cluster studies may provide a fruitful avenue for future research. Jane Bennett authors the final article, and proposes two novel methodologies for the co-creation of knowledge within autistic communities: 'auto-photography' and 'collaborative drawing'. Jane discusses these in relation to the design of the built environment, and asserts how, when these methods are used alongside traditional methods, autistic research participants and autistic researchers are better supported.

The 'Features' section begins with a piece by Sarah Stephens, who begins by posing the question of whether AI-powered legal tools can increase access to justice. She goes on to argue how alternative digital legal service models can reduce workload and cost for both lawyers and clients, however also highlights how current racial, social, geographic, and gender inequalities may be exacerbated by such digital provision. In the second feature article, Grania Power narrates an encounter with a family she met during ethnographic fieldwork in western Ireland, examining key issues around the past, present, and future management of Irish peat bogs and arguing for the protection of these bog ecosystems and the people who rely on them.

Our final section, 'Reflections', starts off with Nahida Hussain considering her experiences as a South Asian mother and second-generation immigrant, how expectations of South Asian motherhood and daughterhood have shifted over generations, and how her role as an 'insider' during oral history interviews with South Asian women have both helped and hindered understanding during her research. Next, Anna Ridgewell reflects on her journey to appreciating the value of qualitative research. As someone who worked alongside psychiatrists, psychologists, and nurses in an NHS trust managing quantitative medical research, Anna notes how her experiences created an intrinsic bias towards 'real' quantitative research, and how empowering it became to leave behind the strictness of quantitative research design for a more elastic and creative qualitative focus. William Page then follows with an account of his experiences with public engagement. He presents considerations of his engagement with radio, news outlets, and public forums, and brings comparison between the three, highlighting key points of misunderstanding and conflict. Finally, the final section concludes with Basma El Doulkhi's poignant reflection on her journey from refugeehood to being a PhD student and UN professional. Basma discusses how her personal experiences shaped her life's trajectory, influencing the process of making her own past, present, and future.

We, as the editorial team at Sentio Journal, are incredibly grateful for the enthusiasm, tenacity, and commitment demonstrated by the authors. We are also deeply appreciative of the peer reviewers who volunteered their time to review submissions alongside conducting their own doctoral research. We would like to thank the Sentio Advisory Board: Professor

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"Life is divided into three terms – that which was, that which is, and that which will be. Let us learn from the past, and the present, to live better in the future."

William Wordsworth

Articles

The 'Articles' section features authors attending to philosophical or theoretical discussion, disseminating findings of empirical research and early-stage ideas, and sharing summaries of book chapters or doctoral theses.

Reflecting on 'Tradition' as a 'Hollow Concept' in Contemporary Anthropology and Beyond

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Abstract

'Tradition' is a widely used and rarely defined term that sits at the heart of anthropology and across the social sciences. Drawing on the established idea of 'hollow categories', this paper frames 'tradition' as a 'hollow concept', a definitionally and discursively 'empty' concept that takes on meaning through context, usage, or implied oppositeness to other terms. With a geographical focus on sub-Saharan Africa, the paper considers how 'tradition' may be held in opposition to 'progress', 'modernity', and 'civilisation' and points to the colonially and racially charged meanings that the tradition concept may conjure up as a result. While more obviously racist descriptors like 'primitive' and 'savage' have been widely abandoned, 'traditional' often takes their place and has thus become a euphemistic way of evoking ideals of Euro-American superiority. The paper argues throughout that we – as anthropologists, social scientists, academics, and people – should use the concept of 'tradition' reflexively and critically, with active attention paid to the ways in which tradition evokes multiple temporalities and is not confined to an ahistorical past.

Keywords: *post-colonial/decolonial anthropology, tradition, hollow concept, progress, modernity*

"Tradition"

Noun

1a: an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behaviour (such as a religious practice or a social custom)

1b: a belief or story or body of beliefs or stories relating to the past that are commonly accepted as historical though not verifiable

2: the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction

3: cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions

4: characteristic manner, method, or style"

(Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023)

Introduction

'Tradition' is a widely used and rarely defined term that sits at the heart of anthropology and across the social sciences. It is also a common word in everyday conversation, well known enough not to cause confusion or miscommunication. Due to this familiarity, 'tradition' is often used in academic contexts without first clarifying the exact meanings of the term. Whether talking about intellectual traditions or cultural ones, authors often take for-granted our shared understanding of 'tradition', and thus "the term carries unspecified assumptions" (Shanklin, 1981, p.71). Beyond this, traditions can be intangible, meaning that they are hard to isolate enough to define – "people would not know their tradition, for they simply lived in it" (Kuligowski, 2014, p.323).

Building on Ardener's notion of 'hollow categories' (1989), this paper explores (mis)uses of 'tradition' in anthropology by framing it as a 'hollow concept', a definitionally and discursively 'empty' idea that takes on meaning through context, usage, or implied oppositeness to other terms. I critique the ways in which tradition is framed as the antithesis of modernity, progress, and/or civilisation, concluding that unreflexively using tradition perpetuates harmful and racially charged colonial stereotypes. Rather than delimiting the discussion chronologically, I primarily draw on anthropological literature with a geographical focus on sub-Saharan Africa because of the over-association of a homogenised 'Africa' with undifferentiated 'traditions'. As noted by Mozambican sociologist Élisio Macamo, the two terms have become so intertwined that they are often treated as synonymous: "in other words, what is African is traditional because Africa is traditional anyway" (2009, p.65). Throughout, I argue that the concept of tradition can only be "good to think with" (Lévi-Strauss, 1962, p.89) if we use it reflexively and with an attentiveness to the colonial echoes that may fill its conceptual hollowness.

Tradition as a Hollow Concept

Edwin Ardener developed the concept of 'hollow categories' while working with the Kole people in Cameroon to conceptualize the ways in which group membership relied on "different criteria at different times" (1989, p.69). The idea of 'hollow categories' emphasises the situational, fluid, and mutable qualities that arise when thinking about ethnic groups and their identity formation processes. In this view, hollow categories are able "to be filled with substantive content when the occasion demands" (Dixon, 1991, p.59), becoming more or less semantically rigid and full depending on context. Owing to their taxonomic emptiness, the meaning of hollow categories is often made clear through assertions of what they are not, rather than what they are. As a result, ethnic groups' identity processes and narratives

often centralize another group as their key 'Other'. Anthropologist Dimitrios Theodossopoulos demonstrates this in his work, using hollow categories to show that Greek conceptualisations of 'the Turk' are definitional through opposition, and that "the categories of the Greeks and the Turks are equally as hollow and indefinite as several other categories set in opposition" (2006, p.4). By attributing qualities and meanings to the undifferentiated 'Other' category of 'the Turk' and then situating the Greek Self in stark contrast to this, the two identities are established in a binary framework which causes the category of 'the Greek' to take on meanings of what it is not, and thus, implicitly, what it is. In his later work with the Emberá indigenous community in Panama, Theodossopoulos (2016) again points to the construction of binaries, noting that Western logics often position 'indigeneity' and 'modernity' as mutually exclusive opposites. He coins the term 'indigenous-and-modern' in order to demonstrate how clothing, traditions, and people can be both indigenous and modern at once: "modernity and indigeneity – with all their permeable, ever-changing connotations – do not exist in isolation from each other" (2016, p.184). The 'hollowness' of these concepts does not mean that they are lacking in meaning, but rather have enough taxonomical space to adopt meanings situationally. This becomes potentially problematic because of human tendencies towards binary thinking, as 'tradition' – or 'indigeneity', in Theodossopoulos' case (2016) – becomes the foil for concepts which are prioritised or privileged within certain worldviews.

In this paper, the idea of taxonomical hollowness is applied to concepts, rather than to categories – hollow concepts lack semantic certainty, are seldom defined, and can carry numerous associations depending on context. 'Tradition' is a prime example of this hollowness which, again, "does not denote meaninglessness, but ampleness in terms of taxonomic space" (Theodossopoulos, 2006, p.4), space which is able to be filled as needed. Folklorist Simon Bronner speaks to this variability (2000, p.96):

> *"If tradition… is indeed both invented and inherited, individual and social, stable and changing, oral and written, of past and of present, of time and space, about both authority and freedom, then what does it exclude?"*

Here, the hollowness of tradition allows for enough space that it can even take on seemingly opposing qualities, which we can perhaps think of as the concept 'accommodating' multiple meanings rather than meaning those things in and of itself. This paper is structured in line with the idea of opposite pairings, considering the implications and problems of 'tradition' when opposed to modernity, progress, and civilisation, in turn. The vacuity of the tradition concept imbues it with a situational semantic volatility and slipperiness that leaves it at risk of largely existing as a foil for colonial ideals. As a result, 'tradition' cannot be assumed to be "a

neutral and self-standing concept" (Finnegan, 1991, p.110). The idea of conceptual 'hollowness' allows us to think about the ways in which this could happen.

Tradition in Opposition to Progress and/or Modernity

Particularly in Euro-American contexts, 'tradition' and the preservation of traditional values are increasingly positioned as conflicting with progressive politics or modernization. As such, 'tradition' has become "a loaded keyword of culture and society" (Bronner, 2000, p.95) that obstructs "virtually any innovation" (Williams, 1983, p.318-320 as in Bronner, 2000, p.96). When 'tradition' is conceptualized as the opposite – or even, the enemy – of progress and/or modernity, it thus comes to mean something static, ahistorical, and "immune to conflict or change" (Scott, 2013, p.2). This framing is predicated upon a Western view of time and history that is unidirectional, linear, and irreversible (Bevernage, 2011:2). For this reason, Pierotti argues that understandings of 'tradition' as "unchanged or perhaps timeless" (2018, p.301) are incompatible with "indigenous traditions [which] do not assume progress, but are always ready for change in the environment" (2018, p.302).

The ideas of social progress and modernization are fraught with cultural specificities: what qualifies as progress? Whose vision of modernity are we working towards? What direction(s) of change are considered to be progress? Why does a society have to modernize at all? The terms 'progress' and 'modernity' also have a certain hollowness to them, which enables them to be manipulated and applied in different ways, for different purposes, and in line with different values. Where tradition is positioned as an obstacle to progress and/or modernity, "tradition could represent perpetuation of the political and social status quo" (Bronner, 2000, p.95), including whatever social inequalities and injustices that this status quo entails. This view of tradition as static and unchanging fails to capture all of the active processes that engage with, maintain, and invoke tradition: "tradition is not a body of knowledge, but a process… traditions are chosen and adapted, not merely followed" (Bronner, 2000, p.91-94). Furthermore, the very idea that 'tradition' is incompatible with 'progress' or 'modernity' already indicates a point of interface between them, as "a consciousness of tradition arose primarily only in those historical situations where people were aware of change" (Graburn, 2000, p.6). Here, I show the changeability of tradition across time by referring to Scott's development of a black radical tradition (2013), to *Les Maîtres Fous* (Rouch, 1955), and to Shaw's ethnographic work on Temne witchcraft (1982, 1996, 1997, 2001), all of which demonstrate the fact that "the mobilization of a tradition has a radical potential" (Lewis, 2018, p.28).

Commenting on the tendency to view traditions as static or stagnant, anthropologist David Scott writes (2013, p.2):

"Indeed, some would argue that tradition does not belong in the same semantic universe as radical, appearing as it does to be the very reverse of subversion or transgression. What relation between past, present, and future does a tradition comprehend? What notion of temporality and spatiality does it map?… [E]ven in our attempts to disengage from the claims of tradition we are nevertheless oriented by it."

Here, Scott not only highlights the temporal potential of 'tradition' – in that it inevitably conjures up ideas of the past – but also points specifically to the ways in which that historical quality becomes an orienting force in the present. So, the 'pastness' of tradition is not relegated to the past but is in fact characterised by its ability to inform present-day thinking about ways to move into and towards the future. Thus, 'tradition' is not static or opposed to progress but rather is deeply interlinked with the ways in which we learn, we organise, and we imagine. In Scott's discussion of a black radical tradition, the term 'tradition' refers also to an intellectual tradition – as would 'anthropological tradition', 'ethnographic tradition', 'Marxist tradition', and so on – and thus invokes a particular theoretical, philosophical, and/or methodological foundation, which both situates and legitimises the voices of authors within this tradition. In this sense, the specific past invoked by the use of the term 'tradition' is directly involved with present-day valuations and perceptions of scholars, their scholarship, and their scholarly voice – if someone can be positioned within a particular intellectual tradition, then their views and work can be interpreted and understood in light of that. Thus, the tradition informs the author's work, while the author simultaneously reproduces that tradition.

Jean Rouch's controversial short film, *Les Maîtres Fous* ('The Mad Masters'), documents 'traditional' hauka spirit possession rites performed in Ghana. Hauka was an anti-colonial resistance movement that transplanted colonial authority figures into supposedly 'pre-colonial' rituals and "ritually stole their powers" (Ferguson, 2002, p.555): performers would "assume a series of identities associated with the colonial world… Governor, General, Major, Corporal of the Guard" (Henley, 2006, p.732). This directly challenges characterizations of tradition as something unchanging and confined to the past – in fact, some spirits were explicitly tied to specific people and time periods, such as "the identity of a certain Madame Salma, the wife of an early twentieth-century French colonial official in Niger" (2006, p.372). At the time of release, Rouch's film was widely criticised and was even banned in Niger and Ghana (Ferguson, 2002, p.555). Evidently then, traditions are able to have a profound impact on the present-day, especially when actively integrating contemporary symbols into historical practices, perhaps amplifying the significance of the traditions by enhancing their relevance to performers' current circumstances.

Similarly, Rosalind Shaw's ethnographic work demonstrates the integration of distinctly 'modern' motifs into 'traditional' Temne witchcraft beliefs in Sierra Leone (1982, 1996, 1997, 2001). Shaw describes *ro-seron*, 'the place of witches', as a technologically abundant metropolis: "a preposterous city where skyscrapers adjoin houses of gold and diamonds; where Mercedes-Benzes are driven… and where witch airports dispatch witch planes" (1997, p.857). The 'modern' imagery here speaks to well-established views of witches as selfish and willing to harm others for their own benefit, but with 'updated' symbols of power, status, and wealth, such as diamonds and expensive cars. Temne witchcraft also features a number of other motifs that can be tied into specific time periods and thus disprove ahistorical views of tradition: the most powerful witches have "witch-guns" (1982, p.52-53), witchcraft accusations produced slaves for the Atlantic slave trade (1997, p.863-865), were-animals harvest human organs in a commentary on extractive violence (2001, p.50-51), and 'demonic insurgencies and power' played key roles in kickstarting the 1991-2002 civil war (1996). Among the Temne, images and themes associated with major historical shifts – such as colonisation, slavery, and 'modernisation' – became woven into the fabric of traditional belief, adding to the chronicle of Temne collective history. Most prevalently, symbols of wealth and violence speak to a history of commodification and forced transportation within the slave trade, when "people had, in fact, been reduced to consumable entities and exchanged for foreign wealth" (1997, p.861). In this light, many of the concerns highlighted by 'traditional' Temne witchcraft were/are tied to current affairs.

