A Passage through Place:

A visual exploration of the concept of 'home' in relation to refugees in London (1996 – 1999)

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Contents

Abstract

In the following thesis I seek to examine the significance of the photograph in relation to a series of issues which surround its status as both an arbiter of 'the real' and as an icon of personal memory and identity. Focussing upon a series of refugee experiences from various communities in London, I seek to explore the complexities of being 'out-of-place', and the experience of setting up a 'home' outside of one's homeland. Therefore, my research involved my photographing the interiors of their newly-established homes, both in relation to their experience as displaced persons, and in the way a domestic space is set up (with particular focus on the ways in which visual imagery is used in a private context) as representations of their identities and sense of cultural belonging. At the same time, my photography of public spaces provided a visual analysis of the influence of 'community' (despite its ambiguous meanings) on identity formation. In turn, however, my photographic work implicated the way the photograph becomes part of a complex series of constructions which raise questions about private terms of reference, of space, and interpretation. Thus part of my theoretical discussion on the photographic image in terms of memory, nostalgia and the past, aspects which (as I suggest) question the usual terms of the photograph's status as a record of the 'real', notably in relation to historical uses of the medium and the 'documentary' tradition. In these terms, the images depicted raise questions about their anthropological terms of reference and the ways in which meaning is both relative to and dependent upon the specific context in which the photograph is made, read, and used. Hence the significance of the refugee experience in relation to the making of meaning out of displacement, and the re-construction of 'home' based on this strange, split experience.

Acknowledgements

A burning Kosovan village near the border with Macedonia ... Milan Petrovic claims most ethnic cleansers kept to the 'no killings, no beatings' rule Photograph: Damir Sagolj

... their ... Mr. ... in Bosnia, gave them their or- the army I don't know what would go from door to door. people who aren't terrorists, lem. On Friday, 86 men ap

I. Damir Sagolj, untitled, Kosovo, 1999

A photograph[1] (Image #1) by Damir Sagolj taken in 1999 at Kosovo during the war showing a series of houses in a village on fire is a powerful image of loss. The destruction of the homes and identity documents of Albanians by the Serbs, the process of 'ethnic cleansing', not only signifies the elimination of an officially recognisable public identity but also the destruction of one's home, a person's primary physical site of belonging. The lack of a protected and stable environment in which to exist leads to the 'fragmentation of one's world'.[2] In relation to this, this chapter sets out to lay the foundation for my work, describing my photographic and written approach and to provide an analysis of the critical issues within the framework through which I approach my subject.

The concept of 'home' has always occupied an indeterminate space: it can refer to a place that has been left behind, or a place to which one returns, or a new place that one, even temporarily, 'takes up'. The term 'second home' is reflective of the idea that this concept may not be confined to one particular place. In some sense, 'home' itself is intimately linked to childhood; it is often the place where one grew up, or the country in which one was born. At the same time, when travelling, a hotel-room may temporarily become 'home'. This then means that 'home' may refer to a deeply familiar or foreign place, or it may simply be a passing point of reference. This indeterminate definition of

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[1] The Guardian, April 27th 1999, p.5
[2] John Berger, And our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos, London: Writers and Readers, 1984, p.56

home demythifies 'home', showing it as temporary and relative to a particular person in a specific context; but this lack of clarity in its meaning has also resulted in its being mythified as a site of utopian belonging. In this post-modern sense, the 'home' is an inherently unstable referential space, where "local authenticities meet and merge in transient.. settings."[3]

This thesis is primarily an exploration of the conditions involved in the process of a home being established, and a visual mapping of the process involved through photographs. It is an attempt to visualise the essential but usually unnoticed, and therefore taken for granted and unquestioned "territory" of the "home". I have chosen to approach my subject in relation to the refugee's experience of dislocation. London as a city and symbol of a nation, is a central example to use due to the number of migrant groups and cultures that have grown roots within it, and also the increasing attention that has recently been devoted to issues surrounding asylum and migration in the United Kingdom. My work specifically explores the concept of 'home' for refugees in London, people whose lives have been displaced because of war or internal conflict in their countries of origin. At a primary level, home signifies what is familiar and lost. Of particular significance here is the process of identity formation, the re-defining of one's 'self' in a foreign environment and based on one's particular past and current circumstances. Through an analysis of the interiors of refugees' homes in London, I seek to explore the ways in which a sense of "home" is constructed. At the same time, issues around methodology and representation need to be

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[3] James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art,

addressed and qualified. I will approach the challenge of visually representing the fluid space of 'in-between' by firstly foregrounding the subject of photographic representation itself, and also by placing the question of what actually constitutes the spatial conditions of a culture in-between.

What, within the interiors of these homes corresponds to a conception of homelessness? This homelessness is not defined in the 'real' sense, of people sleeping on the street, but in terms of psychological, even philosophical, dislocation, a lack of a stable sense of belonging. At the same time, the question asked is the extent to which one actually leaves 'home' behind – 'home is where the heart is' and 'home sweet home' for example, establish a sentimentality and nostalgia closely related to memories of a familiar place. The objects collected and put on display may therefore be interpreted as a desire for an alternative space – as Gaston Bachelard proposes, the space of the house is not inhabited simply for the routines of everyday life, but also in the imagination.[4] Desire and fantasy, the quest for the ideal place, finds their doorway within the walls of one's own home. I spent a short time in 1996 in the home of Anna Bukovčáková in Bratislava, the Slovak Republic. Anna lived on her own, and longed for a visit to a country of 'the West' – she wanted especially to live in America. Indeed, she asked me to send her postcards of London at night (when street lights would be on) upon my return to England. The walls in her house were pasted with several posters of Marlboro advertisements and pictures of the statue of Liberty (including an image of George Bush), in her bedroom and even in

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Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988, p.4
[4] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994

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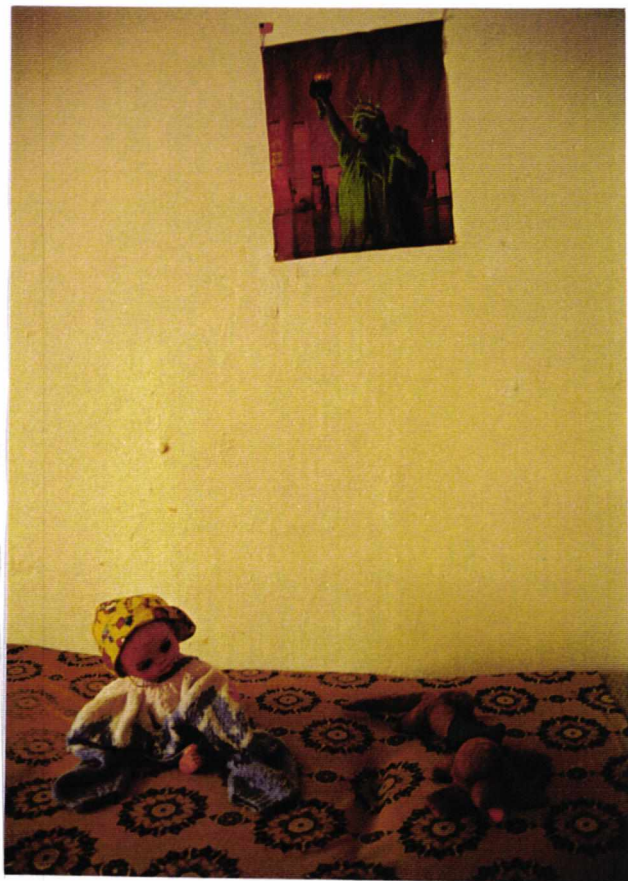
2. Bratislava, Slovak Republic, 1996
3. Bratislava, Slovak Republic, 1996

4. Bratislava, Slovak Republic, 1996

the toilet (Images #2 and #3). She set up her own wishing well with an old unused fish tank, into which she pasted a magazine image of David Hasselhoff, and threw copper coins in on a daily basis making her many wishes to set up home elsewhere. Image #4 shows another part of her bedroom where guests would be entertained. The paraphernalia of her home, complete with plastic flowers on the coffee table and turquoise fur-effect chairs in some ways symbolises her perceived image of 'luxury', tied closely to her fantasies of another imagined lifestyle.

