The Refugee Identity Crisis: How Athens is Trying to Bridge the Gap Between a Person and their Homeland through Heritage and Meaning Making

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Abstract

Athens as a case study is perfect for work on social development of refugees as it has, in the past few years, become a major centre of mass immigration. With thousands of citizens having settled into the city, Athens is now working on looking after these people holistically through reconnecting them to the past.

Everyone has a personal identity; one way in which this is acquired comes from our chosen country of residence through its economy, culture, and history. However, refugees, who have had to abandon the country in which they have been brought up and have lost all connection with any physical evidence of their past, have also lost this way of establishing a personal identity.

Athens is taking steps to connect not only refugees to the local heritage but also the local community to refugees by, on the one hand, giving refugees tours around museums and, on the other, staging exhibitions which illustrate the refugee experience centred around refugees' communities. Athens aims to include the community, in order to teach Athenians about the refugees' experience, and, ultimately, to encourage identity building through positive representation. These activities work to show refugees that, although they may be physically disconnected from their original heritage, it is possible to create a new heritage and its associated identity. Athens is reshaping the connotations inherent in the title 'refugee' by creating a community and therefore a new identity. This is an identity which has its roots in Athens, where refugees can make us of its historical background but, by highlighting Greece's democracy and Greek's famous hospitality, both Greeks and refugees can build a self-identity based on these concepts.[1] The possible outcome of what Athens is and has been doing to help its refugee population reflects conclusions that I have come to as a result of informal discussions with museum professionals and conversations with the people I met during my time in Athens.

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[1] This article is based on a paper presented by the author at *Boundaries*, a University of Kent MA Festival and Conference held in Paris 30 May – 2 June 2017.

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Identity is probably not the first thing that comes to mind when considering the needs of people who have been violently displaced from their home in the way those living in refugee communities have been. However, when shelter and other basic needs have been met, the boundary between the self and the surrounding public becomes more apparent and this feeling is only exacerbated when refugees find themselves in an area where people have a strong sense of national identity, as is the case in Greece. Most refugees now in Greece did not intend it to be their final stop; they are there because of events in March 2016 which halted them on their way into Europe.[2] Not only have they been displaced from their home country and forced to abandon their belongings there but they have also lost their end-goal and are now stuck, it seems forever, in a state of limbo, not belonging anywhere, as refugees are seen as 'people without a place' (Papastergiadis 2006; cited Burnett 2013: 1).[3] Essentially, the refugee risks losing all sense of self and identity. The object of this article is to examine how Athens, having provided refugees with their basic needs since they began arriving in significant numbers, is working to bridge the gap between them and their lost identity.

The inspiration for this article came from the coincidence that during from my postgraduate studies in Heritage Management at the University of Kent's Athens campus, I was living not far from the refugee camp at Skaramagás, the largest in Greece. Using the same public transport as they did to travel to and from Athens, I got to know many people from a community with which I had never previously interacted as well as volunteers who worked with them. This gave me insights into a way of life about which my only information up till then had come from the media.

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[2]   The background to the current situation is that, prior to 2016, Greece allowed refugees from the Middle East and beyond who arrived via Turkey to enter but did not encourage them to remain, as it was unable to make adequate provision for them. Most, if not all, of them were aiming for countries in Europe, such as Sweden, Germany and Austria, via Macedonia and the West Balkans. The situation changed considerably during 2015, when more than a million refugees fled from Syria, as conditions there worsened (UNHCR 2016: 13). Instead of settling in neighbouring Middle Eastern countries, as had previously been the case, many of these set their sights on Europe, encouraged by the welcoming attitude of countries such as Germany, where Chancellor Angela Merkel declared, 'We can do it' (ESI 2016: 15).

[3]   Burnett also observes that refugee camps themselves often have a 'placeless' status, being deemed to be not legally part of the country in which they are actually situated, and this 'enhances the impression of placelessness' (Burnett 2013: 1).

1. Refugees in Athens: Present and Past

The presence in Greece in 2018 of around 60,000 refugees, of which 15,000 or so are on the Greek Islands (Strickland 2018), is the outcome of two independent political decisions taken in 2016 to address the almost exponential increase in the numbers of refugees trying to enter Europe via Turkey and Greece during 2015.[4] The first of these was Macedonia's decision to close its border with Greece to unpapered immigrants in early March 2016. About ten days later, the EU and Turkey entered into an agreement whereby Turkey would take back refugees still on the Greek Islands and the EU would give Turkey six billion Euros towards the cost of making better provision for refugees in that country.[5] The combined effect was that refugees already in mainland Greece found themselves stuck there and refugees still on the Greek Islands found themselves unable to transfer to the mainland.

The sudden influx of refugees into Greece during 2015 and the situation that arose after the events of March 2016 made an immediate and obvious impact on Athens and Athenians. From late 2015 on, camps to accommodate the refugees still arriving from the Greek islands were hastily set up on the outskirts of Athens and near Piraeus, making use of buildings such as disused military bases and the old Olympic stadium. One of these was the camp at Skaramagás already mentioned; near Piraeus, this was initially a women and children only camp, but it now houses 3,000 families, Syrian, Afghani, Kurdish and Iraqi. These official camps provide the refugees' basic needs of shelter and food, the cost of which is borne by NGOs and humanitarian agencies.

Communities of refugees have also been established in the Athens city centre areas of Victoria and Omonia. In addition to this, unofficial accommodation for refugees is being provided by Athens' thriving left wing groups, so called 'solidarity groups', who have been taking over large unoccupied buildings in the urban area and putting refuge families into them; it's estimated that currently over 2,500 refugees, of whom there are little records, are being housed in this way (Georgiopoulou 2018).

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[4] This increase is illustrated by data in *The Refugee Crisis through Statistics*. One table shows the month by month increase in the arrivals of refugees in Greece during 2015 from 1,694 in January to a peak of 211,663 in October before declining to an average of around 130,000 for November and December. Another table shows that 872,500 migrants arrived in Greece by the sea crossing from Turkey in 2015 compared with 43,500 the previous year (ESI 2017: 14–15).