Tradition, then, is neither static nor stagnant, and is not inherently opposed to progress or modernity. In fact, invocations of tradition appear to contribute directly to radical change and thought, serving as intellectual, practical, and socio-political forms of resistance and self-legitimization, which can bolster efforts for progress or modernization. 'Progress' is also a contentious word when invoked in that way, because at its simplest, it refers to change in a direction that is desirable for the speaker/author. For example, my vision of progress would be incredibly different from that of someone falling on the other side of the political spectrum. Likewise, 'modernization' refers to change in line with a particular vision of modernity, and my ideals for a 'modern world' would be vastly different from that of someone with values and dreams that differ from my own. Progress and modernity are thus also hollow concepts to a degree, deriving much of their meaning from the specific positionality, subjectivity, and values of the invoker. This means that characterizations of tradition as the opposite of progress and modernity are even more hollow and, as a result, even more susceptible to being deployed as cloaking devices to justify restrictive policies, conceal 'divide and rule' tactics, and conjure up support for conservative political figures who base their manifestoes on 'preserving traditional values'. The hollowness of tradition, amplified by

the hollowness of the progress and modernity it supposedly opposes, thus creates a socio-political smokescreen that is increasingly deployed in politics across North America and Europe.

Tradition in Opposition to Civilization – or, 'Traditional' as Euphemism for 'Primitive'

The final opposing pair considered within this paper – 'tradition' versus 'civilization' – is the most problematic, setting up a binary between 'civilized' and 'uncivilized', 'developed' and 'simple', 'advanced' and 'primitive'. Such framings were common in early anthropology, when as part of the anthropological mission to "stud[y] 'primitive' and 'traditional' society, the two terms [were] taken as synonymous" (Finnegan, 1991, p.108). The hollowness of 'tradition' allows for a certain amount of conceptual slippage, making it possible for 'traditional' to be used as a less controversial replacement when the discipline began rejecting more obviously racist and colonialist language, such as "primitive", "tribal" (Ekeh, 1990, p.662-663), "unlettered" (Bronner, 2000, p.91), "simple" (Lowie, 1936, p.ix), "savage" (Ferretti, 2017, p.113; cf. Trouillot, 2003), "uncivilised and barbaric" (Scott, 2009, p.336). Previously commonplace, these terms are now relegated to the confines of inverted commas, a grammatical trend which "indicates the shaky and unsure ground upon which they rest" (Dozier, 1955, p.187).

While these terms are no longer in use, the binary of 'civilized-uncivilized' is still present, a colonial echo that is conjured up when Euro-American social scientists use 'traditional' to describe certain societies or beliefs that differ from "more advanced societies like our own" (Peristiany, 1954, p.39 as in Hallpike, 1993, p.31). The view that African societies 'lacked civilization' was one of the major justifications of the colonial enterprise, drawing on Euro-American understandings of 'progress' and 'modernity' to argue that African communities were somehow lagging behind, populated by "primitive people who impeded progress and needed to be civilised and brought into modernity, or as savage beings who needed to be subdued" (Ramírez, 2020, p.155). The evolutionist socio-political hierarchies constructed through this type of language were used to moralize colonialism. Masking economic and political motivations, literature at the time points to a widespread view that Euro-Americans had a 'duty' to 'civilize' their colonial subjects. This is evident in Rudyard Kipling's poem, *The White Man's Burden*, which refers to "new-caught, sullen peoples, // Half devil and half child" (1899). As observed by Canadian studies scholar Samantha Stevens, this line captures "the imperial sense of salvation, of saving these people from their devilry and their childish innocence" (2020, p.83). This logic of saviorism was explicitly couched in racial terms and served to legitimize and justify colonial violence against people across sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere.

While explicitly colonialist rhetoric is less widespread now, colonial echoes still follow the term 'tradition'. Many contemporary forms of discrimination derive from views that frame anything 'traditional' and 'African' as 'uncivilized', whether this is the view that "natural afro hair is unkempt, excessive, and unprofessional" (Rashidi-Zakuani et al., 2020) or that African American Vernacular English is "incomprehensible" (King & Kinzler, 2020) to white Americans, who view it as "is less acceptable, less intellectual, and less respectable" (Chung, 2019). Whenever there are conversations about who does or does not qualify as 'civilized', these are simultaneously also conversations about who has the authority to determine the criteria for civility. In the same vein, the hollowness of concepts like tradition, progress, modernity, and civilization enables those with authority to determine their meanings and connotations in line with the interests of a particular social group. Within this context, 'tradition' can quickly become a euphemism for racially charged terms that echo colonialist logics. Although 'tradition' is often a valid and appropriate word to use, it is important to remember the historical baggage of the term, its conceptual hollowness, and the resulting definitional slipperiness.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have shared a number of thoughts and examples relating the conceptual hollowness of 'tradition' to its potential for perpetuating colonial views. Although I have focused on the negatives, I am not proposing that we banish 'tradition' from our vocabulary. I do however think it is important to start actively reflecting on the use of such a term and to do so we need to start to explicitly acknowledge that 'traditional' does not mean ahistorical, static, or primitive, and that 'tradition' does not exist in strict opposition to progress, modernity, or civilization. Instead, we should view traditions, or traditional practices and beliefs, as bodies of knowledge that have been accumulated over time, passed down from generation to generation, gathering wisdom and weight through specific cultural and historical events. In this perspective, lessons learned in the past are able to inform present-day decision-making about our visions for the future. The 'tradition' concept can thus move beyond a stagnating relegation to the past into a multi-directional reframing of the relationship between temporalities, communities, and knowledge.

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Adult autistic identification: Acknowledging temporality and the role of narratives in autism research

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Abstract

Autistic identification in adulthood frequently involves an evaluation of past lived experiences leading to a gradual understanding of autistic identity. Considering temporality in relation to this process enables us to interpret the complex impact of this search for agency and identity over time. However, there has been a historic lack of autistic narratives in autism research. This paper argues that impactful autism research (as defined by autistic people) requires the inclusion of participatory autistic narrative experiences and identity realignment in social research to understand the complex dimensions of autistic self-construction over time. This has the potential to have a positive impact on our analyses of autistic resonance and sense of self. This paper will illustrate the complex dimensionality of autistic self-construction, disruption and identity realignment and argue that narrative life story research can help us move beyond medicalised framings of autistic experience and enable increased autistic embodiment of past and present lived experience so that autistic people can reclaim their agency and feel empowered within/by future research.

Keywords: *autistic adults, identity, narrative, temporality, realignment*

Introduction

The last two decades have seen a significant (787%) increase in UK autism diagnoses, with the biggest rise seen in adult diagnoses over the age of 19 and women (Russell et al., 2022). Improved clinical recognition and the gradual expansion in our understanding of differing autistic presentations are among the core reasons underlying the increase in adult autistic identification and diagnosis (Ferri et al., 2018). However, autism has historically been researched through a medical model, ignoring/devaluing subjective lived experience (Rosqvist et al., 2020). Though autism has both bio-medical and social dimensions (Milton & Sims, 2016), diagnostic processes and policies still frequently disregard subjectivities and are primarily informed by majority, non-autistic society (Lewis, 2016), as well as bio-medical models (Grinker, 2015).

Both autism research and services for autistic adults lag far behind those for children (Howlin, 2021) and studies have shown a frequent disconnect between social policies, implementation, and the experience of a late diagnosis (Malik-Soni et al., 2021). Extensive research has shown complex consequences of late autistic diagnosis and the associated realignment of identity and changing perceptions of selfhood (Lai & Szatmari, 2019). These may involve a quest for agency – the capacity and power for an individual to make their own choices and actions (Bagatell, 2007; Cooper et al., 2017), the acceptance of lived experience and recognition of mental health (Cage et al*.,* 2018), as well as the construction of autistic self-identity (Bargiela et al.*,* 2016). These often involve evaluations of an individual's life story and past interactions with surrounding society as well as a growing awareness of the present and potential for future acceptance and embodiment of autistic identity.

Considering temporality, the subjective experience and perception of time, in relation to shifting autistic identity over the course of life, enables interpretations of the complex impact of a search for agency and the embodiment of past, present, and future selves. The concept of "Crip Time" and associated social ableism is one example of terminology that has been utilised to indicate the complexity of disabled experience of time, autistic temporality (Samuels, 2017). However, there is a significant gap in autism research in relation to time and cultural variations on boundaries of temporality (Rubenstein et al., 2019). Inclusion of autistic narratives could contribute to emerging empirical data on meaningful impact and improved future prospects as defined by autistic individuals (Hayes et al., 2018; McConachie et al., 2018). This paper argues that this requires inclusion of participatory autistic narrative experiences and identity realignment in social research on the complex dimensions of autistic self-construction over time.

The complexities of shifting understanding of selfhood
The initial phase of autistic realisation and identification in adulthood can lead to a significant shift in understanding the context and parameters of lived experience. Individual conceptualisations and definitions of self (Harter, 1999) are not static, but a dynamic and complex development influenced by a range of social and psychological factors such as social experiences, cultural norms and values, personal characteristics, and the feedback received from others.

The transition of a subjective sense of self from one perception of identity to another can be challenging and frequently involves evaluation of past and present conceptualisations of one's life story (Lewis, 2016). Runswick-Cole (2014) argues that late diagnosed or self-identifying autistic individuals concurrently accommodate both their past identity as striving for acceptance as a member of neurotypical majority society, and their

post-identification autistic persona. This may incorporate subjective review of how these narratives coincide to experience the past in the present (Bloch, 1977) and the acknowledged contrasting positions across disciplines of differential temporal dimensions in relation to phenomenology and the temporal structure of consciousness (Bourdieu, 1977; Husserl, 1991).

In the liminal period where someone is beginning to explore their autistic identity, it becomes progressively more important for individuals to claim ownership of subjective narrative agency and embody their 'I' over time relative to self and others (Stenning & Rosqvist, 2020). This includes contradictions in their own revelational narrative, the ways the person gradually understands their own position in conflict with surrounding culture, reminiscent of the contrast between ideology and cognition (Robertson, 2009). It also aligns with an expanding definition and intersubjective feeling of the individual's position over time as central for their deepening awareness of understanding.

Reclaiming stigmatised social selves

For many, an autistic diagnosis in adulthood involves reclaiming a social self that has been stigmatised. Due to the socio-cultural perceptions of autism and stigmatisation of autistic behaviour patterns, societal norms frequently view autistic people through social deficits. Hence, autistic individuals often face challenges in terms of acceptance and experience discrimination or exclusion. The stigmatised role is partly established through the disruptions in communication and shared social meanings frequently experienced between autistic individuals and surrounding society (Goffman, 1965). This is also illustrated in Milton's (2012) work on the Double Empathy problem, which suggests that people with different experiences of the world will struggle to empathise with each other when they interact.

Pinker (2017) argues that social stigma has the potential to become an individual's primary self-identifying characteristic, shaping how they understand and define themselves in relation to larger social categories. This results in external expressions of othering, considerations of deviance, stigma, and stereotyping, while internally this impacts the autistic individuals' self-perception and embodiment, as well as creating a disrupted sense of identity. This can be expressed through masking behaviours which attempt to control social impressions, mitigate the risks of stigmatisation, and give expected social performances (Pearson & Rose, 2021). Little attention in research or society is given to the cost and "hidden labour" for the stigmatised individual to make those interactions possible (Scully, 2010). A long-term misalignment between the social and personal spheres can have significant consequences for mental health and well-being. The shift of autistic identification prompts identity negotiation, re-surfacing of potential past trauma, and evaluation of stigma and marginalisation (Coleman-Fountain & McLaughlin, 2013).

These differences between autistic/non-autistic social interactions will often play a role in how people make sense of themselves. Coleman-Fountain and McLaughlin (2013) draw on symbolic interactionist theories to argue that "the everyday interactions and the stories we tell within them and about them are important spaces and narratives through which impairment... is produced, informing self-identity and also broader dynamics of power and inequality". This relates to the "ontological insecurity about identity" - in the sense of losing a sense of self and agency - of autistic identification disruption in relation to interactions with others and social context (Gergen, 2015). This disruption refers to the sense of uncertainty and instability created by significant changes in an individual's life. Their previous narrative may no longer fit their current reality (Plummer, 2019). This can lead autistic people to re-evaluate their life story, and to re-construct their sense of self in a way that more closely aligns with their current experience and circumstances. This needs to be acknowledged in contemporary autism research.

The benefits of affirming autistic identity

The identity realignment centred around autistic traits and experiences as a result of late-stage identification or diagnosis can be a source of pride and self-affirmation. Having an explanation for the difference of their subjective lived experience allows people to recognise and identify their traits and challenges in a context that makes sense (Farahar, 2021). This has the potential to increase appreciation and acceptance of the alternate communication, interactions, sensory and perceptions, not the stigmatised person created by surrounding society. Late diagnosed autistic individuals have described the relief of no longer framing their life histories as failed members of a majority culture (Botha et al., 2022). They may structure their lives into 'pre-identification' and 'post-identification' phases. The lens of what can be considered disrupted or discovered identity (Frank, 1995) provides new ways for each person to see themselves and their place in the surrounding majority culture in both a cyclical and linear fashion (Seers & Hogg, 2021).

This has increased a focus on self-affirming collective identity and culture within the autistic community. Indeed, the term "community" reflects some perception of ideological affective solidarity (Frost & Meyer, 2012). This solidarity relates to the positive impact of a sense of autistic emotional connection as well as cognitive affective components of identification and community, frequently not acknowledged in pathologizing autism research. Farahar (2021) highlights the development of autistic culture through the social paradigm of neurodivergent acceptance and acknowledgement. This cultural focus also defines an autistic individual by their shared experience as a minority group beyond the history of their subjective time-lineated experience, with the potential to develop positive future identity through understanding, acceptance and support (Botha & Frost, 2020). There are significant

benefits to exploring these complex issues through intersectional participatory research, as the collaborative approach involves active engagement   with community members. These include increased research relevance and validity as experiences are drawn directly from the individuals, as well as the expansion of participant empowerment (Seers & Hogg, 2021) and capacity to identify and address issues arising from the research.

The need for inclusion of autistic narratives in research

An increasing amount of literature highlights that it is both epistemologically and ethically problematic if autistic voices are not included in autism research (Chown et al., 2017; Robertson, 2009). The frequent lack of acknowledgment and recognition of inequality in autistic/non-autistic interactions requires a centring of autistic narrative experience as a methodology, to consider how both interactions and life stories illustrate perspectives of social norms and collective stories (Coleman-Fountain & McLaughlin, 2013). Participatory narrative life story research of differentiated embodiment enables analysis of inequality, conflict and change over time. Plummer argues that telling stories considers, "both personal power that allows for stories to be told or withheld; and social power which creates spaces or closes down spaces for stories to be voiced," (1983, p.2). As such, life stories produce counter narratives to the stigmatising denial of an expressive space to define an embodied self and identity over time.

This viewpoint is echoed by Arthur Frank (1995) in his recognition of the value and legitimacy of creating space for those who have been marginalised to tell their own stories of temporal, time-sensitive development to assert their identities. He notes that storytelling can be a powerful tool for resisting marginalisation, as it allows individuals to create a sense of narrative agency and empowerment in the face of adversity. Narrative agency and engagement with storytelling – your own and those of others – can become crucial to identification and connection. This is especially the case when you specifically feel othered from the societal narratives around you and have primarily encountered externalised constructions of autistic experience in autism research. Story-telling creates space for diverse perspectives and experiences to create more inclusive and equitable systems and practices that prioritise the needs and life stories of all individuals, regardless of their background or identity.

The differing forms of narrative expression - of identity development, past recollections, reviewing of mental states or feelings - can be a way to gain control over the individual's life and evaluate life story positionality. It enables embodiment of a narrative that makes subjective sense and conveys the experience of past, present and future realignment. Through life stories, individuals reshape memories and make sense of the past in relation to the context of the present (Samuel & Thompson, 2021). This can be a means of

reclaiming agency, control and empowerment in the face of overwhelming disruption. The individual may understand past experiences as having limitations and challenges as well as potential for future growth and transformation. Hence, they become personal resources, as they "form a point of connection between inner and outer worlds," (Plummer, 2019, p.87). In this sense, personal stories link to a wide variety of broader value systems, with the power to influence social change, even though these would be negotiated within social processes and the associated relational power dynamics.