It is rare that sociologists have engaged in the task of assessing how sociological arguments are constructed, or how such 'evidence' can be assembled in texts. This is an issue that needs addressing: the examining of how a project, which might conventionally be based in anthropology, can be written or expressed in other terms. How do we construct, convey our arguments: not only in relation to historical or theoretical texts, but also in terms of how the facts and findings of research are conveyed? These can never make up elements of a neutral report: the conventions of text, rhetoric, and photographic imagery are among the ways in which reality can be constructed. Photographs especially, at many levels of signification, 'teach' us how they are to be 'read'. It is a learned process in which we take for granted the 'truth' of the image, which allows the image to pass off quite easily as a neutral form of representation. Our experience of the world, both physical and cultural, is always mediated by conventions of enquiry and representation. Since my photographs of refugee homes and communities form an integral part of this research, I begin in Chapter Two (The Photograph as a Cultural Document) by discussing ways in which the photograph has

been historically used, particularly in the field of anthropology. I will then further elaborate on my own photographic approach and its relationship to my project as a whole.

The photographic image, of all the two-dimensional arts, has traditionally given us the most direct and 'literal' representation of nature and the environment. Considered to be the "mirror of nature", the image is often seen as a medium of representation which flawlessly reproduces 'reality'. Cameras click and trap images in a mathematically precise rectangle that we look at as windows of the world. The history of photography has developed in such a way as to establish a relationship of assumed and unquestioned faith between the viewer and the photographer, such that images are invariably accepted as they appear without question. The mechanical means of the photograph's production implies no substantial human input in the process besides the operation of the equipment itself. The elimination of the authorial presence results in the assumed objectivity of the process.

Upon its invention, photography rapidly became a symbol for scientific achievement and was increasingly used to control and classify both man and nature. The medium allegedly provided 'truthful' evidence of prevailing attitudes. The desire to classify and categorise was an integral part of the new science of anthropology. When photography was introduced in 1839, it quickly assumed an important role in scientific investigations of 'the other'. It was both the perception of the other and the expansion of colonialism that caused a proliferation of photographic images from exotic and distant locations: "the photographer knew what a

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noble savage should look like, and did not hesitate to impose his vision on his subjects."[5] Photography often depicted the prevailing attitudes of the dominant culture, in relation to colonial powers like France, Great Britain, and in the United States. For example, when Native American children were forced to attend boarding schools where their cultural heritage was denied to them, photography recorded the transition from the 'savage' to a shadow of white culture.[6]

In Britain during the 1860s too, Francis Frith, a pioneering British travel photographer, made enormous negatives of the Egyptian pyramids. These prints were monumental in scale and "heroic in execution"[7], and Frith was regarded as someone who had extended the frontiers of photography. Photography then spread across ancient civilisations, bringing 'home' documents of antiquity. Photography, in this instance, became important in its ability to preserve the 'monuments of the world', and also symbolised its purposeful annexation of exotic and distant lands for the service of the British Empire.

The popular belief in the photograph as fact led to its widespread use in the nineteenth century as an instrument of record and categorisation. Its uses included, for example, the recording of the features of 'primitive peoples' in anthropological projects usually carried out by colonial powers, notably Great Britain in dependent territories. And also, more

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[5] Brian W. Dippie, The Vanishing American, White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy, University Press of Kansas, 1991, as cited by Deborah Klochko, 'Authentic Identities?', in See, Issue 1:4, San Francisco: The Friends of Photography, 1995, p.8

[6] Deborah Klochko, ibid., p.8

[7] Mark Haworth-Booth, Introduction to The Origins of British Photography, London: Thames and Hudson,
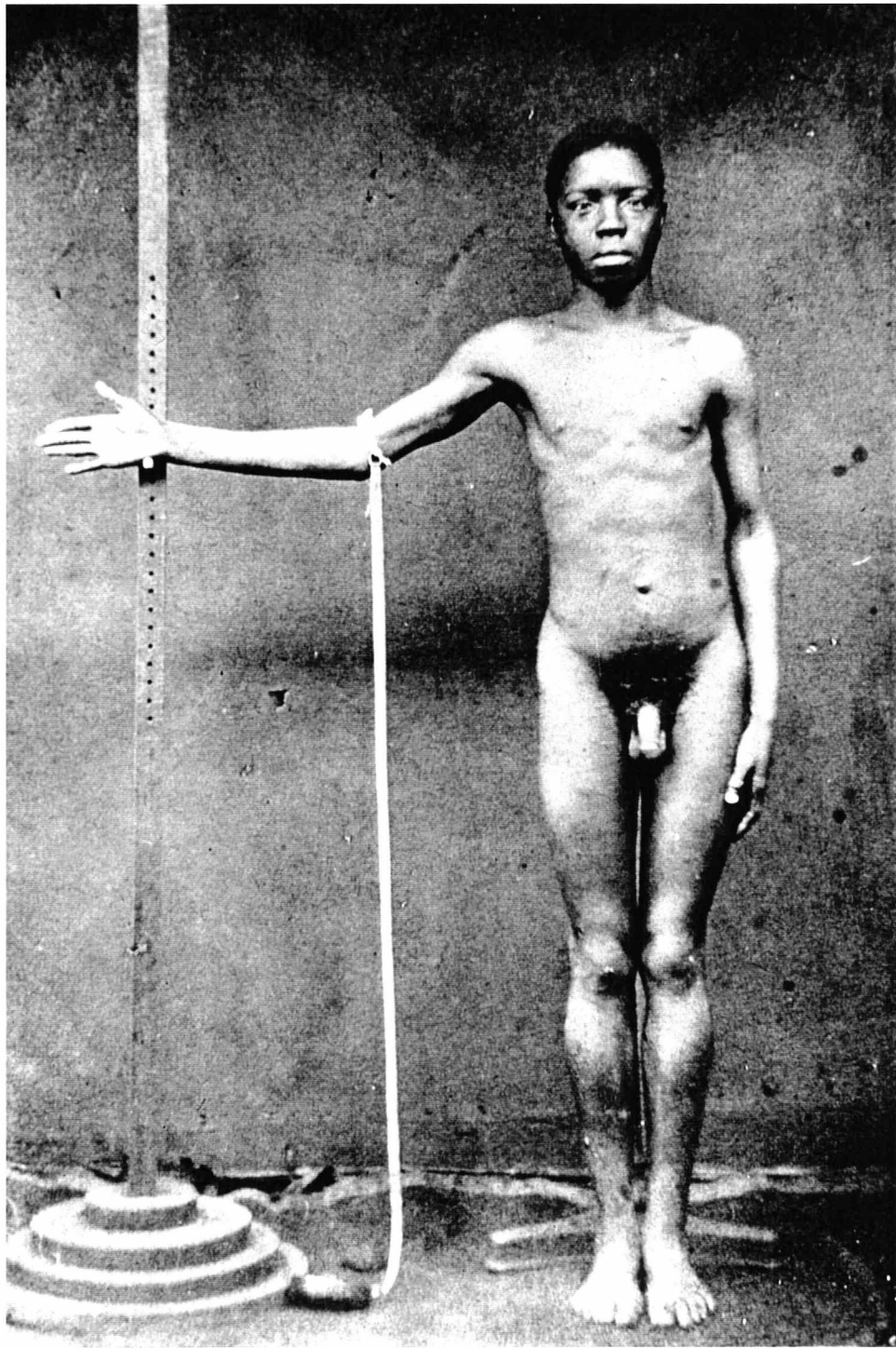
5. Anthropometric print, from the Royal Anthropological Institute, c.1900

recently, in the documentation of poverty, work, and slum conditions. The early archive photographs became the subject of what are now recognisable as a series of discourses surrounding racial and social discrimination, in which the photograph supplied the 'evidence' for supposed ethnic and criminal typologies.[8] The contents of these photographs were interpreted in an unquestioned way, and because of the photograph's claim to veracity, the proof that it provided legitimises such beliefs. Thus,