[5] Writing on the anniversary of the EU-Turkey Agreement, Amnesty International's Greece Researcher Kondylia Gogou condemned the previous twelve months as 'Europe's year of shame' (Gogou 2017). Refugees still on the Greek Islands are living in appalling conditions; volunteers working with these refugees are convinced that '[the fact that refugees] have to endure [these conditions is] part of a broader plan' on the part of the camps' Greek operators and EU financial backers to deter further refugees from attempting to get into Greece (Strickland 2018; Witte 2018).

However, today's immigrants are not the first refugees to arrive in Greece in great numbers. Nearly a century ago, the outcome of political upheavals in the Eastern Mediterranean during the first two decades of the twentieth century as well as international pressures was the arrival of the *Mikrasiátes*, the Greeks from Anatolia (or Asia Minor), in 1922. These settled all over Greece and Macedonia, but a large majority settled in Central Attika, in Athens and the neighbouring towns of Piraeus, Elefsina and Elliniko.

Just as is happening today, the arrival of these refugees greatly changed the physical landscape of not only Athens, the population of which doubled, but also neighbouring towns; overall the population of the whole area increased by the addition of one million refugees (Karatzas 2012: 162). Initially, many public buildings were commandeered to provide housing for the refugees: school buildings, public baths, even the Athens Opera House (Hirschon 1989: 36). New suburbs were then built on the city's periphery to provide housing, but many of the new arrivals from Anatolia and the Balkan province in Turkey were unable to afford them, so they created illicit settlements, building where they could with whatever materials were to hand in styles that 'expressed their own architectural traditions'; Karatzas describes how the 'abrupt wave of refugees from Asia Minor' radically changed the appearance of neo-classical Athens (2012: 162–65).

2   Heritage

Heritage, says Harrison, is ubiquitous; we live among 'spectral images of the past, the heterogeneous piling up of historic materials in the present' (2013: 4). But he argues, this does not mean that it must be considered as just a historic phenomenon; it is also a social, economic and political phenomenon of late modern societies. Evidence of a shared human connectivity, heritage can be an object as large and as ancient as the pyramids of Giza or as small as a book handed down through the generations, emblems representative of the past which we preserve and treasure. It can be not only a city's long-built transport system but also the continued daily use of it, a practice from the past which we continue to uphold in the present; this is intangible heritage, that is, not represented by physical objects.

Intangible heritage is a representation of a culture, so naturally connects itself to identity through its creation (Lenzerini 2011: 101–02). It reflects a group's practices, rituals and daily lives; it is an image of a time, place, and emotion. It is not just the physical form of old buildings or artefacts but our personal involvement in the area in which we live, be this a conscious activity such as taking part in the annual town festival or an unconscious one such as adopting the characteristics of local speech; heritage is life.

Heritage and memory are strongly linked. Heritage is the means whereby the past is not forgotten but kept alive in the present. It can be the 'glue' which helps communities bond together. The *Mikrasiátes* who flooded into Greece nearly a century ago give a good illustration of this. In her examination of *Mikrasiátes* who settled on Chios, James observes that it was '[s]hared memories [of their former life in Anatolia and their traditions that] allowed the refugees to reconstruct their lives, if not just as they had been, at least with continuity' (2001: 235); intangible heritage informed their sense of collective identity.

At a personal level, we surround ourselves with our own heritage, again both intangible and tangible: rituals, activities, religion, tastes, and objects. We keep physical memories of our family and friends who make us who we are in the form of photographs, we visit the same sites throughout our lives, and sing the same songs from our childhood. These are all evidence of our own personal identity and heritage, as well as the changes to our personal identity, which will be discussed in the next section, are closely related to the personal heritage with which we surround ourselves. If we look within ourselves, we'll find things with which we feel we are associated at a basic level; it could be a childhood song, the place where we lived for a brief time or a personal object we have grown up with. This is our own heritage, gleaned from countless influences on our life.

During its three-year programme which ended in January 2013, EuNaMus produced a number of reports.[6] In one of these, entitled 'Agents of Change: How National Museums Shape European Identity', it says that '[t]hrough their collections, these institutions […] provide solid anchors for a national sense of belonging, a role they have performed for centuries' (2012: 1).[7] Arguably, heritage shapes how we fit into a society and can enhance or decrease our feeling of belonging within a societal and cultural landscape.

From this, we can see that heritage has a key role in developing identity. Indeed, heritage can play a role in revitalising existing communities by encouraging a positive sense of identity. This idea is not new; it is being used, for instance, by the European Council of Culture and its annual choice of a European Capital of Culture, which not only boosts the local economy but also community morale (Moris et al, 2017). The Greek town of Elefsina (coincidentally, the town in which I lived when studying in Athens) is one of the latest choices for Capital of

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[6] EuNaMus is the acronym of European National Museums: Identity Policies, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, a research project funded under the Seventh Framework of the European Commission.

[7] The concept that heritage, whether presented through representation in museums or being learned through the study of history, contributes to the development of identity has been a popular study since the 1970s with the advent of the movement known as New Museology, which shifted the focus from the artefacts exhibited to represent heritage to their audience.

Culture, having been nominated for 2021. As the organisation promoting Elefsina's candidacy for the title makes clear in its final bid book, the expectation is that the ECoC title will be the catalyst for the town's dynamism, creativity and social cohesion by involving its people to get more involved with heritage and work towards building a stronger community (Eleusis2021 2016).[8]

Heritage, both tangible and intangible, supports the awareness of a nation's past which is a component of a sense of national identity to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the individual. It follows that separation from the heritage that supports one's sense of identity, whether national or personal, will adversely affect it, the more so, if the separation is enforced, as is the case with refugees. The effects of such a separation — experiencing a loss of identity, the sense of being 'placeless', of not belonging anywhere — are only going to be exacerbated when refugees find themselves in a country such as Greece, where all its citizens have a strong sense of national identity, and the more so in Athens, on which the Greek's sense of national identity is centred (Karatzas 2012: 155).