Conclusion

While the initial liminal phase of autistic identification can include searching for new forms of meaning, understanding, connection and identity over time, the realignment is frequently a positive and empowering experience. This paper has outlined some of the complexities involved in the multi-faceted negotiations of agency and embodiment of autistic acknowledgment. It concludes that participatory and emancipatory narrative research, which contemplates temporal perspectives of adult autistic experience, has the potential to have a positive impact on our analyses and to create a deeper awareness of autistic resonance and sense of self. This provides potential for an improved understanding of autistic lived experience. It moves beyond medicalised and pathologized framings of autistic experience and enables increased autistic embodiment of past and present lived experience, in order to reclaim agency and lead to future empowerment.

Acknowledgements

Author Background

Katrine A. Callander is a PhD student of Social Policy at University of Kent, UK. She is a late diagnosed autistic researcher with multi-disciplinary experience in academic and professional fields across journalism, editorial, anthropology, social policy and autistic qualitative research. Conducting qualitative research into trauma, support and identity among late diagnosed autistic women with experience of sexual assault and gender-based violence to increase visibility of marginalised autistic voices.

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Towards an 'Engaging' Post-Pandemic Workplace: Office, Hybrid…?

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Abstract

The recent global acceleration of hybrid work patterns among knowledge-intensive organizations due to the COVID-19 pandemic has substantially changed our understanding of the physical workplace environment. This new (hybrid) physical context of work to some extent may thus challenge the pre-pandemic research on work-related issues. The article critically examines and discusses whether, and how, the pre-pandemic research on both the physical workplace environment and employee engagement can sufficiently address the post-pandemic hybrid workplace context. The paper draws upon studies from several disciplines, such as organizational behaviour, environmental psychology, real estate, and interior architecture, to fully embrace the complexity of hybrid workplaces. This paper provides insights into how the transition to the hybrid workplace can contribute to more sustainable employee engagement in knowledge-intensive organizations.

Keywords: *physical workplace environment, employee engagement, COVID-19, hybrid workplace, knowledge-intensive organizations*

Introduction

Employee engagement is a psychological construct that has been of interest to both researchers and businesses for a few decades now. The recognition by global organizations that employee engagement is a key determinant of their success, along with reported evidence of employee engagement in raising performance and productivity across the UK economy (Rayton et al., 2012), signal the continuing relevance of employee engagement. Unfortunately, according to recent studies, only 20% of the global workforce is actively engaged (Gallup, 2022a) and low engagement had been consistently reported among European and American employees (Attridge, 2009).

Knowledge-intensive organizations (KIOs) are organizations whose main activity is based on the employment of knowledge (Alvesson, 2004), such as IT firms, finance organizations, and management consultancies. Although all types of conventional office-

based jobs entail a mix of physical, social, and mental work, it is the "perennial processing of non-routine problems that require non-linear and creative thinking that characterizes knowledge work" (Reinhardt et al., 2011, p. 150). In this light, knowledge-intensive work is essential for exploring what drives productivity and economic growth (OECD, 1996). Knowledge-intensive services already constituted 61.20% of all service exports in 2012 (European Commission, 2014). Knowledge-intensive work is therefore crucial in achieving a key aspect of the "UK Industrial Strategy": becoming the world's most innovative economy (HM Government, 2017).

Creating healthy workplaces with engaged and productive employees within KIOs is paramount in achieving this aim. In the last two decades, both academics and industry research have demonstrated a considerable interest in the development of the physical workplace environment aiming to contribute to organizational outcomes in, among others, productivity, performance, and employee engagement (Kegel, 2017). The specific focus was put on supporting the knowledge-intensive businesses – the main clients of the global corporate prime office real estate sector (Cooke et al., 2022). A large body of cross-disciplinary research has been developed to justify the relevance of the indoor (office) environmental quality for knowledge-intensive work and the health and well-being of office buildings' occupants (Chadburn et al., 2017; Chan et al., 2007; Clements-Croome, 2004; Kwallek et al., 2007; Vischer, 2007; Wyon, 2004). For example, some environmental psychology studies reported the relevance of biophilic design for mental recovery, air quality for cognitive performance, and lightning for better focus on work, among others.

In the light of the accelerated shift towards hybrid work patterns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the above considerations, underpinned by the assumption that the knowledge work's outcomes are solely affected by the corporate office environment, have been revisited (Fiorentino et al., 2022). It is now clear that the hybrid workplace, defined as conducting work tasks in several physical locations during a working week, has been successfully adopted as a "default workplace" for the majority of global knowledge-intensive organizations (Future Forum Pulse, 2022). In the hybrid workplace, employees share their working time between a variety of physical locations such as their homes, the office, and other locations (Deloitte, 2021; Gillen et al., 2021; Teevan et al., 2021). The hybridization of the workplaces, physical and virtual, is now expanding to the wider urban realm environment (Surma et al., 2021, p.4). These dynamics signal the need to revisit the traditional conceptualizations of both the physical workplace environment and employee engagement.

Therefore, this article seeks to uncover a new, additional viewpoint that could aid other researchers in understanding the relevance of the physical workplace environment for employee engagement, defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is

characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). It discusses the link between the physical workplace environment and employee engagement and how it has evolved in the relevant studies in the field. Firstly, it summarizes the pre-pandemic studies that have focused on full-time corporate office work. Secondly, it explores new insights that emerged whilst approaching hybrid work scenarios as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirdly, it highlights possible future research directions. This study suggests that greater collaboration between academics working across different fields, such as real estate, organizational behaviour, environmental psychology, and city planning, and knowledge-intensive organizations can shed new light on what constitutes an engaging workplace for knowledge workers.

Employee Engagement in Full-Time Office Work

There are two main conceptualizations of employee engagement in organizational behaviour research: "employee engagement" (Kahn, 1990) and "work engagement" (Schaufeli et al., 2002). While much research does not adequately differentiate the two concepts, some academics suggest that they should be treated as distinct concepts due to their distinct origins and the contents they measure (Kosaka & Sato, 2020). For example, "work engagement" is generally understood as the relationship between an employee and work, while "employee engagement" is perceived in the wider context of the relationship between an employee and work and the workplace. The preference for using the term (and understanding) of "employee engagement" is more visible in industry research (see for example Gallup, 2022b).

The research on the relationship between employee engagement and the physical workplace environment is largely focused on the office workplace environment, which is perceived as the dominant place where knowledge work occurs (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2020; Carter et al., 2020; Feige et al., 2013; McCunn & Gifford, 2012; Roskams & Haynes, 2021). Studies in environmental psychology suggest that the office indoor environmental quality, such as air ventilation, biophilic design, temperature, and views, is largely responsible for health and well-being of buildings' occupants (Chadburn et al., 2017; Chan et al., 2007; Clements-Croome, 2004; Kwallek et al., 2007; Vischer, 2007; Wyon, 2004). This, in turn, results in better financial outcomes for organizations via more productive and better-performing employees (World Green Building Council, 2014). This hypothesis was explored by both academic and industry studies in several disciplines and has had important practical implications on the contemporary design of global cities, such as London and New York, informing the way we live and work. For example, the prime quality office real estate is predominantly offered in core business hubs (i.e., central business district–CBD) located in central parts of large urban agglomerations such as Manhattan, Canary Wharf, and the City

of London. However, the full-time office work in such workplaces is often related to the long daily commutes of those living in suburban locations and may lead to disengagement.

The strong focus on the office workplace is also visible in organizational behaviour research. For example, organizational constructs are largely defined by the quality of the social relationships at work, such as with supervisors, colleagues, and co-workers, which usually happen in face-to-face office environments (Bakker et al., 2014; Kumar & Sia, 2012; Osborne & Hammoud, 2017; Rana et al., 2014).

Employee Engagement in a Hybrid Workplace

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated new work trends among global knowledge-intensive organizations, most notably in terms of performing work tasks in several physical locations within a working week. This shift has contributed to new insights into the challenges related to remote work (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021), its effectiveness (Hickman & Robison, 2020), comfort (Carmona et al., 2020), satisfaction (Yang et al., 2021), productivity and well-being (Russo et al., 2021), and a general effect on employee engagement (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2020). A hybrid workplace has become associated with increased flexibility, reduced carbon footprint, labour-cost optimization, and increased employee satisfaction. Alongside the benefits of working from home, traditional co-located work assures smoother coordination, informal networking, stronger cultural socialisation, greater creativity, and face-to-face collaboration (Mortensen & Haas, 2021). Workplace flexibility and environmental conditions of home offices were found to be positively associated with productivity, satisfaction with working from home, and work-life balance (Yang et al., 2021). Following latest recent findings that flexible work positively affects work engagement in the hybrid workplace (Naqshbandi et al., 2023), hybrid work modes may also provide other benefits. For example, home workplace may be more suited to conduct focused work while office workplace may be more conducive to collaboration.

The above new trends were quickly and widely adopted by global businesses worldwide (Gillen et al., 2021, Deloitte, 2021, Teevan et al., 2021), impacting office markets and corporate real estate (Cooke et al., 2022). A global shift from "5-day in the office" to fully remote work from home has unexpectedly encouraged many organizations and the real estate sector to think differently about what constitutes a workplace environment and how this workplace ecosystem impacts organizational outcomes (Boland et al., 2020). The generally positive working-from-home employee experience (Barrero et al., 2021) has been accompanied by positive statements made by the most prominent global agencies, projecting a permanent transition to a "total workplace ecosystem" (Cushman & Wakefield, 2020b) with "adaptive workplaces" (Deloitte, 2021) underpinned by a high-quality urban realm to fully embrace "workplacemaking" as a whole (IPUT & ARUP, 2020).

Many employees nowadays who work in the knowledge economy sectors split their working environments between different physical locations. How are the parameters of employee engagement, defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.74), impacted by workplace hybridization since the pandemic? And how can we reconcile physical properties of real estate across the workplace ecosystem with an effort to address well-being in the workplace (Surma et al., 2021)?

The new industry-projected workplace ecosystem scenarios, which have been developed by leading global providers of consulting (e.g., Deloitte), commercial real estate (e.g., Cushman & Wakefield; CBRE; and IPUT), and design, planning and engineering (e.g., ARUP), involve both physical and virtual workplaces (Gillen et al., 2021). The increased popularity of hybrid workplaces, whereby an employee may work across a network of different work locations (Cambon, 2021), encourages a rethink of the current arrangements for employee engagement and its unpreceded impact on organizations and their employees (Future Forum Pulse, 2022). Considerations of different employee engagement metrics and industry approaches to monitoring workplace design and management may help businesses and their employees adapt to the emergence of this "New Normal" i.e., blended virtual and physical work environments underpinned by digital technology across the office, home, and/or "third place" work environments (Deloitte, 2021). There is also a growing need to facilitate this apparent shift towards hybrid work as well as of the formulation of innovative digital solutions that can support collaboration in an ever more diverse and volatile labour market (International Labour Organisation, 2023).

After the initial "home versus office" debate, there has been growing evidence of "hybrid" as the best option for all (Naor et al., 2021; Teevan et al., 2021; Williamson & Colley, 2022), including the youngest workforce (Pataki-Bittó, 2021). The flexibility of hybrid working was also identified as a game-changer for those with caring responsibilities (Wyatt et al., 2022). Therefore, we should re-examine the role of the office post-pandemic to better accommodate a hybrid workforce (Gillen et al., 2021; Orel, 2022; Vinopal, 2022). Considering the key role that the real estate industry sector plays in providing global standards on how to create and evaluate the office workplace environment, we can argue that a new set of guidelines is needed for knowledge organizations to operate successfully in an engaging hybrid workplace ecosystem.

Employee Engagement in Future Workplace: Physical versus Virtual?

We need to frame our discussion on creating engaging workplaces within the wider impact of the built and natural environment on human health and well-being (Altomonte et al., 2020;

Hartig et al., 2014; IWBI, 2021; Loder, 2020; Ostner, 2021). Given that the assumption that the centrally located office is the predominant place where knowledge work occurs has been challenged in the post-pandemic reality, we can expect future cities and workplaces to be planned around the concepts of stronger compactness, decentralization and greater availability (e.g., a "15-min city"). This will ensure greater connectivity within a network of workplaces, underpinned by equal access to the city's infrastructure and amenities (e.g., shops, parks, and entertainment). This suggests that employee vigour, dedication, and absorption will greatly rely on both the human and cities' conditions, and that the relationship between them will inform sustainable employee engagement.

Although the connectivity between employee engagement, health, and well-being in the physical workplace environment has already been explored on the office scale (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2020; Carter et al., 2020; Feige et al., 2013; McCunn & Gifford, 2012; Roskams & Haynes, 2021), it remains a question how the development of the virtual reality and digital technologies will impact on employee engagement. For example, some studies show that using electronic devices in green spaces substantially counteracts the attention enhancement benefits of green spaces (Jiang et al., 2019). On the one hand, knowledge-intensive work requires employees to use technological advances to perform complex cognitive tasks. Another view suggests that greater availability and access to new technologies may have both positive and negative impacts on employee vigour, dedication, and absorption (Jha et al., 2019). Therefore, more transdisciplinary research is needed to explore the phenomenon of employee engagement in the future workplace.

This article highlights that wider adoption of hybrid workplace scenarios in the future can significantly contribute to better employee engagement in knowledge-intensive organizations. However, this is not a straightforward task, considering the complexity of the transition, the number of actors involved, and still limited research on hybrid workplaces. Despite some significant shortcomings, some workplaces in the fields of academic and industry have been transitioning toward modes of work that are more flexible, digital and physically distributed across a workplace ecosystem. These developments are likely to inform employee engagement levels across the whole ecosystem. Additionally, the growing importance of the home workplace should encourage the global workplace industry to re-evaluate current workplace standards or metrics more broadly. For example, the available on-the-market certification schemes ensuring office workplace quality needs to be framed more widely to include residential, district, and city-scale developments. This joint approach will holistically contribute to more sustainable employee engagement–with a greater awareness of employees' subjective well-being leading to "full engagement"–a broader

conception of engagement beyond "a commitment-based view" to a more "human-oriented" holistic sense of thriving and well-being (Robertson & Cooper, 2010).

Discussion and Conclusion

This article has elucidated how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the trajectory of academic and industrial thinking of an "engaging" workplace environment, pushing boundaries for more transdisciplinary research in the future. This research should touch on, among others, organizational behaviour, urban planning, real estate, management, environmental psychology and sustainability transition studies.

Firstly, the pre-pandemic research which focuses on the office workplace needs to be re-examined in the context of a more distributed workplace ecosystem. Most workplace-related studies separately investigated either full-time office work or remote work, but the hybrid workplace has remained under-researched. Therefore, we should pay greater attention to the hybrid workplace to better understand the impact of workplace flexibility on employee engagement. Subsequently, further research is needed to comprehensively analyse vigour, dedication, and absorption in different physical locations on the city scale. Secondly, we need to further examine how specific management styles can enhance working practices within such a network of workplaces and contribute to better employee engagement. We would likely benefit from more mixed-methods approaches. Further research could investigate different strategic interactions such as how different city planning scenarios are better suited to greater employee engagement and the role of co-working spaces in cities and towns as a potential for social connection among remote workers. Overall, more transdisciplinary research with various actors, such as city planners, knowledge-intensive organizations, and the real estate industry, could better explain the post-pandemic workplace and its implications on different levels, such as policy, planning, and management.