> The camera.. may be utilized by the traveller with anthropological tastes to very great advantage in securing, for exhibition to those of similar tastes who are not lucky enough to be able to travel and see for themselves, accurate records of the appearance, life, and habits of the primitive folk visited.[9]

Image #5 is an anthropometric print from the Royal Anthropological Institute which depicts a nineteenth century system of measuring and classifying human beings according to their physical and racial characteristics as every person was thought to literally embody his or her racial and cultural identity. Very often, human beings of 'other' primitive, and hence considered exotic cultures were used as living exhibits or specimens at exhibitions. The image itself poses as quasi-scientific proof, masquerading as a kind of scientific evidence. It fails to take into account the massive invisible structure that we as viewers have to be aware of, and stresses that the photographer is never a neutral lens. Images like this therefore

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[8] See for example, Sander Gilman (ed.), The Face of Madness: Hugh W. Diamond and the Origin of Psychiatric Photography, Secaucus: Brunner-Mazel, 1976, or Peter Hamilton and Roger Hargreaves, The Beautiful and the Damned: The Creation of Identity in Nineteenth Century Photography, London: Lund Humphries and National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2001.

[9] Everard I.M. Thurn, quoted by Deborah Klochko, op. Cit., p.7

connote wider implications about society and cultural constructions which define an individual or a group in terms of their physical appearance.

According to Roland Barthes, the signifier (the image or a fragment of the image we see) is always the same as its referent: the object at which the camera is 'pointed'. The signification or meaning of the photograph is made apparent by a "secondary action of knowledge or of reflection." The photograph is for him the "perfect analogon"[10] whose exactitude personifies photography as nothing more than a replica of the original reality. By applying this proposition, Barthes then proposes the special status of photography as a "continuous message without a code"[11]. It is for him neutral and passive. Any change in treatment of an image is the result of significance acquired when translated by its audience whose own particular condition and knowledge combined with its channel of transmission controls understanding and interpretation. This is described by the two terms: denotation—which refers to the basic, literal meaning; and connotation—which refers to the level of a symbolic, culturally given meaning. As Allan Sekula proposed in his essay "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning"[12], photographs have to be read as cultural messages, not simply as well composed or badly composed artistic or documentary pictures. It is not the individual's private consciousness that alone produces meaning in photographs. Our perceptions are characteristic of our experience, formed by cultural, social, historical and political awareness. Hence, a

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[10] Roland Barthes, Image-Music-Text, London: Fontana Press, 1977, p.17
[11] Barthes, ibid., p.17
[12] Allan Sekula, 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning', in Victor Burgin (ed.), Thinking Photography,

non-ideological aesthetic may not exist.

The photograph's assumed phenomenological 'truthfulness' does not provide its audience with a ready-made interpretation. What one as spectator sees is conditioned by a whole range of other factors – both collective and personal, spatial and temporal. How we look at the world entails tracking back to the roots of our (coded) perception, since the world of objects has already been constructed as a world of uses, values and meanings. The objects caught within a frame of an image relate to a far wider scope of meanings surrounding these images. Thus, it is possible for a photograph to be interpreted in numerous ways. This implicit ambiguity, derived from the multiple uses to which the image has been put, has given rise to uncertainty and doubt. Hence, what the viewer believes he sees is not necessarily what the photograph contains or represents. At the same time, particularly in anthropological research, text and captions usually accompany photographs used in order to inform the viewer, to influence his or her reading. In these situations where the text is assumed to precede the image, the viewer potentially fails to 'look into' the image altogether.

In its assumed role as an objective, archival record, the photograph became an instrument of knowledge and power. As a consequence, when confronted with a photographic image, the viewer expects *one* answer - a coherence in content and meaning. However, the image solicits interpretation from its audience, and is therefore never coherent. This gives rise to an anxiety when this transparency of meaning becomes dubious. As a result, the

photograph changes from becoming an object of certainty to a text of fiction. Where there are many interpretations possible, the meaning of the photograph falls from absolute 'Truth' to relativism. Hence, there is always the need to 'place' images in their original contexts. According to Chris Townsend, if the image is no longer deemed true, but subject to competing claims about its meaning, then there is a sense in which we no longer know what it means. And since meaning and content are so bound up in our relationship to the photograph and its claims to verisimilitude, uncertainty in meaning results in a reciprocal uncertainty over content. Therefore, the photograph is no longer the objective inscription of a phenomenon, it is a starting point for personal narratives.

The production of secondary meanings in photographs is in no way contingent upon their content.[13] What we as viewers are gradually realising is that phenomenologically, no matter how close the resemblance, the photograph is not its object, and our descriptions of it – the language it produces – have no relation to that object. The crisis of looking is a crisis of meaning, or rather, of non-meaning: 'The image has nothing to do with signification, meaning, as implied by the existence of the world, the effort of truth, the law and the brightness of the day. Not only is the image of an object not the meaning of that object and of no help in comprehending it, but it tends to withdraw it from it meaning by maintaining it in the immobility of a resemblance that has nothing to resemble.'[14] The severance of meaning and its

[13] Chris Townsend, Vile Bodies, Munich: Prestel, 1997, p.9
[14] Maurice Blanchot, The Gaze of Orpheus, Barrytown, New York, 1981, p85, quoted by Chris Townsend, ibid., p10

object leads to the resemblance of nothing. Thus, there is no single truth: there are only competing narratives and interpretations of a world that cannot be wholly, or accurately, described.

The work of the artist Christian Boltanski emphasizes the complexities involved in the process of identity representation. Photography, for him, is a form of ethnography, and he finds nothing as meaningful as the ordinary object, the trivial detail. While Barthes posits that what he refers to as 'the impossible science of the unique being' depends on an individual spectator's particular reading of an 'ordinary' photograph, Boltanski enlarges the artist's role: it is the artist who creates those images imprecise enough to be as general and "communal" as possible, images each viewer can interpret differently. In this way, he uses 'fake' family snapshots to tell supposedly 'true' stories. He reverses this concept in his *"Les Inventaires"* (Inventories) series (Images #6 and #7). Boltanski had read of the untimely death of an Oxford student and wrote to the student's college asking if his personal belongings could be sent to him. These objects were then photographed against a neutral background, giving them an equal value. These installations were supposed to display all the possessions of someone who had recently died, but some of the work photographed consisted of images of the effects of a resident in Oxford who was still alive but had moved elsewhere. The question the inventory poses is whether we can visually know something through his or her things. If the clothes make the man, as the saying goes, can we re-create the absent man from his belongings? Or does the subject fragment into a series of metonymic images that might relate to anyone? How then can

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6. Christian Boltanski, List of exhibits belonging to a Woman of Baden-
Baden followed by an explanatory note, June 1973

7. Christian Boltanski, Inventory of objects that belonged to a resident of Oxford, 1973

identity, if it exists, be portrayed? Under such circumstances, what is defined as authentic is contested. The questioning of the medium of photography to represent 'visual truth' has therefore brought about a crisis of representation. Digital technologies too, have put into doubt the nature and function of images. Pictures of 'reality' can now be undetectably altered, manipulated and edited.[15] This crisis of the relation between image and 'reality' raises subsequent questions about representation, knowledge and the truth of the image.