Greeks are very aware of their long heritage, which they exhibit well. Every major town has an archaeological museum which tells the story of the town's heritage from times past, the people that lived there then and what they did. The mass marketing of the heritage from Ancient Greece means that the city's history is ever present to the visitor. To the tourist, this is exciting, but it can become suffocating for the long-term visitor, as I experienced. To be surrounded by museums, displaying only Greek artefacts and promoting only Greek heritage must make refugees feel their loss more keenly; even the mass of the Acropolis that dominates the city is a reminder that you are not home.

3. Identity

The concept of identity, the state of having unique identifying characteristics, is most relevant to the refugees who now find themselves in Greece.

3.1   Personal Identity

Our personal identity is influenced by many things: our experiences in life, our interests, what we believe and stand for; an important influence is the idea of our home. This home we connect

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[8]   Elefsina, known in antiquity as Eleusis, is historically important for several reasons. It is the birthplace of the poet Aeschylus, the focus of the annual Aeschylia festival. It is also where the Eleusinian Mysteries, one of Ancient Greece's secret religious cults, were celebrated annually at a site to which people walked from Kerameikos in Athens along a route known as the Sacred Road. Living in the town, I saw a different picture. Where the rituals were once held is an archaeological site, but it has a deserted air; the town is becoming depopulated as young people move away, and the area now better known for its abandoned factories and the oil tankers which make the coastline unusable.

to is not necessarily the country we were born in but can be the country we have resided in for a long time. Forced displacement from one's home will alter one's personal identity; this is certainly the case for a refugee (Griffiths 2001). The refugees now in Athens have been forced to abandon the home that was part of their personal identity, increasing their feeling of loss further and leading to their feeling of being people without a place, what Papastergiadis terms 'placelessness' (Papastergiadis 2006: 431–33; cited Burnett 2013: 1). This makes recreating a refugee's personal identity problematic: do refugees, as Burnett asks rhetorically, 'continue to base their identity on their country of origin, do they form an identity connected to a non-place or do they no longer have a part of their identity based on place' (2013:1)? A similar question could be asked, even if the refugee is sufficiently settled in the host country not to feel like a person 'without a place': should identity be based on the old home or the new one? It is beyond the scope of this article to attempt to answer this question.

The term 'personal identity' has a plethora of definitions; it can be how we see ourselves in relation to our surroundings and fellow beings, the way we define ourselves, how we choose to live our life, and the labels with which we are associated. All definitions agree, however, that this sense of self is based on our experiences, so it changes throughout our lifetime, depending on major life events and self-evaluation (Carducci 2009). We humans are subject to change, and the way we view our identity consequently changes. We grow older and change the way we dress, our taste buds become more diverse, and religious affiliations can be gained or lost; as a result, we can assume many different identities or identifications rather like masks, which can be worn either successively or even all at once (Ibáñez 1990: 15); national identity is one of these 'masks'.

3.2 National Identity

The way in which we see ourselves in relation to our fellow beings is known as 'collective identity'. One form of collective identity is national identity, the sense of belonging to one state or one nation. The concept of this envisages a community built of millions of people who have never met but feel a bond with through shared experience:[9]

> [The nation] is an imagined […] community […]. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members […] yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. […] [I]t is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, a nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (Anderson 2006: 6–8).

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[9] References to Anderson are from the latest edition of his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* first published in 1983.

National identity can be defined as the sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, as represented by distinctive traditions, culture, language and politics. It is way of 'branding' a group of people who collectively share the same subjective sense, 'we', and distinguishing them from those who do not, the outsiders, 'they'.

National identity is not the same as nationality, in that term's sense of one's legal status as a citizen of a nation state. Anderson uses the term 'nation-ness' to distinguish between the two concepts: 'nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it, in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts' (Anderson 2006: 4). In other words, we are not born with a sense of nation-ness; we acquire it from the culture around us. Heritage, therefore, is a major contributor to the 'mask' that is one's nation-ness. Greeks are an example of a people whose heritage and nation-ness are closely linked.

Modern Greeks are keenly aware of their heritage and history which go back nearly three thousand years. It was this intellectual affinity with classical Greek civilisation, as well as the Greek language, which formed the basis of what Kitromilides describes as 'proto-nationalism' in the Greek-speaking Christians who were at the core of the many small states which emerged after the break-up of the Byzantine empire in 1204 (2013: 23). However, the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and the consequential fall of the remaining Greek states meant that Greece, unlike many of the nations of Western Europe, did not become a nation-state until it gained independence from the Ottoman empire in 1832. Throughout this period, Greece, however, held on to its distinct language, history, religion, and customs to separate itself and promote nationalism (ibid: 24).

However, argues Karatzas, the past culture, history, and religion on which this nation-ness is built is not that of what is now modern Greece but only of one part of it: Athens; modern Greece is 'Atheno-centric' (2012: 155). This is evident from the way Greek history is both embedded in many Greeks, who hold strong opinions about their past, and, together with culture and religion, is fully covered by representations in Athens' museums — the National Archaeological Museum, the Christian Byzantine Museum and the Museum of Greek Folk Art.

Nation-ness can be acquired by people who live in a country for a long time but were not born there. Refugees, like all migrants, arrive in the country which will be their new home with an already established nation-ness. If they live there for long enough, and especially if they are present there when experiencing key rites of passage such as puberty and marriage, they are likely to connect emotionally to the local nation-ness, even if they never completely lose their original nation-ness. One reason for this is the effect of isomorphism, the tendency to become

like the people around one: '[g]reater similarity […] result[s] from interaction, communication, and emulation' (Rosenau 1996: 259). Another is that one naturally develops an emotional attachment to the nation which is providing for one, so one's emotional attachment to one's original nation can weaken a little but is not completely lost.