Although there is a growing, common acceptance of a hybrid workplace, still little is known about the specific assessment criteria of the home workplace and the wider urban ecosystem. Considering the relevance of both environmental and human factors for employee engagement in a hybrid workplace, we need to fully embrace this complexity through an accurate evaluation methodology that addresses the whole workplace ecosystem. This will benefit the formulation of future workplace strategies.

This article suggests that flexible workplace arrangements allow more options for supporting individual needs via "environmental crafting" and contributing to employee engagement (Roskams et al., 2021). This finding is important and may track a higher level of organizational and governmental policy support for a hybrid workplace. The analysis emerging from this study largely follows expectations: that a hybrid workplace is associated

with greater employee flexibility (e.g., improved work-life balance), economic values for employees and organizations (e.g., greater productivity and less commute), and improved employee well-being (e.g., more time for wellness activities). Therefore, the hybrid workplace may substantially contribute to employee engagement by strengthening vigour, dedication, and absorption with work. However, we still require further research to examine whether a hybrid model of work relies on the wider urban quality for its benefits on employee engagement. Future research should focus on reconciling the efforts toward better employee engagement and sustainable real estate, considering the challenges associated with delivering on these two fronts (Surma et al., 2021).

<div align="center">**References**</div>

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Place Branding Within Business Clusters: Development and Future Research

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Abstract

The present article aims to provide an overview of the development of place branding and to discuss business clusters as place brands. Business clusters are agglomerations of different actors of a related and complementary nature within geographical proximity. Whilst shaping a strong brand for a business cluster can help the overall development of such entities, the heterogeneous nature of clusters can make such processes challenging. In the last few decades, both place branding and clusters have played an increasingly important role within policies and strategies to foster economic development at the local, regional, and national level. Existing place branding literature has often over-emphasized the roles of collaboration and stakeholder participation within the place branding process. However, few have examined why and how stakeholders engage in such processes. Moreover, place brand research beyond the field of tourism is scarce and little is known about the dynamics of place branding within clusters. The development of place branding research has shifted to more qualitative research methods, but scholars suggest that this discipline still lacks conceptual clarity due to inconsistent definitions and a weak theoretical foundation. Here, I argue that interdisciplinary cluster studies can provide a fruitful avenue for future research.

Keywords: *Place branding, clusters, stakeholder management, co-creation, regional development*

Introduction

Drawing upon practices and theoretical conceptualisations of branding for products and services, place branding deals with the "associations in the consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place" (Zenker & Braun, 2010, p.1). Initially adopted for more protectionist scopes, for example, in "buy domestic" campaigns, more recent developments of place branding practices have aimed to attract tourists, foreign investors, and new residents a national, regional and city level (Papadopoulos et al., 2016). Similarly, the concept of clusters has become increasingly important for regional development since Porter's seminal work on the Competitive Advantage of Nations (1998). Porter's work (1998) sparked the idea that to compete in the global marketplace, nations
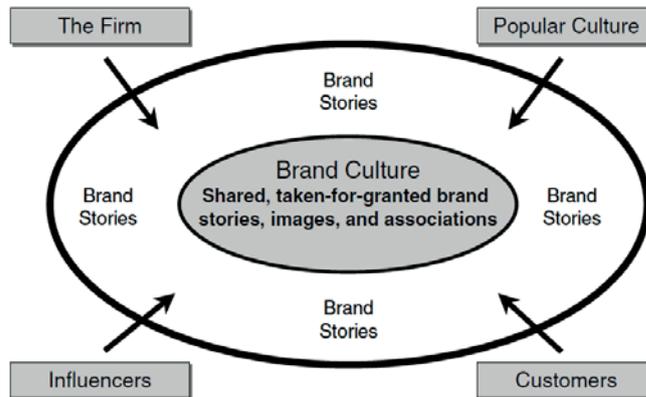
would need to leverage their competitive advantage through a combination of a place's geographical conditions and industrial strategies. The Porterian approach to cluster is still relevant to current industrial policy strategies. For instance, the European Commission (2020) has recently launched a number of initiatives (e.g., ClusterXchange and EUROCLUSTERS) to encourage collaboration among firms, build resilience and boost innovation. To date, there are more than 3000 clusters within the European industrial landscape. As argued by Kasabov and Sundaram (2013) clusters are "specific examples of place brands" (p.538). The emergence of the service-dominant (S-D) logic in marketing has led to a proliferation of studies that emphasize the collaborative nature of the branding process. This approach in turn has been transferred to the domain of place branding (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). According to this new logic, brands are the outcome of interactions between multiple stakeholders. Whilst the development of clusters is often deemed organic and attributed to a place's geographical conditions (Kasabov, 2010), studies have found that place branding and image can play a pivotal role in supporting existing clusters and the creations of new ones (Hafeez et al., 2016). Aiming to better understand the dynamics of place branding within the context of clusters, the present article provides an overview of the development of brand management and cluster branding and what common challenges and opportunities the two fields share, as well as possible directions for future research.

Brand Management and Meaning Co-Creation

If, on the one hand, traditional brand theory views brands as tools controlled by the organizations behind them (Aaker, 1996), more recent approaches (e.g., Hatch and Schultz, 2009; von Wallpach et al., 2017) argue that brands are the result of interactions between various actors such as companies, customers, the media, and the public at large (Holt, 2003). This co-creative understanding of branding is often attributed to the emergence of the so-called service-dominant (S-D) logic of marketing (Merz et al., 2009; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). According to this logic, value is determined in use and by the beneficiary (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). For instance, if once companies tried to instil value by adding meaning to a product through promotion, the S-D logic implies that the value of a certain product or service is determined by what purposes they serve and by how the receiver evaluates those purposes (Merz et al., 2009). According to Holt (2003), brand building is a complex process that is put into action by the firm and accomplished by three more "brand authors" (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Four Brand Authors; Source: Holt (2003)

As shown in Figure 1, each brand author produces their brand-related stories. Once those meanings are widely accepted in society, they become a brand culture (Holt, 2003). However, over the course of the time, the role of branding has not remained stagnant. For instance, in their review of the development of brand management between 1985 to 2006, Heding et al. (2016) identified seven different brand approaches. As shown in Table 1 below, according to the authors, a brand's role can be seen as a communication tool for companies to spread their messages (to passive consumers) in the first period; in the second period, brand approaches were focusing on the receiver, and lastly, they focused on the role of brand understood as platforms that enable societal discourses.

Table 1

The Seven Brand Approaches; Adopted from Heding et al. (2016).

Brand Approaches	Period	Author(s)	Focus
Economic approach	Before 1985	McCarthy (1960)	Company/Sender Focus
The identity approach	Mid-1990s	Hatch and Schultz (1997)	
The customer-based approach	1993	Keller (1993)	Human/Receiver Focus
The personality approach	1997	Aaker (1997)	
The relational approach	1998	Fournier (1998)	
The community approach	2001	Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001)	Cultural/Context Focus
The cultural approach	2002	Holt (2002)	

The observations made by Heding et al. (2016) are also in line with the streams of research concerning corporate branding (e.g., Balmar and Gray, 2003, Hatch and Schultz, 2008), Customer Based Brand Equity (Keller, 1993), co-creation and co-construction (Hatch and Schultz, 2010). This development of brand management has implied a change in the understanding of brands from static tools controlled by organizations that add value to their offerings to dynamic entities that create a sense of belonging among those who shape them. Ultimately, the evolving role of brands from the economic to the cultural approach has also implied a shift from quantitative to more qualitative research methods (Heding et al.2016).

Figure 2

Economic and Cultural approach to brand; Adopted from Heding et al. (2016)

As shown in Figure 2, as opposed to the one-way dialogue (from marketer to consumer) typical of the economic brand approach, the cultural approach to branding becomes a process that shapes culture as a product of the interactions between consumers and marketers. As argued by Holt (2003), brands represent the meanings and stories attached to a specific product or service. However, over the last two decades, the definition of branding has extended beyond the commercial domain, including, for example, NGOs, people, and places (Neumeier, 2015).

Increased by the internet and social media platforms, customers' brand-related interactions potentially contribute to shaping brand meanings either in a positive or a more negative way (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). With the internet, the amount of opportunities for allowing interactions among like-minded individuals have increased and intensified (Vallaster & van Wallpach, 2013). Moreover, these interactions are no longer constrained within geographical boundaries (Schau et al., 2009). The boundaryless aspect of this and the resulting easiness of community building recently has allowed brand communities to quickly gather together critical masses of like-minded brand admirers or detractors (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). This capability to attract a wider range of actors, allows brand communities to accomplish a broader range of brand-related activities such as improving product and service quality, stimulating innovation and identity building (Hatch and

Schultz, 2010; Wallpach et al., 2017). Accordingly, companies increasingly recognise the importance of such interactions. For instance, in their review of LEGO's brand community, Hatch and Schultz (2010), observed that LEGO provides brand fans with resources and opportunities to engage in product innovation. By doing so, companies share control over their brands. Therefore, by providing "(un-)filtered forums" for brand-related discussion, firms do not just gather data about customers but from them (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013; p. 1505). Whilst the academic debate on co-creation of product and service branding is well developed, there has been a paucity of scholarly literature on the place branding mechanisms (Pedeliento & Kavaratzis, 2019). Thus, the discussions of why and how place brands are co-created has been neglected (Giannopoulos et al., 2020). Therefore, to elaborate on the role of place branding in the context of business clusters, we now turn our attention to place branding and its development as an academic discipline.

Place Branding

Place branding as a research area originates from the more established body of knowledge of country of origin (COO) in the field of product marketing (Papadopoulos, 2004). By conducting a systematic review of the extant literature on place branding and place marketing from 1976 to 2016, Vuignier (2017) found that this discipline lacks conceptual clarity due to inconsistent definitions and a weak theoretical foundation. Whilst initially adopted for more protectionist scopes, for example, in "buy domestic" campaigns, more recent developments of place branding practices have aimed to attract tourists, foreign investors, and new residents at a national, regional and city level (Papadopoulos et al., 2016). Though widely applied in different contexts such as FDI, resident, students and workforce attraction, studies on place brands are mainly focused on exports and tourism (Sun et al., 2016; Almeyda-Ibáñez and George, 2017).

One of the most prominent authors and arguably the founder of place branding as an academic discipline, Simon Anholt has often criticised a lack of control on how taxpayers' money is spent on place branding initiatives (2014). In one of his articles, titled "Place branding: Is it marketing, or isn't it?" Anholt (2008) suggests that one should critically distinguish between the place as the object of a strategy and the product that such campaigns want to sell. In short, it is a place branding campaign aiming to build a long-term brand for the place or it aims to achieve short-term profits by selling products and services such as hotel reservations, FDI opportunities and so on. Various definitions and terms concerning place branding are often used interchangeably. Table 2 below provides an overview of the main concepts related to the topic.

Table 2

Place branding concepts and definitions

Concept	Author(s)	Definition
Place branding	Zenker and Braun (2010)	A network of associations in the consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design.
Nation branding	Papadopoulos et al. (2016)	Nation branding concerns the image and reputation that a nation enjoys in the world, which in turn can directly influence its attractiveness as a destination and/or producer.
Place brand image	Papadopoulos (2004)	The image that is developed among target customer(s) of a particular place, given the place's unique identity.
Place brand equity	Bose et al. (2020)	Place brand equity is a set of all assets and liabilities that a place brand can be attached to.
Place identity	Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013)	Place identity is the construction of an identity through a constant dialogue between the internal and the external elements of a place.
Destination brand	Almeyda-Ibáñez and George (2017)	Conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience.

Similarly, to more traditional brands, place brands can be understood as social objects and the result of negotiations between stakeholders. As residents are more aware of the issues a place is facing, e.g., housing and transportation, they often disagree with the

simplified meanings embedded within a place brand for commercial scopes (Zenker et al., 2017). Stakeholders involved in place branding may not have the same access to discursive resources. According to Vallaster and von Wallpach (2013), resources can range from economic such as money to social/cultural resources like power, social influence, and evidence. This unbalance of discursive resources can hinder the participation of key actors in brand-related discourses, thus hampering their quality (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). Therefore, the place branding process may not benefit all the stakeholders equally (Lucarelli, 2018). Examples of critical issues discussed in place branding literature include the interdependencies of partner brands under a common place brand umbrella (Iversen & Hem, 2007), the issues related to the politicization of place brands (Lucarelli, 2018) and the role of visitors and residents in shaping the place brand (Zenker et al., 2013). Whilst those discussions have contributed to overcome the understanding of place branding as a top-down process and shed light on issues of power and consensus in place branding, there is a lack of studies that extend beyond the field of tourism (Kasabov & Sundaram, 2013). Critical questions, such as whether it is possible to sell a place like a product, have arisen since place branding emerged as an academic discipline (Parkerson & Saunders, 2004). At the same time, other issues such as place brand ownership and how a brand can include all the meanings associated with a heterogeneous entity like a place have remained critical topics in the place branding debate ever since (Florek & Insch, 2020). A research area that shares common objectives and faces similar issues of power and consensus is the study of clusters in the field of regional studies (Kasabov & Sundaram, 2013).

Cluster Branding

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, scholars (e.g., Kasabov & Sundaram, 2013; Hafeez et al., 2016) have drawn parallels between place branding and business clusters. Through the agglomeration of businesses, suppliers, and institutions of related and/or complementary nature established within spatial proximity, so-called clusters can gain a reputation for being specialised in one particular industry (Porter, 1998). Moreover, such agglomerations are also deemed to accelerate economic growth at a local and regional level (Porter, 2000). In extant literature, clusters have been conceptualised in numerous ways including as market organizations (Maskell & Lorentzen, 2004), collective social entities (Teigland & Lindqvist, 2007) and a pool of skills (Kasabov & Sundaram, 2016). For instance, from a firm perspective, clusters provide organizations with highly skilled human resources, access to key infrastructure and facilitate knowledge exchange, hence boosting firm growth and innovation processes (Porter & Kramer, 2011). As argued by Kasabov and Sundaram (2013) clusters are "specific examples of place brands" (p.538). Implementing place branding processes can support existing clusters and aid the formation of new ones (Hafeez

et al., 2016). However, Kasabov and Sundaram (2013) also explain that the complexity of brand-building processes can hamper the formation of a collective identity for the cluster through place branding processes. The complexity of cluster branding can be attributed to the too often incompatible or even contrasting interests and agendas held by the cluster members (Kasabov & Sundaram, 2013; Perkins et al., 2021). In their study on regional small tourism firms, Perkins and Khoo-Lattimore (2020), found that collaboration among regional businesses is not easy to achieve. Their findings show that among others, issues such as the lack of formal collaborative arrangements and unbalanced efforts between businesses pose a threat to successful collaboration. As highlighted by Lucarelli (2018) in the public domain, place branding is a fragmented process in which multiple brands, by interacting with each other, co-create the place brand. Holding a high degree of social proximity (belonging) and institutional proximity (similarity) is key to ensure the cluster's success (Kasabov, 2010). A cluster brand forged by genuine collaboration can reduce power asymmetries that may arise among actors (Mauroner & Zorn, 2017). However, cluster members have different access to resources and legitimacy based on the duration of tenure and hierarchical position in the cluster (Kasabov & Sundaram, 2013). Shaping a cluster brand, therefore, becomes a matter of balancing the expectations of the stakeholders who engage with it (Admam et al., 2020).

Whilst there has been advancement in place branding literature regarding place brand dynamics, little is known about the stakeholder's participation in cluster branding and how place brand managers release control over the place branding process. Therefore, questions still arise as to *how* and *why* stakeholders engage in cluster branding. Based on extant literature, Table 3 below introduces the roles of stakeholders involved in the branding of clusters, their scope and implications. As outlined in Table 3, there are internal and external stakeholders to be considered in the context of cluster branding. Examples of internal stakeholders are the companies, research institutions and universities that may form the cluster. External stakeholders could be potential employees, potential investors and policy makers who may have an interest in the cluster. Whilst a strong cluster brand can provide benefits to internal and external stakeholders, challenges can arise for both groups. For internal stakeholders, contrasting agendas and interests can hamper the branding process. Assessing the stakeholders' expectations and future of the cluster can be a challenge for external stakeholders.