Photography, like most visual artforms, has often been called a "universal language", a "foreign language that everyone thinks he speaks", capable of transcending differences of language and of culture. Like anthropology and ethnography, it was thought to have its roots in a scientific, empirical point of view that gave it universal credence. But photography's claim to represent other cultures impartially is no longer accepted today.

My photographing of refugees' homes in London is thus not a definitive guide or study of refugee cultures, but is determined mainly by my interaction with the 'subjects' involved. In this way, it is experiential, and based not only on the information provided by the occupants through informal interviews, but also on my experience of these interiors. It involves the relating of what I photograph *to* the experience, and an analysis of dislocation. Part of my motivation is to create or express the idea of 'home' visually, and, in turn, to establish the complexities involved in such a process of definition. Although I attempt (through my

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[15] William J. Mitchell, The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era, Cambridge, Mass.,

photographs) to depict the interiors of the homes in which refugees live, and to analyse the conditions in which the occupants construct a familiar sense of 'home', this project is in many ways deeply personal. I developed close contacts with my 'subjects' through my interviews, and although both parties were fully aware of the circumstances in which this interaction was taking place (with reference to my status as a researcher), I could in many ways relate to their experience and communicate comfortably with them. My involvement with my subjects was reciprocated, and I felt I was invited to their social functions not purely because they believed I could benefit from this experience as a researcher. I cannot say explicitly why I was so easily trusted and accepted into the homes of virtual strangers, but perhaps it is closely linked to my own foreignness – I was seen as someone who came from 'outside' British culture. I was treated with much hospitality by most of the people I interviewed, and would be invited for meals at their homes, or at a pub or restaurant. In some cases, I was forced to distance myself from the single Sudanese men who occasionally asked me to marry them. This relationship and involvement with the people I interview and photograph necessarily influences the nature of my documentation, and also determines to some extent my access into their individual worlds.

Discussions around what 'home' means are often centred on related conceptions of space and place boundaries. They draw attention to the fundamental dichotomy between what can be considered 'public' or 'private' – a theme that is particularly relevant to photography – which almost always presumes a subject

and an object. Each person's home is considered to be a private space; however, the home itself is divided into various sections, and each carries a different concept of privacy or accessibility. I would say I was being a passive photographer in that besides requesting permission first to photograph their homes, I did not ask to photograph specific spaces, like bedrooms, for example. I did so only when invited, as I did not want to intrude into or to invade what they considered to be private. Besides, the living-room functioned on most occasions as indicative of how they wanted their world to be represented. This again is influenced by the presence of females in each household.

There are multiple ways of looking at subjects in their homes. Quite often in my photographs, the interiors are presented as potent spaces which contain possibilities, suggesting the ways in which occupants of particular homes live. These depopulated spaces, devoid of human beings, speak through the play of presence and absence. What is presented in these images are only fragments of the scene of the home, framed by the camera. The narrative that is then constructed around each image depends on what the viewer invests in it. The intended ambiguity of these photographs can be reflected through the limited information that is provided within each image. These interiors can sometimes become incomprehensible spaces. Walking into each of my subject's homes, their domestic spaces, I enter another culture, stepping inside what to me is usually a world full of unfamiliar objects. What is constituted within them is usually foreign to me, and this may also be the case for any other 'viewers' of the photograph. The viewer of an image feels the need to recognize elements represented within the image to give it a coherent meaning. There may be circumstances

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however, in which the viewer remains unsatisfied with the information that is presented, even in the most iconic or symbolic of visual representations. Take for example, the Westerner who watches an ethnographic film, or the anthropologist unfamiliar with the cultural setting where his or her research is based—quite often, this lack of 'communication' or understanding leaves the viewer perplexed by the objects he or she sees in an image and yet cannot name or classify. These objects may include decorative objects, or various settings in photographs. The problem of cultural taxonomies begins here with naming and classification, because cultural objects are perceived and classified differently from one society to another. Therefore, the verbal input from interviewees or occupants is vital here. This approach in photographing my subjects serves to support the structure of the thesis, setting the terms in which these images could be read. Therefore, the written text will take the form of alternating theoretical and subjective writing, and involve the weaving together of what may be referred to as 'academic' critical writing (providing a critical basis and methodological grounding), and the personal, and subjective (a means to present my own creative understanding).

"Participant observation" is a familiar phrase in anthropological fieldwork to describe an important research method used to observe and subsequently describe a community and culture. It basically involves seeing what the world is like from the point of view of the people who function in that community. This method calls for active participation in the activities of the community and behaviour of its members on the part of the researcher. Participant observation and interviews foster the acquisition of

first-hand information. An important part of ethnographic fieldwork, photographs are produced as articulated statements of specifically situated events, which are 'decoded' by community members and the researcher for analysis and interpretation. As such, the imaging process foregrounds photography as a system of communication between research data, researcher and community. In anthropological research, the researcher avoids or has to be uninterested in the photographic process, but what is believed to be the 'real-life event' that is depicted. The photograph is viewed here purely as a recording device, as part of a communication system that supports the process of constructing "explanatory models" of everyday life. Victor Caldarola's method of using the camera in fieldwork is an apt example of this process. In his article "Visual Contexts: A Photographic Research Method in Anthropology"[16], he proposes an image-producing process that is compatible with anthropological paradigms. This includes the prior selection and definition of an event, based on 'assigned significance'. This is supplied by a researcher and "noted in a field notebook". Operational significance is assigned through guidelines which provide a formal structure for photographic coverage of a research project area – it constitutes a plan for observation. And from there, photographs are taken following these guidelines of what significant events are, and these images will be accompanied by a written annotation. The minute details which anthropologists take interest in when observing 'other' people is similar to the approach taken by wildlife documentaries, particularly in the examination of primates.

My photographic approach is only in a few ways congruent

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[16] Victor Caldarola, Studies in Visual Communication, Vol. 11, Number 3, Summer 1985

with Caldarola's method. Rather than following an ordered, mechanical approach when photographing the refugees and their homes, my approach can be considered to be subjective in comparison. In order to attempt to re-present the 'experience' of these spaces, I was more comfortable with the random and spontaneous aspect of photography which seems to be able to reflect in some ways the grasping or extraction of time and a moment. At the same time, the content of my photographs may not attempt to speak of grand narratives, but instead focus on the significance of the everyday. Home is a reflection of status, aspiration, identity. Most of these pictures, empty of figures, function like 'ghost-portraits': only their contents attempt to reveal their occupants.