In the case of refugees, the 'homesickness' refugees experience on finding themselves among people with an alien sense of nation-ness is going to be greater because they have not left their home by choice, and they are not well enough settled into the new community to develop an emotional attachment to the host country; they therefore cling on to their original nation-ness. As a result, there can be conflict between the groups whose nation-ness differs; this can lead to friction within the community, a situation which requires sensitive handling by the host nation.[10]

Nation-ness is not the same as nationalism, which is also a 'cultural artefact' (Anderson 2006: 4). Özkırımlı defines nationalism as a 'form of seeing and interpreting that conditions our daily speech, behaviors and attitudes' (2017: 4). Today, the term is often understood as an extreme form of patriotism marked by a belief in the superiority of one's nation over all others. It is this extreme expression of patriotism which is manifested in 'the recent problem of xenophobia and ethnic violence against immigrants, *Gastarbeiter*, and asylum seekers' (Özkırımlı 2017: 126–27) and which has, in recent years, been championed by political entities in both Western and Eastern Europe which focus on themes such as immigration, security, and economic austerity.[11] The refugee crisis has only served to make these arguments louder, as both fears about terrorist attacks and the consequent need for better security increase. This is the reason behind the surge in the popularity of far-right parties such as France's *Front Nationale* which very nearly won the presidential election in 2017. Another far-right party is Greece's *Popular Association — Golden Dawn*, founded in 1980, which opposes all non-European, especially Muslim, immigration into the mainly Greek areas of southern Greece and Athens and includes in its National Plan the expulsion of all illegal immigrants.[12]

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[10] Mittelman identifies 'conflicts between immigrant and established communities in formerly tight-knit neighborhoods' as one of the manifestations of globalisation (1994: 427; quoted Rosenau 1996: 248).

[11] Arguably, nationalism could be seen as a form of localisation and its rise in recent years as a reaction to increased globalisation, which Rosenau defines as 'objects and activities that spread across boundaries' (1996: 256). Rosenau identifies six categories of these 'objects and activities', one of which is 'people […] either as tourists, professionals, *refugees*, or *migrants*' (1996: 256–57; added emphases).

[12] Strickland comments that, unlike other far-right, populist and often neo-fascist parties across Europe, *Golden Dawn* has not successfully broadened its base since the massive influx of refugee arrivals started in 2015. However, he warns, whilst '*Golden Dawn* hasn't grown, there remains the grim fact that the neo-fascist party hasn't shrunk much, either' (Strickland 2018a).

4. Community Building: collective identity and 'imagined communities'

Although we can define what is meant by 'personal identity'; we cannot define or comment on a person's identity unless we are that person. What we can do is work towards helping a person rebuild or develop their identity. There are many ways of doing this, and it's beyond the scope of this article to mention them all. My focus is on those which, in one way or another, make use of Athens' heritage and can be interpreted as community building.

I referred earlier to collective identity, one of the 'masks' which a person wears. A group with which someone identifies is the people amongst whom they live: the community. In simple terms, a community means the people living in a given locality. However, it can also mean a group of people that has characteristics in common; they have a shared identity. When people living in the same locality recognise in each other a shared identity, they are said have a sense of community; individually, each has a collective identity.

The biggest contributor to a collective identity, maintains Karatzas, is a 'sense of belonging to the same place' (2012: 165). This is recognised by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 'A Community based Approach in UNHCR operations' which gives guidance on how to implement the approach and help refugees feel that they are part of the local geography and part of a community (UNHCR 2008).

Sometimes, external initiatives are needed either to revive a sense of community that has been lost or to encourage a sense of community where none yet exists, for example, where new communities in the basic sense are being created; the mere fact that people are all living in a given locality does not mean that they will automatically develop a sense of community. This is community building; an example of this is the annual choice by the European Council of Culture of a 'European Capital of Culture', already mentioned in connection with its choice of Elefsina as the European Capital of Culture in 2021.

Today's refugees, who have been housed in the camps outside Athens and in social housing in Athens itself, will naturally develop a sense of community because of their shared culture, religion, ethnicity, and the experience of becoming a refugee. However, this will perpetuate the divide between Athenians and refugees that currently exists. The arrangements to provide shelter for refugees has had a negative outcome in that is that there is a physical divide between the refugee communities and indigenous Athens. This is obvious in the case of the camps, which are located outside of Athens. However, the way the official plan of settling refugees within the city has been carried has also created a divide which is not so obvious: the high concentration of refugees in just two districts of Athens has resulted in the formation of distinct refugee

communities there. The knock-on effect of this is that these areas have acquired a bad reputation and are regarded as 'no go' areas by Athenians.

The outcome of this physical divide is that there is little sharing of space and therefore little interaction between most Athenians and the refugee communities, apart from those parts of Athens where refugees have been unofficially accommodated by 'solidarity groups' in squats. Here refugees are less numerous, so they are less obvious as they mingle with their Athenian neighbours. Whilst this brings refugees more into the day-to-day life of Athens, it cannot be regarded a long-term solution or one that can be used everywhere. If, in the long term, this psychological divide is to be removed, there needs to be a sense of community between refugees and Athenians. This is the task that Athens now faces.

Times of crisis often result in forcing together groups of people who have different backgrounds, languages, cultures and needs. They are a community in the sense that they are all living in the same locality, but they are not a community in the deeper sense of having a shared identity. This is the situation in Athens. Each group needs to recognise that they have a shared identity with the other, to see the other as 'Us' and not 'Them'.

Ideas of community are formed physically through shared spaces and intellectually through shared ideals. This in turn creates what Anderson calls 'imagined communities', a concept which he introduced when defining a nation and to which I have already referred but which can be applied, with modification, to a group of people living in the same locality that have a sense of community: it is 'imagined' because even though the 'members of [the group may never have any contact with] most of their fellow members […] yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'; it is a 'community' because 'regardless of the inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, [the group is] conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' (2006: 6–8).

An initiative that helps refugees to develop a 'sense of belonging to the same place' has been to start tours of the city's major museums for refugee groups. In May 2016, Aristidis Baltas, the Greek Culture Minister, took one hundred refugees on a tour of the ancient site of the Acropolis and the newly built Acropolis Museum. Instead of simply explaining the historical significance of the site, he made use of the fact that Syria, like Greece, is steeped in archaeological importance, so the countries have a shared heritage. During the tour, he compared the damage done to the Parthenon in the seventeenth century when Greece was still part of the Ottoman empire with the destruction of Palmyra, a very important archaeological site in Syria that was destroyed in 2015 by ISIL, who either demolished parts of the site or sold

artefacts into the illegal trade in antiquities. This tactic has the effect of transferring culture and heritage from Syria to Athens, by showing that they are on the same side when it comes to importance of antiquities.