Table 3

Cluster Branding Stakeholders, Scopes, Implications, and Limitations

	Stakeholders	Scope(s)	Implication(s)	Limitations
Internal Stakeholders	Companies Universities Research Institutions	Visibility and attention Exchange and cooperation Idea and promise	Mediating function for diverging interests	Contrasting agendas and interests
External Stakeholders	Potential Employees Potential Investors Policy Makers	Risk reduction Promoting regional competitive advantage	Awareness on the part of political decision makers	Difficulties in assessing stakeholders expectations and future direction oft he cluster

Discussion and Future Research

Seeking to contribute to the growing literature on place branding and clusters, this article set out to discuss business clusters as place brands and to identify similarities and research gaps between the two areas of research. From a managerial perspective, understanding the dynamics of place branding within clusters would allow companies to coordinate their branding effort better (Pedeliento & Kavaratzis, 2019). More specifically, the place branding perspective on business clusters highlighted in this article is relevant for companies' (re)-location decisions, marketing agencies with a focus on place, policy makers, and for business development and investment attraction agencies.

The overview presented in this article, serves as a starting point for future debate about the evolution of the field of place branding, and in particular for the branding of business clusters. The development of brand management in the last few decades has shifted from an economic approach to a cultural approach. In the early 2000s, the marketing scholars' view of brands as social objects has been borrowed by practitioners and scholars in the field of place branding. Place branding originates from not-for-profit and more social aspects of marketing for the public sector. However, scholars have highlighted the complexity of multi-stakeholder engagement in the place branding process and have suggested comparing it to corporate branding (e.g., Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2010). One of the

most critical issues of corporate and place brands is the issue of finding a point of cohesion for what the brand stands for. The discussion presented in this article can also be enhanced by setting it in the context of Hatch and Schutz (2009) Vision Culture Image (VCI) model of corporate brands. According to the VCI model, a strong brand needs to find a balance between the three elements.

Existing literature has shed light on the co-creation process of place branding, hence defining place branding as an open and fluid dialogue between internal and external stakeholders. However, as discussed in this article, there is a paucity of studies that extend beyond the field of tourism, and little is known about how and why stakeholders engage in place branding within clusters. Therefore, further research into the place branding process could pay greater attention to stakeholder management to understand how brand value is created within clusters. Focusing on the issues of power and consensus in place branding would be necessary to understand the different access to economic, discursive, and social cultural resources to engage in the brand-related debate that eventually shapes what a cluster stands for.

A limitation of this article is its reliance on existing literature to deliver arguments and conceptualise cluster branding. Therefore, future studies could conduct more empirical research using existing business clusters as case studies. On the grounds of the cluster members' ever-changing access to resources to engage in brand-related discourses (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013), a promising line of research would consist in conducting research of the cluster branding process at different stages of a cluster's cycle and from the perspective of cluster members who hold different hierarchical positions within the cluster. For the same reason, it would be worth to empirically evaluate the role of legitimacy and isomorphism in influencing cluster members' behaviours during the cluster branding process, as cluster members may tend to become homogeneous due to long-term socialising with oneanother (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

There have been a few studies that have analysed the development of cluster brands (e.g., Hafeez et al., 2016; Mauroner & Zorn, 2017). These studies, however, have focused on clusters that have a similar origin and are located in the same regional or national context. Future studies could utilize a comparative methodology to focus on different types of cluster development and assess the role of institutions such as the legal frameworks of different countries in influencing the cluster branding process.

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Auto-photography and Collaborative Drawing: How Can Autistic Researchers Foster Inclusion Through Method Selection and Development to Investigate the Design of the Built Environment?

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Abstract

In this article, I examine how the process of method selection and development fosters the inclusion of autistic researchers, utilizing my axiological positions as autistic and researcher to critique traditional methods in qualitative research. Autism is defined as a communication disorder, but there is little discourse on the appropriateness of using traditional research methods, such as interviewing, which relies on verbal communication and the appropriate reading of body language. Therefore, there is an acknowledged gap in communication referred to as the 'double-empathy problem', where neurotypicals fail to adequately comprehend autistic communication. I pose two methods, 'Auto-Photography' and 'Collaborative Drawing', as potential methods for future research. I argue that these research methods, when employed through an autistic lens, offer the potential for meaningful co-creation of knowledge within autistic communities and in the design of the built environment. These methods complement traditional methods, supporting autistic research participants, and autistic researchers, who are verbal, minimally verbal, and non-verbal.

Keywords: *Autism, research methods, auto-photography, collaborative drawing, built environment*

Introduction

If public space is a social product (Lefebvre, 1991), then surely it is malleable to the needs of society and should reflect the natural neurodiversity that exists within humanity (Gardener, 2022). In this paper, I explore my own axiological position as an autistic researcher, investigating the design of the built environment and the impact it has on autistic population. Then, how this position will impact the selection and employment of diverse research methods for the study of locomotion within the built environment. As an autistic researcher, I

am, as Collins (1986) states, an 'outsider within', simultaneously autistic and a doctoral candidate. As a doctoral candidate conducting research, I am an outsider to the research participants. As autistic, I am part of the diverse community. Consequently, I am in a position of power whilst simultaneously vulnerable. This balance allows me a unique position between strengthening the research and providing insights to cultural experience. To ensure rigour, there must be reflexivity and transparency at each phase of the research.

Autism is defined as a disability that affects communication and interaction with the world (National Autistic Society, 2023). With an estimation of 25% to 30% of autistic children having verbal limitations or being nonverbal (Brignell et al., 2018), methods that do not solely rely on verbalizing are vital to inclusive research. Method selection must engage with non- or minimally verbal participants, to collect representative data from the wider autistic community. Historically, methods have not actively engaged with autistic people, rather their support networks, families, and educators. Therefore, there is a likelihood that data gathered is an allistic (non-autistic) interpretation of behaviour and not a first-person account. In this context the autistic person is not treated as an expert of their own experience (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2017). Autistic traits are often 'camouflaged', avoiding detection in a neurotypical society (Cage & Troxell-Whitman, 2019), raising questions of epistemological validity within historical autism research methods, as the literature lacks debate on autistic-appropriate method selection. Neurodiversity challenges the status-quo of traditional qualitative research methods, such as interviewing and observation. Through the proposal of auto-photography (AP) and collaborative drawing (CD) as methods to complementary, the sample of autistic people contributing to research is diversified.

If autism is a dis/ability rooted in communication difference, then the epistemology, methodology, and method selection must recognize this. The methods I pose ensure rigour, as both the researcher and participant revisit the findings and co-create meaning; meaning is not solely inferred by the 'outsider' (Phillips & Earle, 2010) as the case is with observation and interview analysis.

Researcher positionality

Due to my axiological position as 'autistic researcher', I engage with the 'double-empathy problem', whereby neurotypicals fail to 'correctly read' neurodiverse body language and nonverbal cues (Zamzow, 2021). However, I utilize my status as a researcher to balance my autistic identity and use my 'insider' status to identify nuanced benefits regarding method selection. As an autistic researcher, both AP and CD may be beneficial in two ways. Firstly, in the application of reflexivity, through the capturing of experiences photographically and drawing with advisory teams to explore the research in an embodied manner. In this context, the research has the same benefits as the research participant. Secondly, through the

implementation of these methods. By working with methods that may closely align with the communication style of autistic research participants, richer data may be gathered. This is similar to an allistic researcher utilizing the interview. This is not to say that the autistic researcher should only use one method, rather, AP and CD may enhance the ease and richness of data. This thinking stems from the feminist critique of male dominated knowledge production, rather I critique the dominant neurotypical knowledge production. From an intersectional perspective, this could be critiqued as there is no singular autistic experience and one autistic researcher that can account for a multiplicity of experiences which intersect with race, gender, class etc. (Phillips & Earle, 2010). Here I suggest methods that account for autistic communication styles and strengths and encourage the co-creation of knowledge thus enhancing rigour through the knowledge gathering process to capture a more authentic embodied experience of autism. Thus, enhancing the experience of researcher and research participant.

This paper explores why AP and CD may be appropriate methods for researching autistic locomotion in public spaces. Further, how the reflexivity, temporality, and physicality that they offer may enhance the quality of future research as they mirror the reflexivity, temporality, and physicality of moving through the built environment. It is therefore pertinent to explore the ethical concerns that may arise whilst communicating with an autistic population. I speculate that two methods, AP and CD, may be implemented to gather ethically aligned data. Both methods are enhanced through verbal and written communications rather than being solely reliant on them. This may align them with autistic strength of 'visual thinking', a trait that is common in the autistic population (Rudy, 2021). This is not to oversimplify autistic communication and overgeneralize all autistic people as visual thinkers and visual communicators. Rather, to open a dialogue on how these methods might be implemented to engage more deeply with a variety of communication styles.

The authentic voice and method selection

A key historical issue in autism research is the disregard for the authentic autistic voice. This occurs when researchers engage with the autistic person's advocates, teachers and family as opposed to the autistic person, meaning that the vital first-person experience is lost. In these instances, researchers gather a neurotypical interpretation of the autistic experience. Traditional research methods such as interviewing exclude those who do not verbalize as a primary communication method. Furthermore, the 'ability to verbalize' and provide consent may be confused with 'mental capacity', thus excluding those who do not communicate in a neurotypical manner (AASPIRE, 2015). Excluding this group from research infantilizes, silences, and negates autonomy from the marginalized individual, re-enforcing their status as 'other' (Boys, 2018). It does not account for their complex identity and autonomous

decision to participate in research and the use of the built environment. Devising methods that empower a community to communicate and advocate, such as AP and CD, is vital. Both AP and CD are longitudinal methods, whereby the researcher and research-participant co-create knowledge. As the methods are revisited, so are conversations regarding consent and engagement. Informed consent in research should not end with the signing of a consent form but be reasserted throughout the data gathering. It is vital to carry this out with the autistic community, as there is a historical medicalized narrative, which has been used to dehumanize, objectify, and stigmatize, leading to a community distrust of research (Botha & Cage, 2022). These issues are compounded through use of applied behaviour analysis, as practice that 'teaches' autistic children compliance through coercion and manipulation (therapistndc.com, n.d). Therefore, there is a need for autism researchers to be aware of the potential vulnerability of some autistic adults to coercion. Ways of mitigating these issues include allowing research participants access to information regarding the research, time to process their decision on participation, and develop an understanding of how the research might be positioned. This also incorporates repeated consent to engage with the research. AP and CD facilitate this through the revisitation of themes and visualizations. This ethos aligns with RIBA's 'Ethics in Architecture Practice' (RIBA, 2017). Similarly, these practices align with Autistica's Researcher Toolkit that state that 'processing time', or time to think and structure, are important (Ashworth et al. n.d.).

Auto-Photography – Autonomy and Voice

Auto-photography (AP) refers to the act of a research participant photographing their own experience and sharing the photographs with a researcher. Their images may be informed by a brief but are ultimately self-directed. Heng (2020) claims that visually focused participation utilizes the camera as fulcrum to perform identity, whilst Gardner (2022) expresses that the built environment is treated as a backdrop to autonomy. The photographs taken provide valuable insight into the lived experience of the research participants. This is in opposition to a means by which autonomy is constructed. In this context, neurodiversity is an integrated part of the built environment rather than an object within it. This aligns with Boys' (2018) 'DisOrdinary Architecture' project that challenges underlying assumptions of accessibility as merely problems to solve. Rather, it is about the expertise of disabled communities being utilized to reframe architectural design and the design of the built environment. By utilizing AP, a vital archive of autistic created images could be developed to identify barriers of access, therefore integrating access into the design of the built environment.

Photographs are made rather than taken, as humans are active within the image making process (Johns, et al., 2012). Therefore, photographs are not just a visual inventory

and a substitute for memory, but due to their composition and intent, they are artifacts that evoke response. Decision making is implicit in the creation and inherent in elucidating the experience of the built environment, especially when emotional content may be 'too nuanced for language' (Horwat, 2018). Therefore, these are not just photographs of the journeys taken through space, but an archive of autistic lived experience within the designed built environment. Decisions on what to photograph are never arbitrary, they are part of the strategy inherent within AP (Mitchell, 2003). Participants are revealing their story through a visual method which emphasizes elements of their lived experience. This is especially relevant whilst exploring the impact of multiple sensory stimuli from the built environment on the individual.

An elaborate description is not needed when a photograph is present, as text, gesture, and expression can elucidate the experience. Utilizing AP in the context of photo-elicitation interviews, participants can elaborate on their experiences which relate to the images. This ensures that a bias reading of the images is not made or interpreted in a way that the research participant does not agree with, therefore ensuring that the authentic voice is fully present within the context of the findings. Heng (2016) states that images must speak to the viewer in a meaningful way, informing, surprising and signifying meaning. Using photo essays, a technique where images drive narrative as opposed to words, the narrative of placemaking can be co-curated between the researcher and research participant. Narratives of experience can be clearly depicted in this manner and whilst a textual narrative may be used to elucidate on images, the images themselves provide interplay between placemaking, action and experience; they are the data.

As AP has the potential to be conducted autonomously, this may encourage the research participant to disclose their personal experience. Therefore, it is essential to provide access to intimate and private spaces that may otherwise be inaccessible (Charmaz, 2006). This autonomy allows for the fluctuating nature of dis/ability, where the ability and energy of the individual may vary (Boys, 2018). Through this, potentially vulnerable populations may elucidate on experiences in a way that is safe and accommodating for them. It may also aid in the redressing of power between researcher and research participant by encouraging the participants to choose what is photographed, thus actively driving the visual narrative (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996). They can invite the researcher into their space without the pressure of them being present and encroaching on them. Horwat (2018) suggests that wordless narrative research fosters 'imaginative engagement that encourages an empathetic connection'. This approach will be beneficial in developing research that is ethically aligned to the autistic community's desire for authenticity (Gowen et al., 2019) and autonomy of voice.

Leavey (2020) indicates that photographs taken by research participants can aid in the exploration of narratives and conceptualizing experiences. The inherent reflexivity invites further participatory conversation through the dissemination of findings. Images shared (with consent) may unlock dialogues with wider audiences and encourage reflect on their own experiences. These techniques emphasize the individual's agency and autonomy in the context of research and the design process of place.

Collaborative Drawing – Processing Intangible Space

Collaborative drawing (CD) is a technique used in ethnography that allows the research-participant and researcher to communicate without the limitations of solely using verbal or written language. It is a method which is often used in early years education (Knight et al., 2015). Using this technique with autistic adults is not to imply any form of infantilization, but to engage with a wider scope of creation methods used in architectural design. Visual methods, such as drawing, may enable a deeper understanding of complex knowledge that is difficult to express solely through language (Martikainen & Hakoköngäs, 2022).