What, then, constitutes an ethnographic and documentary image? Few definitive answers can be provided, as there is perhaps no clear divide between what can strictly be defined as artistic or anthropological in relation to the visual image. In the second chapter, I will discuss the photographic work of Bruce Davidson, a documentary photographer whose images of what he considered one of the worst streets in New York, East 100th Street is very significant to this project. He spent many months with the subjects he photographed and developed a close relationship with these individuals and their community. Although his photographs are poignant reflections of the community in which he worked, he possessed a distinctive way of working, which in some ways, contrasts significantly with, for example, an anthropologist's photographic approach. These issues relate to the route anthropology has traditionally taken, and point to questions around power, control and representation. A problem that arises is

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in the questioning of how 'reality' can be represented: is it necessary for one to know what is going through the mind of the other in order to speak about it? Susan Hiller proposes that art, by definition, is an anthropological practice.[17] The role of art is to articulate codes that are not 'visible' in a culture. Similarly, for Christian Boltanski, "the painter is someone who underlines these realities too close for us to perceive." Reality and its representation are seen in terms of distance, mainly between the subject and the observer, and is reminiscent of the critical distance that is necessary in anthropological research (idea of participant-observation). In addition to discussions around the changing nature of documentary photography, the second chapter will also outline the role that colour plays in photographic representation through the analysis of work by photographers such as Alex Webb and Susan Meiselas.

How do we assign meaning to objects and events? What can we know from photographic images, and how can we know it? At the same time, what I have photographed is only a fragment of each interior. Various composite 'wholes' may be formed, but this is also influenced by and based on other written textual evidence supporting the images, such as transcripts of conversations between my subjects and I, and descriptions of the scene. The habitus is an element of a conversation between the person who inhabits it and the 'anthropologist' who enters into it. There exists, however, a tension between the way these spaces seem to constitute themselves for me and what is deemed important to the occupants of the house – the tension that exists in a situation

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[17] Barbara Einzig (ed.), Thinking about Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller, Manchester and New York:

where 'I' as a meaning-maker meet the occupants as meaning-makers. But this does not necessarily imply a site of collision if reflexivity and contextualisation form part of the process of the analysis of these homes. There is therefore the need to balance the subjectivity of my reading with a more fixed analysis of my work. This can be achieved, according to John Collier, if the anthropologist were to return to their 'native collaborators' with these photographs and to probe further responses from them.[18]

Further, in relation to these photographs, there is a need to consider how we as viewers 'reading' into the images of these interiors 'take up' spaces in these rooms. Therefore, three possible 'occupational' positions exist in the same place: the space of the inhabitant or the resident, myself as photographer or researcher, and the viewer or others who look at these photographs, who 'read', judge and impose their own meanings on what they encounter. This points to the questions around identification and the taking up or rejecting of specific spaces. Fantasy and dreams of the future perhaps form part of the process of 'occupying' spaces within photographs. This process emphasises the photographic image as a separate representation which others can occupy. Take for example, magazine images of interiors and those in broad sheet supplements which present physical conceptions of 'ideal' places that one can occupy.

Much contemporary art practice has begun to question the parameters of Western art history; what had been taken for granted

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is now understood to be a limited frame of reference. Issues surrounding cultural identity and contemporary art practice has in turn generated a simultaneous increased interest in anthropology. This is because anthropology has for a long time served as a tool for understanding 'otherness', and is therefore vital in discussions around post-colonial issues when questioning its essentially Western ideology. Hence, with the rise of postmodernism, one needs to examine the traditional distinction between what is considered Western or non-Western. At the same time, there is a need to question what constitutes the boundaries of art. This signals a necessity for a new dialogue between anthropology and art, especially in discussions concerning contemporary art.

As outlined above, the analysis of the use of still photography in anthropology has traditionally and largely focussed on technical and practical manuals of method and analysis, which operate within a realist frame. Due to photography's mechanical means of production, it was assumed that no intervention by the photographer was possible, no 'creativity' from the artist. The resultant 'objectivity' involved in this technical process has led to trust in the medium in its use to document 'reality', in the collection of anthropological data. However, photography itself is a process of selection. Its selective eye limits the extent to which the photograph itself is presented as a "visual truth". Contrary to traditional claims, the intentions of the photographer can come into play; the subjectivity involved in this process of selection may allow us to move beyond the limits of sociology in the traditional sense, in the blurring of the boundary between the documentary and the aesthetic. On the surface, there seems to be a

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distinction between two sets of values: at one extreme, facts, objectivity, science, exactitude, and at the other, art, subjectivity, discursive, aesthetic. This has been recognised as an over-simplification. Recently, however, visual anthropology has adopted a more reflexive mode; it has recognised the need to question and challenge the realist position (and its notions of 'visual truth') in which the photograph's contribution to scientific knowledge depended on the accumulation of visual facts. There now seems to be a movement towards the argument of the document as a mode (metaphoric) of expressiveness, and anthropological practice is being repositioned within a wider photographic discourse. For example, the style and subject matter of Nan Goldin's The Ballad of Sexual Dependency (1986) appeals to the emotions of its viewers, overriding the dilemmas of documentary representation simply because these photographic images are regarded as direct expressions of 'real life'. Indeed, Goldin emphasises her own subjectivity in the process, referring to the book of images as "the diary I let people read" and that her pictures "come out of relationships, not observation."[19]

There are components of culture which require a more evocative, multi-dimensional, even ambiguous expression than the realist paradigm permits. As Elizabeth Edwards says, 'Through its increasing global strategies photography is capable of articulating its own particular culturally grounded voice within the discipline, one which anthropologists should recognise as capable of different but perhaps equally revealing ways of seeing

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[19] Nan Goldin, introduction to The Ballad of Sexual Dependency, 1996, ed. with Marvin Heiferman, Mark Holborn & Suzanne Fletcher, New York: Aperture Foundation, 1986

over their traditional domain.'[20] Although the product may not necessarily be labelled 'anthropological' in terms of a fully integrated theoretical position, they nonetheless constitute documents of culture whose legitimacy is drawn from the fact that the photographers or artists are attempting to communicate values and realities which are integral to human experience and consciousness.

Edwards makes reference to the documentary dilemma in still photography[21]: the more specific the image, the more general its meaning; the more general and ambiguous the image, the more incisive it can become in its revelatory possibilities. The revelatory visual powers of photography depend precisely on these ambiguities and metaphors. Photography can communicate about culture, not at the level of surface description but as a visual metaphor which bridges that space between the visible and the invisible, which communicates not through the realist paradigm but through a lyrical expressiveness. As Kracauer[22] has argued, the expressive/aesthetic value of the photograph 'would in a measure seem to be a function of their explorative powers.' Hence, the current trend in photography – to move increasingly away from the recording of a surface 'reality' to a visual text capable of expressing the deeper meanings and metaphors of cultural being, together with its complexities and ambiguities. We are now acutely aware of the gap between photographic appearances and the 'realities' they portray. Photographic images exist within a

[20] Elizabeth Edwards, 'Beyond the Boundary' in Rethinking Visual Anthropology, ed. Marcus Banks & Howard Morphy, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, p.55
[21] Elizabeth Edwards, ibid., p.55
[22] S. Kracauer, Theory of Film: the redemption of Physical Reality, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960, p.22

series of ambiguous structures. The difference between the sign and the referent, the connotated expression and the thing itself is made explicit, whereas the realist tradition has obscured the relationship. This ambiguous space becomes central to my photographic work. The objective of this project, then, is to explore the intersecting space between the aesthetic expressive (a more intuitive and subjective perspective), and ethnographic documentary in photography. The two categories of narrative (the expressive) and analysis of 'facts' (of which photography is the documenting tool) might be complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Therefore, visual production should not necessarily be read as polarised oppositions - realist versus expressive, document versus art, but as objectively related and interdependent phenomena.[23]

It is not my intention to provide a sociological study of the refugee situation in England. However, a refugee's personal circumstances may provide a useful starting point for us to visualise and interpret the experience of dislocation, of being in limbo for an unspecified period of time. Although my approach is not strictly ethnographic, it is necessary to situate my work in political, social, and economic contexts, and therefore necessary to attempt to define what "refugee" means. This definition is itself complex and shifting: "A well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion"[24] is the technical definition of refugee status as established in the 1951 United Nations Convention. This definition has formed the basis for

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[23] Fredric Jameson, Signatures of the Visible, London: Routledge, 1990, p.14

asylum procedures in Britain. In practice, however, Britain has become increasingly restrictive in its admission policies, most noticeable in the changes made in the Asylum and Immigration Act, implemented in 1996.