Throughout the visit he took pains to link the state of Greece to that of Syria; rather than focusing on what Greece can offer refugees, he emphasized those characteristics of the Greeks which would help them, their democracy, tolerance and acceptance of everyone despite race or religion (TornosNews.GR 2016). In his endeavour to ground the young people in Athens and convince them that this was their new, welcoming home, he talked of the world-famous Greek hospitality rather than Greek history. Initiatives like this can mitigate the initial, brutal shock of Greek identity refugees by showing them that the two identities can be reconciled.

Another such initiative took place in August 2016, when Athens hosted a three-hour concert organised by *El Sistema*, a music education programme founded in Venezuela with the object of teaching music to children of low income families; this was held in the Odeon of Herodes Atticus on the slopes of the Acropolis. A large group of refugee children performed for about an hour. One of the singers, a twelve-year-old boy is reported as saying before he went on stage that he felt good when he was going to perform at the concert, adding, 'It's good, and when I sing I feel better' (Associated Press 2017).

Providing these children with cultural activities can potentially work on their self-confidence. High self-esteem links itself to positive social and personal identity-making through increased interactions with the community (Carducci 2009). By placing these refugee children in the city's most famous structure, the Athens municipality displayed them to the world, putting them front and centre as part of the community. Furthermore, the concert given by refugees was attended by Athenians, so community efforts such as this bring the two communities together.

Community building is anything which will foster a sense of shared identity and, in periods of crisis and war, is very important to those who have been displaced, as it enables them to experience feelings of normality and a sense of continuity from their previous life (Shabi 2016). I argue that representation can help people to discover shared experiences, the image of their communion, and is therefore effective in community building. This will be discussed in the next section.

5. Representation: the role of museums in community building

Representation is the production of meaning through classification and display in museums and galleries, places that Lidchi views as 'systems of representation' (Newman & McLean 2006:

57; citing Lidchi 2003).[13] What is being represented will, of course, depend on the objects being exhibited and the underlying purpose of the exhibition, whether permanent or temporary, but, by displaying objects, museums and galleries 'articulate or reinforce frameworks of knowledge […] and convey meaning and validity upon objects' (bid). In the context of this article, representation means the representation of culture and, by extension, heritage.

The relevance of this to the refugees in Athens is two-fold; first, studies have shown that if we identify with the representation of culture in a museum, we are more likely to be motivated to visit it;[14] secondly and more importantly, exhibiting heritage with which the viewer identifies reinforces their sense of identity (Newman & Maclean 2006: 61–64).[15]

I have already commented on the likely effect on refugees of finding themselves in Athens, where the heritage of Ancient Greece is strongly promoted. A whole city, not aligned to their identity, is now the new home into which refugees have been forced. Neither they nor their culture, experiences, and interests are represented. They have no identity in that city and are left feeling placeless and empty, outsiders overwhelmed by the strong indigenous identity by which they are surrounded. Athens is taking steps to address this issue by including refugees in what is arguably Greece's best product: heritage. At first sight, being included in a city's heritage does not seem important. However, as I have shown, heritage is a way of seeing oneself; it has a key role in forming identity both personal and national. In general, most people would probably relate to the notion that heritage has a part in forming national identity, typified by the connection Greeks have to the Acropolis.

Museum representation also enables visitors to 'think of themselves as sharing aspects of their identity with others with whom they have had no personal contact' (Newman & McLean 2006: 63), a core element of Anderson's 'imagined community'. Furthermore, Newman & McLean maintain that such communities have much in common with 'essentialist forms of identity that do not reflect the complexities of modern life but present a simpler, more straightforward identity with which to make links' (ibid); in other words, we have an innate

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[13]   In the context of this article, it's a happy coincidence that the term 'museum' comes via Latin from the Ancient Greek 'Μουσεῖον (*Mouseion*)', that is a place dedicated to the Muses, divine patronesses of the Arts in Greek mythology.

[14]   See Falk (2016), Allen (2010), Dodd et al (2013).

[15]   Identity, in Baumeister and Muraven's view, is an adaptation to context: 'History, culture and the proximate structure of social relations create a context in which the individual identity must exist [and] individuals actively choose, alter and modify their identities based upon what will enable them to get along best in that context (1996: 405; cited Newman & McLean 2006: 61). Hein argues that when seeing the representation of our own culture we can connect to it through our sense of identity. This influences our learning, as our understanding of history comes from our personal, socio-cultural, and physical contexts over time. Learning can therefore be a contextualised process dependent not on what is being portrayed to us, the object physically in a museum, but upon prior knowledge, interests, abilities, and aspects we with which we connect (2006: 371–72).

ability to recognise what we have in common with people who are, on the face of it, very different from us. It is in this way that people from different cultures who have been thrown together in times of crisis can identify with each other. Museum representation is, therefore, a way to encourage community building. Admittedly, the permanent exhibitions of the city's museums are predominately Greece focused, which makes it hard for today's refugees to connect to what's on display, as it is not their history being represented. However, if more Athenians, as well as tourists and refugees, were aware of Greece's refugee past, this would open the opportunity for a new narrative and a new identity associated with today's refugee crisis.

For this new narrative and new identity to be accepted, Athens needs to promote the history of its previous refugee crisis. In so doing, it will remind its citizens that they have characteristics which can help create a sense of community today. Although the sudden arrival of refugees in great numbers has created any number of difficulties which currently seem incapable of resolution, the previous experience shows that Athens has been able to handle this situation. Amongst the pictures of the earlier period held by the University of Athens Museum are ones of children and people banding together. The hope is that today's refugee crisis will be resolved in the same way in the future. Identity-affecting experiences such as fleeing, seeking asylum, and settling into the city are being used as a centre of expression in cultural sites. By exhibiting these difficult experiences to the public, Athens is creating conversation, education, and inclusive practices. Presenting the plights of a new community gives its people exposure, and more people are given the chance to understand what is happening. With this exposure comes education, understanding, and, hopefully, acceptance.