The exploration of sensory environments is an intangible experience, difficult to express in words. The act of drawing allows researchers and participants to visualize theories and ideas, making complex and nuanced conversation more tangible. Pink (2015) acknowledges that we place definitions on words, and this can be difficult to do with intangible sensory experiences. This may be especially relevant to autistic people who experience alexithymia, a condition described as a 'difficulty in identifying and describing feelings' (Vaiouli & Panayiotou, 2021). As drawing is a process of creation, it is tangible, temporal, and rooted in physical experience; this allows the time to process the experience, while simultaneously making the drawing. Drawings can also be revisited, added to, and revised in order to clarify and define meaning. Verbalization is not needed to express or describe emotion. CD is a participatory practice whereby multiple people contribute to a single drawing; in this framework, the researcher and research participant would explore a single theme which had been decided in advance. For example, patterns that occur on pavement surfaces. Therefore, each mark is a decision to share, and the thinking process is held within the drawing. The act of drawing allows both participant and researcher to be present and take time and space, whilst investigating multiple ideas to develop and refine concepts (Knight & McArdle, 2015). This embodied approach challenges the traditional mode of interviewing, whereby both participants are stationery and verbal, and the research participant delivers one narrative. The embodied activity of drawing, moving, making, and remaking marks in order to explore a central theme may facilitate an authentic autistic communication style, this may be supplemented with text or spoken word depending on the researcher and research participant.

The act of drawing is a temporal exercise, and the potential drawings are, as Guysas and Keys (2009) state, 'visual constructions of data, knowledge, and residues of thinking processes'. This temporality is mirrored in the trajectories created whilst moving through space (Massey, 2005). These can be personal, for example, pedestrians passed, businesses encountered, or chairs from a cafe to be weaved through on a busy pavement. Similarly, drawing is physically active and engages with all the senses, ensuring that individuals are actively participating in the environment and present (Pink, 2015). Through drawing, these trajectories may be added to maps or elaborated on through image making processes.

Leavy (2020) states that images hold an elevated place within memory and can be recalled in a way that a verbal description of an event cannot. He argues that visual arts can 'challenge, dislodge and dismantle' stereotypes and systems. For this reason, a visual method seems a natural place to begin working with a marginalized and often stereotyped group. Drawing in this context might be used to express emotion or understand sensory perception in a deeper way. The act of drawing prompts the drawer to look closely and, over time, see the world differently.

This method may be beneficial in triangulating data within a study, as images are complimented with words, gestures, and spoken language (Kearney & Hyle, 2004). A 2009 study by Andrade showed a 29% increase in key word retrieval by research participants who were encouraged to doodle whilst listening to a 'boring' recording. This indicated that the act of drawing either improved memory retrieval or concentration in the 'doodling' group. Whilst there is no established link between improving symptoms of alexithymia, this may be a relevant area of knowledge creation. Knight (2015) notes that whilst using this technique with 'young children' they were able to open verbal and visual dialogues regarding complex issues, such as social justice and inclusion. Reciprocity is a defining autistic feature; Ommeren et al.'s (2015) study used CD as a method for an autistic child and researcher to take turns, continually adding elements to build a narrative. Results suggest that autistic children tended to be more reciprocal once in control of the drawn narrative. This approach could allow the adult research participants to focus on their vision and interpretation in the research context, with the researcher being guided by them.

Reflections

In conclusion, this paper highlights the need for the development and implementation of methods that complement autistic modes of communication. My axiological position as autistic, coupled with my position as 'outsider within', allows a unique positionality to develop and implement AP and CD in collaboration with the autistic community. Through this, there is potential to negate or redress the double-empathy problem, whereby neurotypicals

misinterpret autistic meaning (Zamzow, 2021). This facilitates autistic people in communicating their experiences in a meaningful way. Both AP and CD allow the flexibility of language to elucidate without relying on verbalization, text, or immediate processing. AP and CD may also be used as elicitation, giving research participants time to ruminate on their experience of visual conveyance and then elaborating, thus considering alexithymia. These methods provide opportunity for a rich discussion with research participants that traditional verbal interview methods do not. Whilst I am not discounting traditional methods, I offer an opportunity to elaborate on them, supplementing traditional methods through the curation and delivery of visually informed methods.

Recognizing potential deficits in traditional methods (such as interviewing) shifts the impetus from the autistic community to the research community to develop more appropriate methods. This study questions whether the methods and delivery are adequate in gathering data, as opposed to putting the burden of communication solely onto the autistic community. However, adapting methods such as interviewing, through autistic specific protocols, goes some way to mitigate miscommunication (Winn, 2015) and may be applicable to both AP and CD. These methods are a way to explore autistic communication and autistic experiences as 'sites of 'abundance' as opposed to 'sites of liability' (Rao, 2019). To verify the use of these methods, several pilot studies will be carried out.

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Features

The 'Features' section offers authors a diverse space for commentaries, reviews, interviews, and editorial pieces, tapping into less formally structured forms of intellectual curiosity and conversation.

Are Robot Lawyers the Future of Increasing Access to Justice?

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In March 2023 GPT-4 passed the solicitors qualifying exam (the SQE) which is the national qualifying exam to become a solicitor in the UK. In the same month GPT-4 also passed the Bar Exam in the United States. Does this mean that in the future we will no longer need lawyers, as all our legal issues can be resolved by the polite, and patient, large language model known to us all as Chat GPT?

Robot lawyers, or artificial intelligence (AI)-powered legal tools have already begun to play a significant role in the provision of legal services, and they are likely to become more commonplace in the future. For example, AI algorithms are already used to analyze large volumes of legal data as part of the due diligence process in corporate transactions, or to review and generate contracts, and suggest settlement parameters in a dispute. Often the automated output is faster and more accurate than with human analysts (The Law Society, 2019).

However, for society, perhaps the largest gains can be made by leveraging artificial intelligence to increase access to justice. The importance of having access to justice cannot be overstated. It is a conduit of social and economic development, and "essential to the rule of law" (Caplan & McIlroy, 2015). However, there is no universally agreed definition. Historically access to justice has been narrowly conceived as referring to access to lawyers and courts, but it is a nebulous term, and the Courts themselves have held that it is "inherently ambiguous" (KA v London Borough of Croydon [2017] EWHC, 1723).

Others argue for an "irreducible minimum" (Byron, 2019) which includes access to the formal legal system, access to an effective hearing, access to a decision in accordance with substantive law and access to remedy. This article adopts a wider definition to embrace social justice and equal access to resources that are essential for human thriving (Sen, 1999; Sandefur, 2019). In this context, this article argues that artificial intelligence, or robot lawyers offer additional pathways for improved access to justice by increasing access to

information and a range of affordable, legal self-help tools which help individuals make informed choices to determine their justice pathway and legal outcome.

The national public legal education charity, A*dviceNow* (n.d.) note that one of the greatest problems their users encounter is that they don't know how to unpack a problem or *injustice* that they are encountering, including where to go for help, and how to resolve it. The potential opportunity presented by Robot Lawyers (or AI powered legal support tools) is that they can be trained to recognize and categorize legal issues when users seek advice via search engines. This supports early intervention and signposting towards appropriate resources that offer legal information and support. For example, the *AdviceNow* (n.d.) website provides user-friendly, step by step legal guidance on various topics such as family, welfare benefits, health and social care, housing, and employment disputes which they have now started building into interactive AI powered tools which can write letters and complete forms to help users self-represent. Their Annual Review (2020-2021) claims that their digital tools have helped produce 7317 mandatory reconsideration letters to challenge a benefit decision (such as personal independence payments, employment and support allowance, and universal credit) made by the Department of Work and Pension.

Other players in this space include private companies leveraging the opportunity to provide alternative legal service models. For example, Farewill (n.d.) autogenerates a bespoke will for £90, which reduces the average cost of a will by approximately £200; Valla (n.d.) helps users case manage their own employment claims which they estimate lowers the cost of bringing a claim to the Employment Tribunal from an average of £5,000 to £500; and Amicable (n.d.) helps couples divorce online without the need for a solicitor, arguably with significant cost savings. These tools target a range of justice needs, and materially change the way that individuals interact with the legal system, reducing costs and empowering users to find information for themselves to understand and manage their legal issues.

However, whether these benefits will be felt equally across society determines the extent to which artificial intelligence can increase access to justice. The HMCTS reform program is well underway with the first online court (for low value civil claims) being introduced in 2015 on the premise that digital justice presents an opportunity to simplify processes and increase access to justice for the huge numbers of users who do have adequate digital literacy and sufficient legal capability to navigate digital justice services. However, these reforms have been heavily criticized for further excluding the most vulnerable including the elderly, non-English speakers and the digitally challenged (JUSTICE, 2018). Justice needs and capabilities vary across society, as does digital competency and access to digital devices. How these intersecting barriers impact the most

vulnerable users has been considered extensively by JUSTICE who argue that they present a double barrier and could further exclude the digitally illiterate or marginalized, unless measures, such as introducing *Assisted Digital* services (in person case workers to support digital case handling) are taken to accommodate varying needs.

Applying the same rationale to users of free legal advice services, assumes that the more digitally and legally capable users will be better able to 'self-help' freeing up capacity of the advisors to support the clinic users who are more vulnerable, and most in need of direct in-person support. In addition, artificial intelligence powered tools offer other benefits to free legal advice clinics such as by automating routine tasks, supporting enhanced case management systems, or tools for document drafting, review, and execution, which will again free up advisors to support the more vulnerable clients.

The collision of law and technology has the potential to increase access to justice by disrupting the imbalance in access to legal information, services, and resources. However, behind the appealing interface of a new AI powered legal tool, digital technologies and cyberspace affect the workings of power, challenging the boundaries of space, place, and time (Castells, 1996). Technologies present new avenues of engagement and opportunities for individuals and communities to participate in the socioeconomic and political workings of power, to increase agency and challenge hierarchies. However, technologies also reflect power and can expose users to new risks and dangers by amplifying existing social patterns of inequality and disadvantage. Potential inequalities include racial, gender, socioeconomic and geographic bias. This has been widely discussed in relation to reported inaccuracies when AI generated tools have been used in recruitment (Chowdry et al., 2023), exam performance (Salem, 2021) and criminal profiling (Noriega, 2020). It is therefore crucial to ensure diverse and representative training data and regular auditing and testing of the AI models.

The process of legal empowerment through digital services highlights the power dynamics and contradictions that intersect at the meeting point of legal services and technology. With responsible development, leveraging artificial intelligence or Robot Lawyers to reach across the breadth of society with affordable, safe, and accessible resources, presents an opportunity to transform legal service delivery, to disrupt inequalities and democratize justice.

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Three Sisters Gathering Peat on Achill Island and the Past, Present, and Future of Irish Bogs

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Abstract

In the summer of 2021, I undertook ethnographic fieldwork for two months in the West of Ireland. I lived and worked at family farms in three rural communities in County Galway and traveled in between these stays to other rural areas and small towns in Galway and Mayo. My research focused on the quotidian experiences of small-scale farmers and families who heat their homes by burning peat that they collect themselves from ancestral or rented plots of bog land. This feature narrates an encounter with one such family on a bog at the beginning of my fieldwork, highlights key issues around the past, present, and future management of Irish bogs, and argues for the need to protect both bog ecosystems and the people who rely upon them.

Keywords: *Ethnography, peat, bog ecosystems, Ireland, rural communities*

A Field Encounter on an Achill Island Bog

Achill Island is starkly beautiful, scattered with whitewashed houses that vanish into misty sloping hills. At the beginning of my fieldwork in 2021 my colleague and I took an exploratory walk around the island. Along a gravel path that ran through the heart of the bog, a series of poems in English and Irish were engraved on stone signposts.

> *Dordán – Live Every Day*
>
> *Wild are the waves on the western shore,*
>
> *As the sea breaks o'er rock and mooring,*
>
> *The thunderous wind like lion's roar,*
>
> *And the dark clouds above are surging.*
>
> *Bare and bleak is the outstretched bog,*
>
> *And it whispers of times forgotten,*
>
> *Through each bog deal stump a tale is told,*
>
> *And each turf clamp a sculpture begotten.*

A few hundred yards beyond this sign were three women at work. They were constructing knee-high triangular structures out of bricks of peat, colloquially called turf. We had observed similar structures on bog land all over County Mayo.

Figure 1

Bricks of turf cut from bog land and "footed" in triangular structures to dry-out in the wind.

We approached the women curiously, wanting to understand what they were doing and offer help. They all looked up at us and smiled. "Did you bring your gloves?" called one, and we all laughed.

They showed us how to 'foot' the turf: turning wet bricks of turf – each about two feet long and six inches wide – to expose their wetter side to the wind. We worked our way along an area of about fifty feet, flipping the bricks over one by one. As we worked, we chatted cheerfully and the three women introduced themselves as Brigid, Noreen, and Siobhán. "All Crowley's", Brigid told us, "two sisters and a sister-in-law".

We asked them for their opinions on an emerging debate in Ireland and Europe around the future of Irish turf cutting practices, and the ethics of continuing the ancient tradition in light of new environmental concerns. They explained the several 'ecosystem services' provided by an uncut bog: both a habitat for native Irish species and an active 'carbon sink' to sequester atmospheric carbon dioxide. They explained, too, the importance of turf cut from the bog as a resource for their extended family, it was their ancestral and primary source of fuel for home heating.

They then turned to Bord na Móna. Bord na Móna, they said, had now made its new mission to restore and conserve Ireland's bogs for their ecological value to the country. "Bord na Móna's doing what they ought to," said Noreen. "They're absolutely right to. But there's talk now in the government of banning all turf cutting altogether. And of course that would be very bad for many of us out here."

"You said you'll be writing a paper on it, now? Tell them not to." Brigid grinned. "Put in a good word for us." After we had all laughed, Noreen said, "But of course there's nothing to be done about it by the likes of us or anyone. The government will do what they'll do."

Environmental Ideology, Power, and Irish Bog Management: The Past and Present

For as long as there have been people in Ireland there have been bogs. Throughout history, people of all social classes have attached symbolic meaning to Irish bogs and held opinions about their appropriate use (Clarke, 2010). Employing a social constructivist perspective, it is possible to view the symbolic construction of Irish bogs by different groups as reflective of specific cultural values and identity. Yet, the relative power afforded to different social groups has also meant some have been able to impose their own land use prerogatives for the Irish bogs over others (Greider & Garkovich, 1994).

Bogs were likely viewed with a fearful sort of reverence in prehistoric Ireland. Articles of value and sometimes human sacrifices were ritually deposited into them at the inaugurations of feudal kings, and they sometimes served as feudal boundary markers (Clarke, 2010). Some speculate from this information that groups in prehistoric Ireland understood the bog as a limit, a finitude, an end; perhaps even a sort of momento mori. What went into the bog could not be reclaimed, and even the sovereignty of a king could not extend beyond it.

As Donal Clarke writes, the bog was latterly associated with poverty and backwardness. English writers of the seventeenth century linked the "wasteful" boglands to projected faults in the character of the Irish, such as "carelessness" and '"want of industry" (Clarke, 2010, p. 3). This idea that the bogs were a poor reflection on the national character laid the foundation for a patriotic movement in the seventeenth century to transform Ireland's bog "wastelands" into productive agricultural lands (ibid.).

In the nineteenth century, this vision for "productive" bogs began to shift; from their potential to be converted to agricultural lands, to the potential of mechanizing and industrializing the collection of turf. There is documentary evidence that turf has been collected for use as a fuel in Ireland since at least the seventh century. However, efforts to industrialize turf extraction, and to use machines rather than simple hand-tools, began in the nineteenth century and picked up pace in the twentieth (Clarke, 2010).

Crucially for those who rely on turf cut from their own plots for fuel, the governmental and popular symbolic construction of the bogs is now shifting once again in Ireland. A new perspective on bogs as places of enormous ecological value is emerging, and coming into political tension with the traditional practice of cutting turf from the bogs for use as fuel. Bogs are frequently compared for their climate benefits to tropical rainforests by those who wish to see increased conservation (Farry, 2021). Just as a healthy rainforest 'sucks in' and retains

carbon dioxide within itself, so too does an intact bog. In contrast, the draining of bogs—which occurs when channels are cut in bog land for turf extraction—releases into the atmosphere greenhouse gasses that had been trapped and stored (Hilliard, 2020).