It is almost impossible for an asylum seeker to arrive in Britain without using forged travel documents. The imposition of visas on the main refugee-producing countries over the last 10 years, together with fines of £2,000 on airlines and the Eurostar service which carry undocumented passengers has forced fleeing refugees to carry forged documents or enter the country through illegal channels. When refugees arrive in Britain, they face what has been called the "culture of disbelief" which makes it difficult for even torture victims to establish their claims in relation to their status as genuine asylum seekers. When Michael Howard, as the Home Secretary under the former Conservative government, introduced his new asylum law, he argued it was needed to curb increasing abuse of the asylum process. Britain, he claimed, was becoming a "honeypot" for economic migrants. British politicians, therefore, still attempt to distinguish between "genuine political refugees" and "those using asylum as a device to better their standard of living", also known as the 'economic migrants'.

The British media, too, has become over-zealous in its reporting of illegal-immigrant scares. In September 1995, British police were hunting an Algerian who jumped from a Eurostar train while being deported back to France. A 'sham marriage racket' was revealed when an Immigration Service report identified five groups

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[24] The Refugee Council Factfile, London, 1996

trading in arranged marriages. News reports, supported by surveillance video footage at the port of Dover depict ways in which the refugee tries to gain access into the country. They usually feature groups of refugees (each carrying a sack of belongings over their shoulders – perhaps the stereotyped image of the illegal immigrant), running stealthily across streets into hiding. This image is reminiscent of the Mexican 'illegals' attempting to cross the border into America in many Hollywood movies. <u>Men In Black</u>, for example, opened with a scene such as this, except one of the immigrant Mexicans was singled out to be an 'alien' from outer space, a term used to describe migrants in the U.K. and the United States. At the same time, a number of tabloid newspapers invariably publish articles on asylum-seekers, very often in relation to the housing space that they have taken up, and the amount of tax money spent to house and support them. At the same time, these asylum seekers are portrayed as individuals who are intent on exploiting a 'liberal' welfare system.[25]

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[25] Within the span of a week, the Daily Mail featured numerous articles on this issue, using headlines such as *"Asylum seekers took my place on council house list"*, *"Widows ordered out, then asylum seekers move in: What kind of country do we live in when frail old ladies are turned out of their home to make way for fit young asylum seekers?"*, *"Immigrant gambler who sends his son out to beg"*, *"They couldn't find my dying granny a bed but they opened the wards for gypsies"*[25]; other articles included *"10,000 immigrants a year 'marry to stay in Britain'"* and *"Suburbia's Little Somalia"*.[25] This information is targeted at the 'ordinary' tax-paying citizen. The photographs which accompany these articles function to heighten this 'general' feeling of bitter exclusion towards the asylum seekers. Through the use of headlines such as "Why this *working* mother won't get her new home for *Christmas*" in the December 11, 1998 issue of the Daily Mail, an article featuring a close-up photograph of an English woman, face pinned up against her wide-eyed baby's face, juxtaposed with an image of a long shot of what appears to be a family (with three children) sitting at a beach, captioned as "Asylum seekers: Some are taking priority". A comparison is made between this 'holiday scene' of relaxation by the beach, against what is deemed to be an act of injustice by the local council against a 'working', and therefore tax-paying English woman. A similar example can be drawn from the image of a Romanian 'gypsy', captioned with "Welcome to Britain: A Romanian girl smoking outside the ward", and also the image of a Ghanaian man in a suit holding up a champagne glass (perhaps in mockery of the British asylum system), the rings on his hand flashing, the other arm locked around the shoulder of his 14-year old English bride. It cannot be documented how often an individual marries for the sole purpose of settlement in the U.K., but these representations serve only to fuel hostility and intolerance towards asylum seekers entering Britain.

WHY THIS WORKING MOTHER WON'T GET HER NEW HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Asylum seekers took my place on council house list

Displaced: Donna Berry and her daughter Madison. 'I just cried when I heard the news,' she said

By JAMES CLARK
Home Affairs Reporter

A WORKING mother has lost her place in the council house queue because of a decision to give asylum seekers preferential treatment.

Donna Berry, who lives in a single room at her brother's flat with her eight-month-old daughter Madison, was at the top of Labour-controlled Hammersmith and Fulham Council's housing list.

During a ten-month wait, she had accumulated 145 points towards the 150 qualifying level under the council's system of prioritising case. She was hoping to move into a new home as her daughter's first Christmas present.

But overnight, the council increased the qualifying level to 175 points and awarded certain categories of homeless people, including asylum seekers, 75 bonus points.

The extraordinary decision means some immigrants, many of whom arrive in the UK hidden in lorries and carrying fake documents, climb to the top of the list above many local families.

Miss Berry, 31, an assistant at an exhibition centre for 14 years, has now been told her chances of being rehoused are almost nil. In a letter, the council said it 'cannot foresee

Asylum seekers: Some are taking priority
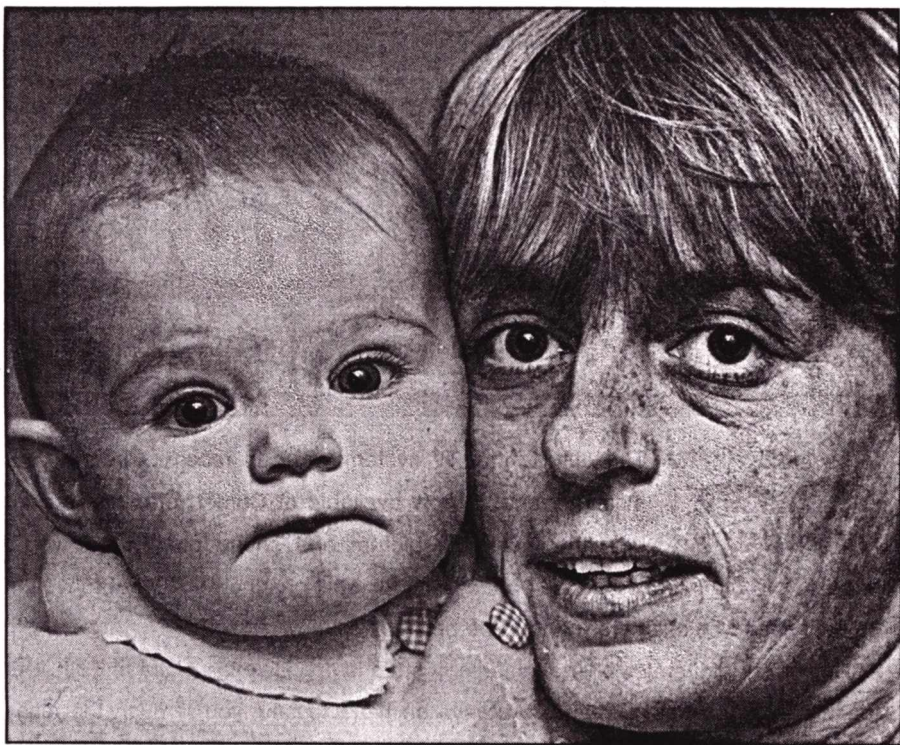
that Miss Berry will be made an offer in the near future'.