The representation of refugees in Athens' museums is not new; there have in the past been exhibitions focusing on its history of immigration going back to 1922, most recently *Twice a Stranger: Forced Displacement and Population Exchange in the 20th Century* at the Benaki Museum (2012). The University of Athens museum, amongst others, has an archive of material representing the lives of the old refugee families — the curator there can even tell you about the time when an elderly visitor came back to the museum to look back at old photographs of themselves taken during the early years after arriving in Greece and how they revelled in the memories. Stories about settling and creating friendships and communities are shared by citizens in oral history.

Today's refugees have been the focus of exhibitions mounted in two of Athens' museums during 2016. The first of these, held in the Benaki museum, was a photographic exhibition,

Children on the Move, which focused on refugee children and also showcased handmade items and toys. This showed a different side to the crisis, and, by presenting refugee children, the Benaki exhibition appealed to the sensitive side of the Athenian viewers. The vulnerability on display challenged the stigma of the typical male adult pictured in the media and asked the viewer to think again about the real victims of the refugee crisis (Benaki 2016). *The Journey: People on the Move*, another photographic exhibition also held in the Benaki museum, recorded the migration from Turkey to Greece and on to the border to Europe. The object of this exhibition was to make viewers aware of what is going on outside their immediate area in terms of the refugee crisis (Solidarity Now 2017; Benaki 2016a). Alongside the photographs were pictures of their life back home that children had drawn, which added another human dimension for viewers and encouraged their empathy with refugees.

Later that year, the Cycladic Museum hosted an exhibition of work by the world-famous Chinese contemporary artist Ai WeiWei (Museum of Cycladic Art 2016). As well as a selection of his better-known works, this displayed works done during or inspired by his time spent with refugees in Lesbos from late 2015 to early 2016. A thought-provoking feature of the exhibition was a video message from Weiwei which is still available on the Cycladic Museum's online platform.[16] In this he gives a first-hand account of conditions on Lesbos. He speaks of how you can see how cut off these people are and how they are focused purely on survival. (Weiwei 2016). The guide book to accompany the exhibition concluded by quoting WeiWei's suggestion that boundaries are not geographical but rather to do with the individual's mind and his hope that by presenting refugees in the rawest way the viewers' understanding is altered and softened to their plight (Museum of Cycladic Art 2016; Guide Book).

Amongst the works which resulted from WeiWei's time on Lesbos was his *Iphone Wallpaper*, a collage of over 12,000 images which the artist took on his mobile phone; this occupied one room and a corridor. In comparison to other exhibitions which focus on travelling or physical objects, WeiWei portrayed the emotions of the refugees on Lesbos with photographs of the everyday, people smiling but also people distraught. His work inspired by his time on Lesbos is intended as a comment on the way that Europe seems to be abandoning its obligations to refugees (Museum of Cycladic Art 2016; Guide Book).

This exhibition generated empathy for the refugee by forcing one to look at what is really going on just on one's doorstep. My personal response to it was, first, a desire to help. I felt compelled to look at each of the images in *Iphone Wallpaper*, to recognise the individual in

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[16]   And now also on YouTube (see Bibliography).

each photograph, to try my hardest to understand what they were going through. However, I also felt uncomfortable, an outsider looking in on someone else's life, and was struck by the fact that there were no refugees present, when there easily could have been.

6.   A New Identity: A Transcultural Community?

As we've seen, most major towns in Greece have a museum in which the story of its past and its people is represented. Today, there are new people in Athens and a new story that needs to be told. Having been provided with shelter and basic necessities, these communities are becoming more permanent, occupying areas within the city centre, as they seek asylum. Athens is taking steps to represent their lives by including them in what is arguably Greece's best product: heritage. If being included in a city's heritage does not, at first sight, seem important, we must remember the role heritage plays in forming identity.

However, what Athens is doing to help its refugee population find its identity can, I argue, have an entirely different outcome. By moving away from promoting the historical importance of Greek identity, Athens appears to be aiming to promote what Macdonald terms a 'transcultural identity' (2013: 162–87) comprising both the identity of the Greek community and the varying identities of the refugee communities. Unlike a multicultural society, which relates to, reflects or is adapted to different cultures, one of which is dominant, a transcultural society involves, encompasses or extends across different cultures, none of which is dominant; each culture has equal status with the others.

In her *Museums, national, postnational, and transcultural identities*, Macdonald argues that the increase of globalisation and the ease with which we can view and be part of others' national identity means that our own identity is now easier to change and merge with new ones (2003: 5-6). However, she insists, this is not to suggest that the two identities merge to the extent that they lose their individuality, rather the contrary; the aim is to connect the matching patterns that appear between the two histories and cultures, so that neither community feels that its already established identity is compromised (2003: 6–10). As we've seen, at any time, an individual has a variety of 'masks', which can be worn either concurrently or consecutively (Ibáñez 1990: 15). In a global environment, it's consequently possible, González argues, for someone to build an identity that combines a diversity of identifications from different countries; in this sense, 'the liaison between identity and locality vanishes' (2008: 807).

The aim is, then, to create for the refugees within Athens a new community which enables them to have a degree of involvement with Athenians greater than they have at present. Community building involves inclusion, a sharing of experiences, objects, and open

conversation. As well as through a sharing of spaces, this can be achieved though more involvement *with* the refugee community rather than *for* them. This requires refugees' involvement with the heritage sector, as has been already done in Berlin, where Syrian and Iraqi refugees have been engaged to lead tours for immigrants, so that they can make cultural connections between Germany and their country of origin (Oltermann 2016); refugees thus directly involve themselves with rebuilding their identity.

6.1   Personal response

Not all the initiatives introduced by Athens have been accepted by Athenians and refugees in equal measure. For example, since October 2016, Athens has been placing refugee children within its mainstream schools for a special introductory education system with the aim of quickly bringing them to a standard such that they join Greek children. For those that are not able to be placed in mainstream schools because of placement numbers there are alternative education systems in place to ensure all children have access to the Greek state-funded education system. The aim is to bring 22,000 refugee children into mainstream schooling.