The new conversation around the ecological value of bogs and their role in a global environmental system is produced on a political level mainly by pressure from international bodies, especially the European Union's pressure on its member states to rapidly reduce their contributions to global climate change. The Irish National Parks & Wildlife Service website currently states, "Our bogs are not just of Irish interest…. The loss of Ireland's bogs would result in an irreplaceable loss to global biodiversity" (Peatlands n.d., para 2). Such internationally and globally focused language of responsibility and care is now commonplace in governmental materials that refer to the ecological value of the bogs and the need to protect them from damage inflicted by turf extraction.

We might venture, then, to roughly frame a long and complex history of shifting social constructions of bog landscapes by saying that Irish narratives about appropriate uses for bog land have shifted in parallel with the orientation of people's lives on the island: from narratives that are oriented locally (in tribal kingships) (Clarke, 2010), to narratives that are oriented nationally, to narratives that, today, are increasingly oriented globally.

The Irish national government is placed in a position where it must manage both the greenhouse gas emission reduction mandates of the EU and the demands of domestic bodies such as the powerful Irish Farmer's Association and The Turf Cutters and Contractors Association (McGee, 2013). Due to conflicting demands and pressures perhaps, federal restrictions on turf cutting seemed to many of the smallholding farmers and rural families that I spoke to in Galway and Mayo to be changed rather at random, and enforced chaotically. Noreen's statement, "The government will do what they'll do," was echoed in sentiment by many others I spoke to. It reflects a common mistrust of federal government in rural Irish communities (O'Riordan, McDonagh, & Mahon, 2016), and a response to the threat of a sudden ban on one's own area of turf collection, or a blanket ban on all turf cutting that would not discriminate between the large-scale, profit-driven turf extraction of companies and the micro-scale, subsistence-based turf extraction of rural households.

Protecting Bogs and People Both: A Future for Irish Bog Management

We likely met the Crowley sisters on their ancestral plot of turf, designated for their family's use on Achill Island generations before. This is the case for many rural families—turf cutting and collection is the exercise of ancestral 'turbary rights' on one particular plot of local bog land, and the practice contributes to a continued sense of attachment to the land and the surrounding community, and strengthens family relationships as a focal point within the family's intergenerational experience

The level-headed, nuanced insights of the sisters and their depth of knowledge about the history, political ecology, and conservation science of Irish bog use is not unusual among rural people in the West of Ireland. In informal and formal interviews throughout my fieldwork, I admired speakers' capacities to consider multiple, and sometimes conflicting local and global priorities for the bogs at once, and to shift and argue with versatility and creativity between rationales of bog management that were ecological, economic, sociological, political, and even, purely poetic in nature.

There is an urgent need to strictly regulate or altogether ban the large-scale, industrialized cutting and sale of turf from the bogs. Indeed, a landmark case in the Irish High Court in 2019 banned the extraction of peat from areas of more than 30 hectares without a permit. Similar actions targeted at industrial actors are urgently needed for conservation. However, regulations must, indispensably, recognize and account for a distinction between large-scale, industrial turf extraction by profit-driven actors and small-scale, traditional and subsistence-based extraction by individual rural households. Turf extraction by rural people for home use must not be conflated with large-scale industrial extraction for profit in Irish or EU policy.

Traditional, small-scale turf collection is economically and socially important for rural communities. It contributes to community and family cohesion, sense of place, and connection to the land and its history, and provides economic autonomy and resilience to energy market fluctuations (O'Riordan et al., 2016; Carroll, 2022)

I believe it was more than coincidence that the poems we saw engraved on signs in the bog on Achill Island were rhythmic; there are particular rhythms that impress themselves upon the body through labor on the bog, and particular rhythms of life and social meaning that emerge from such labor. It is the people who have the rhythms of the bog in their lives and bodies who understand the turf cutting debate best, and they have the right to carry the rhythms forward.

> *…Bare and bleak is the outstretched bog,*
> *And it whispers of times forgotten,*
> *Through each bog deal stump a tale is told,*
> *And each turf clamp a sculpture begotten.*
> *Dordán – Live Every Day*

Figure 2

Signage with a rhythmic poem on a path through the bog; decorated by a piece of bog wood (ancient wood preserved in the bog's anaerobic environment), and a pile of dried turf.

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Reflections

The 'Reflections' section features authors who deliver deliberately brief moments of lived experience across all stages of research and aspects of life as a researcher. These accounts offer poignant insights, nuancing and complementing the rigidity of established academic practice.

Interviewing Mothers and Daughters: Reflecting on the Role of the 'Insider'

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Introduction

Having arrived in the UK as a five-year-old immigrant child, and vividly remembering those early days when everything for me was very different and alienating, formed one of the inspirations for my study on the influence of immigration on families. The influence of my mother, the person central to my care and upbringing, was the core reason for my study on immigrant South Asian families and the way that mother and daughter roles evolve. Mothers are often key role models, as well as being a critical source of support and reassurance, for their children.

The vastly differing experiences of my mother, an eighty-four-year-old first-generation immigrant, compared to my third-generation nineteen-year-old daughter, as well as my own intermediary position as both second-generation mother, and daughter, led me to reflect on how the categories and expectations of immigrant South Asian motherhood and daughterhood have shifted over this tripartite generational evolution. My research question attempts to explore the changes in the experiences and lives of mothers and daughters from South Asia over three generations.

I have conducted the first set of interviews for my study. I will discuss reflections from these interviews, specifically examining my role as an 'insider'. This reflection has allowed me to identify the benefits of an insider role in qualitative research interviews and how the lived experience of an insider can be a useful method for oral history interviews.

Study background

In-depth narrative interviews were chosen as the main research methods to tease out the way immigration is intertwined with the life stories of mothers and daughters. The interviews allowed me to understand how the lives of these women have changed over the generations and unravel the personal histories of South Asian Women (SAW) as mothers and daughters. For the first generation of women, I examined how immigration and the culture and religion in which the women were brought up influenced their roles as mothers. The second

generation of women are the core group for the research as they have both the experience of being both mothered and mothering. The third generation of women are those who have very limited experience of mothering or are not mothers themselves but have performed the role of daughter and granddaughter. The intergenerational aspect of the study has allowed me to examine themes of mothering relationships and being mothered. This requires analysis of what values are taught and what is passed onto the next generation, what religion and cultural ideas are transmitted onto the next generation and how this differs for the various generations. The focus of the first phase of interviews was on three key themes: gendered identity, attitudes and access to education, and attitudes towards marriage. I will be discussing the reflections on the interviews that I conducted for this phase.

Discussion

As a SAW, I was able to adopt an insider role in the process of conducting my research. This has helped me gain access to the group much more easily. Research has shown that when the participants share similar characteristics with the interviewer, they can feel much more at ease in terms of making a contribution (Takhar, 2013; Ashraf-Emami, 2017; Kabir, 2010). It can help reduce interviewer bias. The 'insider role' allows one to immerse into the topic with depth and with a level of familiarity which makes the qualitative oral history interview an ideal method for researching the lives of SAW.

The insider role

As a South Asian Woman, I have a role in the research process. This includes the insider role, as someone who can identify with the subjects, which can lead to assumptions, ideals, expectations and even curiosity from the people I interview. Ashraf-Emami (2017) states that the Muslim women in her research were able to speak more freely and build rapport during the interview, knowing that as a Muslim woman researcher she was sensitive to their concerns and cultural parameters. It is variables like religion, gender, race and age that can influence the interviewer and interviewee relationship and can contribute towards the validation of the data. Bhopal (2001) argues that race is important, and some form of sameness allowed her to gain access to a community for her research. Bhopal argues that in oral history interviews the interviewees provide much more rich data on their personal experiences, and this can be difficult if the participants do not feel confident in the person interviewing them.

The insider role provides obvious advantages and can also provide a platform for the researcher to reflect on their own position as a potential subject in their own research. However, this can merge the insider/outsider role. This merging is not necessarily a disadvantage, because researcher reflexivity is important too. Takhar (2013) writes: "Reflexivity forms an important part of an ethical research process […] it signifies writing the

researcher into the research." (p. 80). The reflective process of interviewing women who have much in common with me has allowed me to reflect on my own experience and learn from the similar but different experiences from the lives of other SAW.

Reflections from my interviews

My sample of the first fifteen interviews for this phase of my research was based on people I knew. Often those I interviewed had some kind of connection with other people I knew, such as a sibling of a long-time friend, or a cousin of a friend. I struggled to gain a purely random sample. This did make a difference in the interview process.

There were many occasions when I felt that the interviewee trusted me and was willing to share confidential and honest answers. For example, when asking questions about marriage, one of the interviewees said, 'let me shut the door' (Myeda). The act of shutting of the door was to ensure that others in the family household or nearby did not hear the conversation. With most of the second-generation women I interviewed, I felt at ease as they were mainly of a similar age and the same generation as me, and they were willing to share more detailed information about their lives. There was mutual understanding between us as women, second-generation, and we shared a similar cultural background. The insider role helped facilitate this. However, this was also a weakness as most of the time, the women assumed I knew what they were talking about, but on some occasions, I needed to get clarification. I needed to probe more and ask additional questions to be more explicit and clarify my understanding of what they meant. The insider role here was not useful.

The fact that I was somehow related or a friend to someone they knew also played some part in the kind of answers I received. The issue of trust may still be something that these women felt they needed to protect, and I felt there was some degree of 'playing safe' in the responses received. As an 'insider', I felt at ease in probing and asking for clarification, but the fact that I knew these women through family or friend contacts may have hindered some of the responses.

The insider role also allowed me to develop rapport with the women during the interview process. The women discussed information about their upbringing, knowing that I understood their lives and could relate to their experiences. This allowed me to hear deeply personal and rich stories and details of the lives of women, which could have been more difficult if I was an interviewer who had totally different personal characteristics and background.

The insider role also allowed me to observe the etiquettes of South Asian culture in terms of addressing others based on factors like age, and the use of language. Since these interviews were conducted over Zoom, I was not meeting the interviewees in person which created a level of distance between us. However, I still used common language of politeness

to ease the interviewee into the conversation. For example, I addressed the first-generation woman I interviewed as "auntie", as it would have been considered impolite to address a much older person by their name. Knowing these cultural etiquettes made it easier for me to put the interviewee at ease.

Conclusion

Interviewing familiar subjects can provide many advantages as it can ease the interview process and the familiarity can allow the interviewer and the interviewee to build rapport and trust, as well as observe cultural etiquettes. The 'insider role' allows the qualitative interviewer to gain a deeper level of trust, understanding, and to use their own experiences to reflect on the research process. The lived experience of the researcher can allow them to embody the insider role for the purpose of research and can serve as a useful tool for conducting research using qualitative oral history interviews, which produce rich personal accounts of people's lives.

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Understanding the World in New Ways: A Reflection on the Journey Towards Appreciating the Intrinsic Value of Qualitative Research

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Abstract

In this article I look back at my experience in quantitative research and reflect on how a convergence of events made the pull of positivism particularly strong. Such events included: working in a medical setting, interpersonal relationships with medical professionals, and growing up in a Western culture that places greater value on quantitative than qualitative research methods. I go on to discuss how, through working on my PhD, I made the transition away from this tendency, towards appreciating the unique qualities and intrinsic value that qualitative methods can bring to research. This reflexive piece should be of interest to anyone on their PhD journey within the social sciences.

Keywords: *Quantitative, qualitative, post-positivism, positivism, reflection*

I am in the final year of my PhD, in which I have been working with young children in schools and nurseries. I have found the doctoral process undulating, but as I have moved through the various stages of my work, I have grown both personally and professionally. The PhD process has allowed me to think deeply about my area of interest. I have been in control of the design and execution of the research, in close collaboration with my supervisors. As the originator of the proposal, I am realising my own vision rather than someone else's. Along the way I have refined a number of valuable skills and taken time out to do a policy placement, working alongside civil servants in a government department; an opportunity I would not have had were it not for the PhD programme. However, I have also encountered challenges, many deriving from the fact that I am conducting a piece of qualitative research – a paradigm which I had only encountered briefly before.

In the very early stages of formulating my proposal, it became clear to me that I wished to truly give voice to very young children (some as young as 3), and not fall back on standard procedures of asking parents, caregivers, or teachers to answer questionnaires by-proxy. To do this I would have to design a study using post-positivist, qualitative methods. As

this type of research firmly locates the researcher in the world (Willig & Rogers, 2017), I would also be required to bring myself fully into the work, by naming my underlying theoretical assumptions. This felt truly alien to me. While I understood the appeal of qualitative methods, as a way of going beyond statistics and humanising research (through for example, vignettes or small case studies), I viewed this approach mainly as an adjunct to the 'real' work of quantitative research. I therefore approached my PhD with a positivist mindset firmly in place, unconsciously placing more value on quantitative designs, even as I proposed to work qualitatively.

To explain why I took this position, it is useful to reflect on my past. For over ten years I was employed as a researcher and trial manager at different UK academic institutions, NHS and local government bodies. I worked on a wide variety of projects; mostly experimental, double-blinded, quantitative studies in the positivist tradition. A few years after starting on this career trajectory, I married a General Practitioner and spent time working for an NHS Trust among a number of Psychiatrists, Psychologists and Nurses. For medical professionals, using evidence-based science such as Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) as justification for prescribing certain medication or courses of therapeutic intervention, is a foundation of their work. This can leave little room for accepting alternative forms of research, beyond those vignettes or small case studies. I was very influenced by this medical-model environment that I found myself in. I became committed to positivistic understandings of the concepts of validity, replicability and transferability. I sought ways to definitively answer questions and apply the findings to entire cohorts of people. This seemed the best – and fastest – way to achieve real change. Alongside this, growing up in the UK, I was subject to a Westernised culture of positivism, which has entered the public domain through an increase in evidence-based policy making in areas that traditionally would not have used this approach, such as in schools (Goldacre, 2013). This culture depicts the social world as a reality that is both knowable and measurable (Dunne et al., 2005) and positions quantitative methods such as RCTs (Hariton & Locascio, 2018), as the gold standard approach in the quest to discover the irrefutable truth of causal relationships (Hariton & Locascio, 2018).

Quantitative research felt very linear and natural to me: a straightforward journey from A to B, to be undertaken by a wholly objective observer. It has been argued that as humans we have an irresistible urge to classify the world in an attempt to bring order to uncertainty (Keck, 2009). Being a very organised person, someone who likes to be in control of situations, this style of research thus appealed to me on a deeply intrinsic level. Working within such predefined parameters, also meant I never had to risk giving away anything of myself by declaring my position. Why would I need to talk about myself, when I was simply

trying to answer a question about an area of importance? All of these factors came together to create the deep and lasting impression that quantitative methods were superior. Meanwhile, I subconsciously internalised the rhetoric of qualitative methods as less rigorous, more subjective and unscientific (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), pushing me still further away from them.

And yet, I did believe that this piece of research, my PhD, required a qualitative methodology, if only from a pragmatic point of view. Plus, deep down, I probably always knew that research is influenced by the researcher. How could it not be when we are after all, only human and bring all our foibles and prejudices with us into every area of our lives? And so, with these apparent contradictions in mind, I found myself having to push forward in this unfamiliar world and reflect on my position within it. I have always believed that humans are almost entirely shaped by our surroundings and the prevailing social norms of our cultures. As a younger adult, pre-children, I frequently had nature/nurture debates with my older sister who had a child and was firmly in the nature camp. I was then, and remain now, a firm believer in nurture, even after having my own children. Twenty years ago, I read a book by a clinical psychologist (James, 2002), which spoke deeply to me about the effect our upbringing has on us as adults and these ideas stayed with me. Reflecting on these, and other thoughts, in the context of a module on research design, provided the catalyst I ultimately needed. I came to realise that my position had in fact always been clear; I just had not yet named it. The position with which I most closely identified was social constructionism, within a broader ontology of relativism. I had been persuaded through years of work, interpersonal relationships and a broader Western scientific culture, that quantitative work was the superior research methodology. Yet, in fact, my deepest beliefs completely justified a move into qualitative work: in fact, they demanded it.