Fulham and Hammersmith has led the way in implementing the rules. But the Daily Mail understands that other Left-wing councils are considering such claims.

Greg Hands, a Tory councillor who has supported Miss Berry's case, said: 'This is a deeply unfair and unjust decision.

'We understand that most of the homeless applicants being granted the bonus points are asylum seekers.'

There are 20,000 asylum seekers being held in temporary accommodation in London, with 5,000 more arriving in the UK each month.

Under the council's complex

classification system, Miss Berry is listed as 'homeless with family' because she has accommodation in her brother's Fulham flat.

The 75-point bonus applies to other homeless categories, such as those with nowhere to go at all or to those living in 'unsuitable accommodation', such as a property which is so damp it constitutes a threat to health.

Although most asylum seekers do not qualify for normal permanent accommodation, a small number do.

These include those given 'special leave' to remain in Britain while their cases are considered, for example, because of ill-health or because they have small chil-

dren. Miss Berry said: 'I just cried when I heard. I really thought we would have a home and a base to start again from by Christmas.

'I just can't understand how they think this is fair.'

Sir Norman Fowler, the Shadow Home Secretary, said: 'This issue raises serious questions as many of those seeking asylum in this country are pursuing bogus claims.

'It cannot be right that they should go straight to the top of a housing list.

'We must now see whether other local authorities are pursuing the same policies. I will be putting down questions to the Minister responsible.'

The council defended its actions, saying it was coincidental that some immigrants fitted into the categories chosen to qualify for the bonus.

A spokesman said: 'The 75-point allocation is designed to help those in the most dire need.

'Most of our asylum seekers are in temporary accommodation, not on the permanent housing list.

'There will be a few occasions when we have to house them in property which might otherwise have been allocated to permanent applicants, but this will be rare and they will have to fulfil the same criteria as anyone else.'

Thug's taste of National Service

TO the drunken youth armed with an imitation pistol, 67-year-old Edward Montague-Willett and his wife seemed easy prey.

But when Terry King, 21, pointed the gun and screamed, 'Give me the money', the response from the elderly couple was not what he expected.

Mr Montague-Willett instinctively remembered his National Service training in unarmed combat from more than 40 years before.

He grabbed King's arm and kicked him in the groin, a court heard. King fled yelling, 'Just

Daily Mail Reporter

Montague-Willett for his actions. Judge Anthony Scott-Gall told King: 'It may be that you more than met your match in a very courageous man and his wife.'

Mr Montague-Willett, a photographer, told the jury how he and his wife Carolyn, 58, had been taking a summer evening stroll in the West Hill area of Hastings, East Sussex, when they were confronted by King and his friend Tony Willard.

'The youth had his feet apart, two hands on the gun, pointing

have any money on me and I didn't offer him any.

'He waggled the gun and said, "Do you want some of this?". I took him seriously.

'I swung across to block the gun then kicked him in the groin. The normal follow up is you move forward with the knee to the same place.

'Unfortunately I slipped and he fell on the ground with me.

'We were struggling on the ground and punching.

'My wife hit him with the house keys.

'At one stage he said "Just kidding, just kidding".'

and died of his injuries and my wife's father was shot in the face.'

King, whose father is serving a life sentence for attempted murder, claimed the incident in August was a prank which backfired. He and Willard had each drunk 12 pints of lager.

'I was drunk,' King added. 'It was a joke. There was no way I would rob anyone.'

The jury at Lewes Crown Court cleared King, from Hastings, of attempted robbery but found him guilty of having an imitation firearm with intent to commit a rob

HOW BUSINESS IS BOOMING FOR THE RENT-A-BRIDES AS YOUNG AS 14

10,000 immigrants a year 'marry to stay in Britain'

By PETER ROSE
Chief Crime Correspondent

IMMIGRATION officers suspect that 10,000 marriages a year are bogus.

A senior Whitehall source has suggested that 60 to 70 per cent of all marriages involving foreign nationals are a sham aimed at being allowed to stay in Britain.

Business is booming for so-called professional brides who are being paid up to £1,000 a time to marry immigrants.

They include Britain's youngest known child bride – aged just 14 when she went through a bogus wedding ceremony with a Ghanaian.

Home Secretary Jack Straw intends to bring in laws to tackle illegal immigration which will include tougher vetting of foreign nationals and British partners planning to marry.

The laws will also try to crack down on fixers who are charging up to £3,000 for each arranged marriage.

Registrars, who are currently almost powerless to stop a wedding when they suspect it is a sham, will be given the right to demand documentary evidence of age, identity and marital status so that they can try to establish whether a couple are free and eligible to marry in Britain.

Fears about the scale of the problem of bogus marriages prompted the Home Office to set up a special team of immigration officers to tackle it.

In the last 12 months, it has made over 130 arrests and charged 50 people. Seventeen ended up going to jail.

One 26-year-old woman appeared before magistrates recently, accused of what is believed to be a British record for bigamy involving foreign nationals.

Samantha Parry has been charged with marrying eight times in the last eight years – including four marriages in 1996 – in various parts of London.

The 14-year-old schoolgirl bride – who cannot be named for legal reasons because of her age – borrowed a 19-year-old friend's birth certificate and married at Croydon Register Office, South London, in 1995.

After the ceremony, she posed with her 'husband' for a photograph that led to her being caught.

Immigration officers visited the home of the woman named on the

'Trapped by photograph'

wedding certificate and realised she was not the person in the picture.

The schoolgirl was paid a few hundred pounds to go through the marriage ceremony.

The 'husband', whose name was said to be Kwadwo Duah, hoped that by marrying her he would be able to live in Britain and claim benefits, it was alleged.

The girl was sentenced to do 120 hours' community service after pleading guilty to perjury at the Old Bailey.

The man did apply to stay in Britain and was arrested. But he is said to have fled while on bail and is believed to have returned to Ghana.

One couple were so involved in bogus marriages that they set up their own business to handle them. Between them, Mark Charles and his partner, Sylvia Van Beest, have been married 12 times over the last ten years.
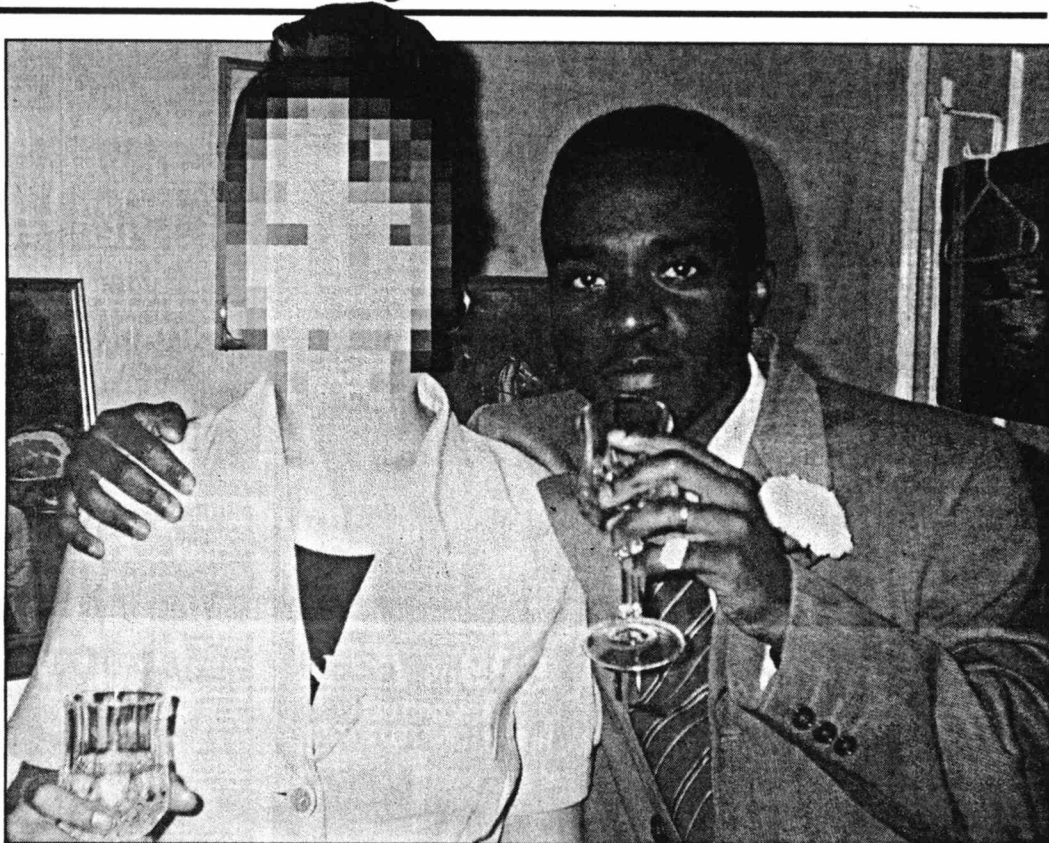
Britain's youngest child bride: The 14-year-old girl – her face obscured to protect her identity – and her Ghanaian 'husband'