However, this scheme had a mixed reception when it was introduced. In some places, the refugee children were welcomed on their first day with gifts of school books and sweets; in others, parents prevented the children from entering for a variety of reasons: that the children had not been vaccinated; that Greek schools are under-resourced and already over-crowded; that illegal immigrants should not have the benefit of state funded education (Zampetaki & Sideris 2017; Squires 2016; Strickland 2016). Conversely, it has not been taken advantage of by all refugees: there are, says Strickland, many refugee parents who are reluctant to send their children to Greek schools, because they hope to settle elsewhere in Europe eventually, so they see little point in the children learning Greek (Strickland 2016). However, some education in the camps is being provided by volunteer support; individuals and groups come from across the world to teach English and Greek to both children and adults. This is important, as it will make it easier for refugees to communicate with Greeks.

6.2   Assimilation

Assimilating two communities has happened before, although it has taken several decades. Because of the way urban authorities responded to the influx of refugees in 1922, the *Mikrasiátes* tended to stay together in their own communities and, as we have seen, created an identity that was very separate from that of metropolitan Greeks, a situation that continued for several decades (James 2001: 234–35; Hirschon 1998: 4–5) and to some extent still exists today:

I have met many Greeks, proud of their refugee history, who claim to be descended from *Mikrasiátes*.

However, there are differences between today's refugees and those of 1922. The refugees of 1922 had an intellectual affinity with classical Greek civilisation which today's refugees do not; they therefore already had a shared heritage with the Greeks of Greece. The question of a transcultural identity did not arise, therefore. Furthermore, whereas the arrivals from Asia Minor in 1922 were Greek Orthodox, most of those arriving today are from Syria and other countries where the dominant religion is Islam. Both these factors could affect the ease with which today's refugees will assimilate into their new environment.

A consequence of the intellectual affinity modern Greeks have with classical Greek civilisation is the commonly held assumption, still reflected in Athens' political and historical landscape, that Greek nation-ness has been 'built on the concept of an uninterrupted historical continuation of the Greek state from antiquity to the present, as well as a homogeneous Greek population that remained stable throughout the years', a notion which 'which largely ignored population movements' (Bounia 2016: 230).

Whilst the concept of 'a homogeneous Greek population that remained stable throughout the years' might be flawed, it is nonetheless true to say Greece is still, in terms of ethnicity, a largely homogeneous country. According to the GLRC report *Greece: State of Minorities*, more than 90% of Greeks identify themselves as Greek Orthodox, and the official position of the government is that there are no ethnic or linguistic minorities in Greece other than the Muslim minority in Western Thrace (GLRC 2012: 7).[17] Historically, Muslims in Greece have suffered discrimination, and the Roma, whom Greece counts among its Muslim minority, have been subjected to forced evictions (GLRC 2012: passim).

A tight societal identity places elevated levels of pressure on the incomer to conform to community roles, values and norms (Carducci 2009). The assumption of ethnic homogeneity is challenged by the present influx of immigrants, and, as a result, conflict can arise between the city and new communities and emerging identities which do not match its own. The popularity of *Golden Dawn*, which is opposed to any immigration by Muslims, particularly illegal immigration by refugees and whose supporters have been accused of acts of violence and hate crimes against immigrants must, therefore, not be overlooked.[18]

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[17] It is beyond the scope of this article to explain the presence in Greece of this Muslim minority, which amounts to almost 100,000 people, of which 50% or more are of Turkish origin, 35% Pomak (speakers of a Slavic dialect), and the rest Roma, also known as Sinti or Tsigani (GLRC 2012: 7).

[18] An example of this opposition to immigration by Muslim refugees occurred in April 2016 when *Golden Dawn* supporters clashed with people protesting against the Greek government's decision to resume deportations of

On the other hand, Greeks are, as I've said, famous for their hospitality; this has been demonstrated by the people of Athens, who have come out to welcome the refugees now settled within the city and in the nearby camps. Weekly food drives are held in the centre of the city for the homeless and refugees, charity is paramount, and donations are given often. An illustration of Athenians' innate sense of hospitality is their response to The Museum Without a Home — An Exhibition of Hospitality, an event held in Athens in November 2016 and created by Oxfam and the Greek section of Amnesty International to acknowledge the solidarity of Greek people towards refugees. It showcased a selection of everyday items, from kettles to toys, that had been donated by Athenians by displaying them at Athens' heritage sites and other locations, together with personal testimonies from both those who donated an object and those who received it (Oxfam 2016; Mistiaen 2018).[19]

6.3   Sharing of Space

Promoting the sharing of spaces by two strikingly different communities ensures that they mix: in this way friendships are formed, experiences are shared, and new identities are made. Social inclusion is key to community building within all sites and encourages a sense of belonging.

I have already commented on the physical divide between the refugee communities and other people living in Athens and the neighbouring towns. In the long term, this issue will be partially resolved as refugees are slowly removed from the camps and resettled within urban areas; eventually the camps will close. The biggest challenge, however, is how to remove refugees from the camps and rehouse them in such a way that 'ghetto'-like communities are not created, as this will perpetuate the divide. This will not be easy; Athens and the neighbouring towns in this part of Attica (Piraeus, Elefsina and Elliniko) have suffered from the uncontrolled way they expanded to accommodate the one million refugees who arrived in 1922.

6.4   Representation

Although the exhibitions and tours have been successful, they have in no way reached the refugees in Athens as a whole. An explanation for this is the fact that heritage professionals involve themselves very little with the new communities, so that museums and heritage sites are acting as a service *for* refugees rather than *with* them; even on the web page which gives details of the museum's future programme of exhibitions they are listed as the secondary user.

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refugees to Turkey, as required resume by the EU-Turkey Agreement (Smith & Kingsley 2016). These had been suspended in response to claims by refugees that it would not be safe for them to be returned to Turkey.