There was something very freeing in this epiphany. I felt empowered in throwing off the strict expectations of quantitative research design in my proposal and able to embrace a more elastic, less ordered approach. Photovoice also slotted in nicely as my chosen main research method. Later, as I moved into fieldwork, I began to truly appreciate the value of qualitative research, accepting that a messy, creative style was perfectly legitimate. In fact, it may be the only way of working as authentically as possible with children, with many researchers now favouring creative qualitative approaches with this cohort, attempting to improve on methods designed for use with adults (Robinson & Gillies, 2012). My work with young participants proved unpredictable: things did not always go according to plan and I had to learn to be creative and adaptable. I had to listen to them and read them in a different way to adults and often simply go with the flow. I doubt a strict quantitative approach would

have allowed me that same flexibility and freedom and it probably would not have been as enjoyable for the participants.

I still know that quantitative paradigms have a very important place in research, but I now accept that not everything is reducible down to numbers. Qualitative methods can offer rich, nuanced and meaningful data, which can be equally as enlightening as a 'p' value or a 't' statistic. There is also the potential for beauty in qualitative research. Huttunen and Kakkori (2020) conceptualise its intrinsic value as its ability to awaken novel forms of seeing and thinking. They argue that the most powerful qualitative research will function as a great work of art, enabling individuals to understand the world in a new way (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2020). In aspiring to this ambition, my future research could be taken in a variety of directions. I am particularly interested in learning about how younger cohorts of education practitioners, who themselves have grown up in increasingly digital worlds, might go on to influence the young children in their care, with respect to facilitating nature connection. This would require work with adult participants, but I can now envisage working in a more nuanced and creative way with them, rather than relying on survey and interview techniques. My past endeavours in quantitative research may have been worthwhile, but I now feel emboldened in the present. I am encouraged to strive towards creating something not just meaningful, but potentially aesthetical with my qualitative work in the future. Most importantly, I now know that there is indeed, great value in that.

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Reflections on Public Engagement: Radio, Journalists, and Public Lectures

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Keywords: *Public engagement, communication, public image, media, reflection and advice*

In March 2023 I presented my PhD research to members of the public at the University of Reading's annual Fairbrother lecture (University of Reading, 2023a). To secure this opportunity I responded to a call put forward by the graduate school and gave a short presentation on my proposed topic. This public lecture focused on how automatic facial recognition (AFR) technology is used by police and private security. This talk discussed my PhD research on how AFR surveillance impacts human, data, and equality rights (University of Reading, 2023b). The lecture received over 100 registrations and was well attended. In the run-up to the talk, I undertook additional public engagement activities through appearing on the local radio and speaking to a journalist from a national newspaper. These opportunities were secured by the University of Reading's communications team and were primarily used to promote the lecture.

Receiving such attention was an incredibly rewarding experience, as I was able to develop my academic profile. However, given the controversial nature of policing and facial recognition surveillance (Dermody, 2019), communicating clear and accurate information to the public on the practical and legal risks of facial recognition was no easy feat. As an early career researcher stepping into public discourse, maintaining a positive public image was important to me. In my case, having a favourable public profile meant keeping the discussion balanced so I did not alienate either police or non-governmental organisations from getting involved in future research.

Reflecting on my personal experiences, the following provides an insight into the importance of public engagement through radio, news outlets, and public forums. This discussion encourages researchers to think about public engagement as early as possible, as each format is unique and provides different opportunities to share findings and engage in an ongoing dialog.

Appearing on the Radio

With the upcoming Fairbrother lecture, news of my research spread across the University. Given the topical nature of facial recognition it was not long until I was contacted by the University communication teams about appearing on the Phil Kennedy show (BBC Radio Berkshire). The purpose of this radio interview was to give members of the public an insight into the University of Reading and promote my upcoming lecture.

Due to the conversational nature of radio, it can be hard to predict the questions you will receive. At the start of the interview, I received standard introductory questions, such as "what is facial recognition?", "how does facial recognition work?", "and where is facial recognition used?". It can be tempting to give a complete overview of the research when answering questions. However, given the limited time and varied background knowledge of the audience, I used short and simple soundbites to put points across clearly. Due to the informal style of questions, the discussion strayed into areas my research had not covered. For example, I was asked about the accuracy of facial recognition. This question focused on the technical side of facial recognition, which I have limited knowledge on. In this instance, I said I was unsure of the answer, but I offered insights into the issues of facial recognition accuracy. For example, I discussed how facial recognition systems can produce discriminatory results if the images they are trained on are not representative of the general population.

I found the key to radio was to break down my research into clear and concise points. This helped me keep the conversation light and engaging to audiences. The conversation can take unexpected turns and you might be asked questions that are not completely related to your research. I found it best to these develops in my stride and enjoy the experience.

Speaking to Journalists

With the promotion of my public lecture, I found myself becoming increasingly associated with facial recognition. When a journalist from a national newspaper spoke to the communications team about a facial recognition piece they were writing - my name came to mind.

One key point to note about journalists is the time constraints they work within, which means you may only have a day (or less) to prepare for the interview. I recommend having a pre-prepared research summary. This summary should include the background of your research, areas in the field needing development, and how your work addresses this. Having research summary provided me with a quick reference point that assisted me during my telephone interview with the journalist. This helped address one of the biggest challenges: providing simple, understandable, and accurate depictions of my research. However, despite my best efforts, the interview focused on broader discussions of AFR use, which resulted in key points getting lost throughout the conversation. This was reflected in how I was quoted,

which summarised the overall discussion into a simple but inaccurate statement of fact. Despite rewriting the quote, for reasons unknown to me, it was not included in the final print. This could have been due to the relevance of the quote or simply cut by the editor for space.

If I were to be interviewed again, I would start by asking whether the journalist is looking for a broader discussion or a quote. Having this understanding would have prevented me going into too much background and having my main points lost in a sea of irrelevant explanation. In a similar vein, I was always in control of how my research was represented. I asked for certain points not to be quoted the way the journalist had phrased them. I always had the option to withdraw if I was still unhappy with how my research was represented. This option to withdraw was very important, as I felt that it was best to have my research represented correctly or not at all.

Presenting to the public

The main event was the Fairbrother Lecture. This presentation took three months of planning and was supported by the graduate school and my supervisors. The most important part of the process was refining content to make it accessible to a non-specialist audience. Previously I only had presented in the academic context, which resulted in the first draft being technical and inaccessible. Based on feedback from the graduate school, the focus of the talk shifted away from the content (the substance of my PhD) towards the narrative of the presentation. To bring the discussion to life, the talk was framed around real-world examples of AFR and how the audience sees this in their daily lives. During the early stages of planning, I invested significant time into understanding how my audience would engage with the concepts and ideas. On the day of the presentation, I arrived at the venue early and practiced the talk. Being able to spend time practicing in the room helped me get comfortable with the environment and build confidence.

Once the talk finished there was a question-and-answer session. Due to the controversial nature of AFR within policing I was aware this talk would attract a range of different viewpoints. For example, during the Q&A there was a dialog about *the suitability of* AFR when identifying and tracking potential witnesses to crimes (Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner, 2023). Many questions came from a place of genuine interest and curiosity, however, there was one exception. This question focused on why they believed I was incorrect and how my research was framed unfairly against the police. I experienced this as hostile, but fortunately I had previous experience with hostile questions and recognised they were likely trying to agitate me to prove a point. I have found when dealing with hostile questions take a step back and acknowledge the core point of the question, as it is best not to be dismissive or rude. Answering these questions calmy and respectful will only work in your favour, as it will often be clear to the audience that some

questions are only asked to undermine or antagonise. In responding I relied upon official government sources to support my reasoning, which demonstrated how and why I had reached my conclusions. Despite the unpleasantness of such a directly hostile question, because of the way I handled it, after the talk I was complimented on how I answered the question.

When engaging directly with the public, I kept in mind that whilst the audience was interested in this area, they might have little or no background knowledge. Therefore, I kept the information simple and introduced new concepts clearly. I focused on the narrative and made sure it was relatable and easy to follow. I found when answering questions that many people had a genuine interest, however a small number sought to undermine or antagonise. When that happened, I made sure I was respectful and tried my best to answer the question.

Conclusion

This reflection piece has provided an insight into my personal experiences of public engagement. Whether it be through radio, news outlets, or public forums being prepared to answer questions and provide a clear understanding is key. In all instances, take the time to understand your audience and what they expect from you. Lasty, throughout this experience I often took time to reflect and appreciate the opportunity. Promoting new understandings and challenging current narratives is what my research strives towards, and this process provided an amazing platform I will always be grateful for.

<div align="center">References</div>

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A Phoenix in a Blue Sky: Basma's Journey

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The focus of this article is to share my life's trajectory on a personal, professional and academic experience which has been shaped by my lived and inherited status as a third-generation of a stateless Palestinian refugee who has lived with her fellows in one of the Palestinian camps in Lebanon for more than 75 years so far. I was able to pursue a PhD in Migration Studies after getting a fully funded scholarship from the University of Kent in September 2021.

I will start by reflecting on my personal lived experience as a refugee, then will explore how this lived experience led to my involvement in humanitarian work with the UN, and finally, how these experiences shaped my academic journey to conduct PhD in migration studies. In this reflection, I agree with Arendt (1930) about the importance and centrality of personal experiences to shape life's trajectory that influences the processes of making the "Past, Present, and Future".

> *'The Moment We Arrived in Saida [City in the South of Lebanon] in the Afternoon, We Became Refugees' – (Kanafani, 1998, p. 75).*

The sky in a camp

I was born and inherited the status of a third generation of stateless Palestinian refugees due to the expulsion of my grandparents from their homeland in 1948. Due to this protracted displacement, I have lived my life so far displaced with no official belonging to a country and living in one of the Palestinian camps in Lebanon. Living in a camp was and still is a challenging experience for a child and human being to live. My base and the other Palestinian camps in Lebanon are overcrowded, surrounded by military checkpoints and entry points, and have minimal substandard infrastructure, sanitation, and housing conditions. This situation is caused by the requirement of authorisation of the Lebanese authorities to improve housing conditions and bring building materials to the camp.

In addition, in Lebanon, I lived in a limbo legal situation, denied any official status and my fundamental human rights such as the right to employment, healthcare, access to higher

education, freedom of movement and travel and the right to own property. This denial of fundamental human rights created a day-to-day reality for me and my growth as a child and adult in exile and the camps. I remembered that looking at the sky and imagining flying far away and high was one of my childhood dreams and a source of hope while living in the camp.

As a child and an adult refugee, I have been labelled and stigmatised for many years due to my status as a refugee living in a camp with other refugees. This labelling led me to systematically face discrimination, marginalisation, persecution, and hostility with the lack of durable solutions and protracted displacement. However, this built my capacity and ability to adapt, thrive, achieve, and grow in the face of complex circumstances and challenging lived experiences. This lived understanding supported me in knowing my passion, mission, and cause in this life: helping other refugees in any part of this world and using any opportunity to achieve this cause.

A call for support in the field

Living as a refugee led me to discover my passion and mission in this life, where I had a clear plan for where I want to be and how I should engage in building my skills, understanding and knowledge about humanitarian and community work and in influencing public opinions about refugees and their plight. So, I started to engage in my Palestinian community and community organisations as a volunteer to teach traditional dances to young women and girls, English language courses for school children and develop and implement community projects to improve my camp's condition.

As a result of these ten years of volunteering in my camp and other camps in Lebanon to work with and for my refugee community, I supported my application for a full-time humanitarian job to work with international organisations inside the centre on child protection, sexual and gender-based violence agenda and community outreach and mobilisation. I worked with these international organisations in the centres of Lebanon for four years. I had the opportunity to build, expand and enhance my communication, networking, partnership, and engagement skills and capacities, in addition to gaining the needed understanding, awareness, and contextual knowledge to work with displaced communities living in the camps and in a highly complex political and legal environment.

Finally, these valuable acquired local experiences, skills and capacities working with my refugee community in different camps facilitated me to join UN agencies such as UNHCR to work with Syrian refugees and internally displaced after the start of the Syrian conflict. It was an eye-opening, critical, and unique opportunity for a refugee to work with UNHCR to support other refugees in Lebanon and Syria. Based on feedback from a senior colleague at that time, I was grateful that my lived experiences and skills were a real asset to UNHCR

work in Lebanon and Syria. I was privileged to use my understanding and experiences to advocate for Syrian refugees within UNHCR and to raise my voice and awareness about certain harmful practices and negative narratives about the vulnerability, resilience, agency, dignity, and self-reliance of displaced people within our humanitarian work in the field, with my colleagues and with the communities and individuals.

The dream of a PhD

Before pursuing PhD in Migration studies, I received a fully funded Chevening scholarship as the first Palestinian refugee from Lebanon in 20 years who received this scholarship to do a master's degree in development studies at Oxford Brookes University in the UK in 2019. I had free primary and secondary education in UNRWA refugee schools in my camp and was taught by refugee teachers.

Pursuing PhD in Migration studies was inspired firstly by my lived and professional experiences working with and for refugee communities and organisations and noticing their accurate and valuable contributions to humanitarian work and communities. These contributions are attributed to the existing skills and capacities that they both must influence and create societal change and mobilisation.

Second, these experiences have led me to take an informed decision to research and investigate the work and impact of refugee-led organisations (RLOs) and refugees' participation and inclusion in developing solutions to their protracted displacement and in their exile. This decision was mainly influenced by these experiences and my improved understanding of the severe gaps, barriers and possible opportunities embedded within the humanitarian ecosystem regarding RLOs and refugees' leadership in humanitarian action.

So, I am researching the meaning and actual implementation of localisation in humanitarian action through the work of RLOs. I hope to bridge all these experiences and unique positionality to study the impact that refugee-led community-based organisations have through their direct provision of capacity building and development to their communities, representation; their understanding of the migration and refugee crises; and the contributions of displaced people in creating and sustaining durable solutions in humanitarian action.

Moreover, I mobilised every opportunity in the university to shift and counter the refugee and migration studies narrative, like the vulnerability narrative, focusing on the contributions and work of refugees in displacement. I shared my experiences through teaching Bachelor and Master students about refugee and migration topics in the classrooms and through leading, planning, implementing, and engaging in public events, discussions and forums within the university and in the city. Also, through acting as a co-

chair for the University of Sanctuary steering group for our application to become a University of Sanctuary.

Furthermore, I plan to use all these experiences, skills, understanding and awareness to act as a role model and a source of hope to help other refugees worldwide access higher education. I also aspire to contribute to the research and academia in the UK and globally by bringing the lived voices and experiences of displaced people and practitioners from the field. I want to inspire other refugees to lead the research about their displacement and experiences and to contextualise these in the academic field, policy and practice to build better humanitarian solutions for contemporary issues and bridge the gap between academia and practice.

In conclusion, through this life's trajectory and experiences, I have grown emotionally, intellectually and mentally, enlightened, tested, exposed, challenged, empowered, and mobilised to claim my voice, follow my passion and mission in the migration and humanitarian sectors and in this life and to bridge all the experiences from the past to the present and the future. So, I can create a better future for myself and inspire or influence a better one for my fellows and everyone.

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