[19] Since then, the 'pop-up museum' has travelled to other locations (Positive.News 2018). In 2017, the Athens exhibition received two Gold ERMIS awards from Greece's most prestigious advertising and communications body (Oxfam 2017).

Furthermore, the conclusions reached by Dodd and others that museums typically fail to cater for people with disability because there is a lack of understanding and training (Dodd et al 2013) can, arguably, be as equally applied to other minority groups, including refugees.

It is therefore important to get more refugees in heritage spaces in Athens and for Athenians to see refugee-based exhibitions. This way, the gap between the Greek and the new communities can be bridged through a common use of space. By utilising and reshaping already well-established national museum collections to represent more communities, as well as by working to introduce refugees to Greek heritage, Athens can work towards helping refugee to recover a positive personal identity.

These failures and aims are being addressed by a series of workshops organised by the International Committee for the Collections and Activities of Museums of Cities (CAMOC) in partnership with the Commonwealth Association of Museums (CAM) and the International Committee for Regional Museums (ICR) and with support from the International Council of Museums (ICOM) as part of a project entitled *(Im)migration and Arrival Cities* (2017) to explore the roles that museums have in collecting, presenting and collaborating in the processes whereby '(im)migrants and receiving populations are making new forms of urbanism [and] cities and their citizens are adjusting to this increasing diversity' (CAMOC 2017); the first of these was held in Athens in February 2016.[20]

This project aims to set up a web platform on which municipal authorities and other bodies dealing with migration, as well as museums and museum professionals, can share knowledge and experiences and promote discussions on ethical and meaningful ways of engaging with 'new urban dynamics and the diverse realities of […] [so-]called "Arrival Cities"' (CAMOC 2017); in other words, how to present new communities to the already existing ones by working on this transcultural representation. This will primarily encourage museums to involve migrant communities in playing a part in retelling at first hand the narrative of these 'arrival cities'. The overarching goal is representation. Representation is important to not only the development of a sense of identity but also the feeling of belonging. How can a person feel welcome in a cultural and societal landscape in which they are not being represented?

Furthermore, although temporary exhibitions play their part in bringing the refugees' narrative to Athenians, the number of visitors to them is limited to the length of time that the

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[20] The term 'Arrival Cities' is borrowed from Doug Saunders' 2011 book *Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History is Reshaping Our World* (London: William Heinemann). One of the keynote speakers was the co-ordinator of the Hope-Now school at Skaramagás, and papers were presented on offering formal state education to the children living in refugee camps in Athens and NGOs working with migrants and/or refugees in Athens.

exhibition is open. This drawback would overcome by a museum of migration, and there have been discussions about establishing one in Piraeus, the port where immigrants traditionally arrive and settle, but, says Bounia, these 'have been in progress for years (2016: 230). However, bearing in mind the contrast between Athenian's reception of today's refugees and that experienced by those who arrived in the 1920s, it is important that care is taken not to allow what Macdonald calls a 'collective amnesia' to prevail (2013: 212). In other words, rather than dismissing a difficult past, the aim should be towards an 'integrated rehabilitation', where everybody treats the situation as one of learning (Vos 2011: 225; cited Macdonald 2013: 212).

7. Conclusion

I began by outlining some similarities between the recent influx of several thousand refugees into Greece with the arrival of the *Mikrasiátes* in 1922. I then explored the concept of heritage, its relevance to the concept of personal identity and its potential as a means of restoring a personal identity that has been damaged by the enforced displacement of the individual from one culture and resettlement in another, especially when the new environment has a strong sense of heritage and nation-ness. This led to a discussion of community building, the task of creating a sense of community in people living in the same locality where none yet exists and of the role heritage can play in this through representation. The steps which Athens has been taking towards community building will, I argue, result in a transcultural community.

Ultimately the success of this venture depends on willingness and involvement from both the Athenian and the refugee communities. Many Athenians admit that Athens itself is not yet a multicultural (as opposed to transcultural) centre (Bounia 2016: 239), so the transition from a monocultural identity to a transcultural one will take time. Refugees arrive with their already established nation-ness which is at odds with the culture and heritage by which they are surrounded. Helping them to acquire a trans-national identity is a delicate task, as the last thing that one wants is to do is erase their past by bulldozing their narratives, a large part of which is centred on their travelling and the horrors they have endured since leaving their own countries. Their narratives include much 'difficult' heritage which should not be ignored.

Whilst what Athens has offered to achieve a transcultural new identity for both the migrants and for Athens can be accepted, it is not enough simply to say that Athenians and refugees are now one community. Unless refugees feel that what they have gone and are still going through is understood, they will still feel excluded; this risks losing interaction with refugee communities. Their help is needed, so the focus needs to be on what they are lacking and want to see in their heritage, so that their nation-ness is affirmed.

The aim is to create a new community for the refugees within Athens, a community that will both offer them a better standard of living and allow them more involvement with their Athenian neighbours. Community building involves inclusion, a sharing of experiences, objects, and open conversation. This can be achieved through a sharing of spaces and more involvement *with* the refugee community rather than just providing *for* them.

As we've seen, Athens has, as a first step, been addressing the issue of representation using exhibition and advocacy work, so that refugees can picture themselves within the Greek landscape and begin to connect to ideas of Greek nation-ness. The next step has been to build upon the refugees' own personal identity, damaged as it is by their experiences, by using Greek heritage to encourage in refugees a sense of a more positive personal identity, one that focuses on hospitality, understanding, and shared experiences.

The hope is that the crisis which brought refugees and Athenians together will, one day, be looked on as part of Athens' heritage and represented in its heritage sites, as the 1922 migration now is, with examples of how the Athenians used charity to welcome the refugees, of the community made efforts to house them, and of museum-held events to represent them. Only when this happens will there be a transcultural identity which is shared by Athenians and refugees alike, an identity based on the refugee crisis, a phenomenon which each group has experienced differently, but which is ultimately the same; there will be a community 'conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship', any 'inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each' notwithstanding (Anderson 2006: 50).

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[21] This webpage has been substantially edited since it was first accessed.