WOMAN WED SEVEN TIMES IN 14 MONTHS

FORMER lap dancer Susan Coates (left) married seven illegal immigrants from West Africa in just 14 months.

Once wed, her 'husbands' wasted no time applying for permission to stay in Britain.

One posted his application the same afternoon, and photographs taken at the wedding ceremonies were submitted.

Three men who paid up to £2,700 to marry Coates, 31, who also calls herself Susie Q, were jailed at Harrow Crown Court, North-West London, for between seven and nine months. Three others have never been found

and one failed to turn up in court. Sia Gbondo, 27, a mother of one, was jailed for six months for paying Coates £1,500 to marry her brother.

Coates's friend Alison Morgan, 32, also took part in the enterprise, marrying two illegal immigrants.

Both women are due to be sentenced on January 7.

Coates, of Kilburn, North-West London, masterminded the scam, which clocked up a benefits bill in the region of £250,000.

Police stumbled across the marriage ring while investigating the murder of a Jamaican drug dealer outside Coates's home.

Charles, 27, married three Nigerians, a Croat and a Sierra Leone woman in 1994 and a Ghanaian in 1995.

Van Beest, 32, a mother of six, married a Ghanaian in 1988, another in 1991, a Nigerian in 1993, another Nigerian in 1994, a Pakistani in 1995 and a Sierra Leone man in the same year.

They were jailed for a total of 12 months at Inner London Crown Court in June.

In the last year, there have been about 17,000 marriages involving foreign nationals. Immigration officers suspect the vast majority are bogus.

The latest figures show that there were 164,158 civil marriages

conducted by registrars in 1996. And according to the immigration officers' estimates, more than 6 per cent of them could have been shams.

One immigration source said: 'Our estimates of the extent of

'Vetting is only cursory'

bogus marriages is almost certainly conservative.

'There are little or no checks made by the registrars currently, and even after the person applies to stay, the vetting of their appli-

cations are only cursory. 'Some 95 per cent who apply are successful, but to prove that the marriage was a sham is almost impossible because we would have to visit everyone and we just do not have the manpower.

'Most of the sham marriages involve people from West Africa, but many are also coming in from the old Eastern Bloc.'

Mr Straw's plans for tackling bogus marriages are part of a tough new package of proposals which include giving immigration officers additional powers of search, arrest and seizure.

They will no longer have to be accompanied by the police when they raid the home of a suspected

illegal immigrant. Mr Straw is determined that his offensive will succeed in stemming what is being seen as a tidal wave of illegal immigrants into Britain, who then cost taxpayers millions of pounds in benefits.

The Government will announce today that hauliers found to have brought illegal immigrants into Britain hidden in their lorries could have the vehicles impounded if financial penalties are not paid.

Immigration Minister Mike O'Brien said the drivers or owners of the lorries would have to pay, or prove they had the means to pay, the £2,000 penalty which the Government intends to impose in respect of each illegal immigrant transported in their vehicles. Only then would their lorry be released to continue its journey.

Mr O'Brien said: 'An estimated 8,000 illegal immigrants have come into the country in the back of lorries during this year. It must stop.

'We asked drivers to check loads and they have not all done so. This is why we need a tough new regime to clamp down on irresponsible hauliers.

'One container had 100 people hidden in the back and the UK taxpayer ends up footing the bill as many illegal immigrants claim asylum.

'Some lorry drivers claim not to know when they have people aboard. But when the authorities here make that discovery, it will be too late.'

FAMILIES' FURY OVER NEW USE FOR NURSING HOME COUNCIL CONDEMNED

> What kind of country do we live in when frail old ladies are turned out of their home to make way for fit young asylum seekers?

From last Thursday's Mail

By NEIL SAWYER and CHRIS MAGUIRE

Widows ordered out, then asylum seekers move in

A COUNCIL which said it was too poor to repair an old people's home has turned it into a hostel for asylum seekers instead.

Forty pensioners used to live in the three-storey Whyteways Nursing Home, set in its own grounds in the North London suburb of Harrow.

But they had to move out in September after the council announced that it could not afford to meet repair costs.

Residents were offered accommodation in other parts of London. Now they and their families have been shocked to discover that the home has re-opened as an asylum hostel for young men and women from Kosovo, Somalia and Sri Lanka.

One of those who had to leave Whyteways was Alzheimer's sufferer Jean Taylor, 72, who had lived at the home for six years.

She was offered a place in Watford, but her family decided to move her to a privately-run home in Devon because it was much quieter. Although Harrow Council is paying for her to stay there, visiting means a 400-mile round trip for her daughter Debbie Glass, 41, who lives in South Harrow.

Mrs Glass said: 'This kind of upheaval could kill people like my mother. They have been moved from a perfectly good building. She was very happy there until they started to lose staff in the weeks running up to the closure.

'My mother became very disorientated because she was used to familiar faces and routines. She is now living in Devon because it is away from the upset she has been caused.

'The council claims it was because of a lack of funds and that the building needed to be brought up to standard. But how, then, can they fund a refugee hostel?'

The home, now renamed the Whyteways Resource Centre, stands in an area where houses fetch more than £350,000. The decision to reopen it as a hostel last month sparked fury among residents of Harrow Weald who have signed a petition in protest.

One, who did not want to be named, said: 'Where is it all going to end? We are not racist, but it is semi-rural around here and people pay a lot of money to buy houses. Nobody can tell me property prices won't fall.'

The case comes just days after the Daily Mail reported how a

'She became disorientated'

businessman in Teignmouth, Devon, is converting his nursing home into a hostel for asylum seekers, claiming it is the only way he can stave off bankruptcy. Many local authorities have faced a sudden influx of refugees since Jack Straw announced that asylum seekers were to be 'spread' around the country.

Under planned legislation they can be housed anywhere in England and Wales rather than near clearing centres. The Home Secretary announced a £30million package to help the process.

Mary Ney, director of social services at Harrow Council, defended the authority's actions over Whyteways. She said the decision to use the £300,000 building as a hostel was taken long after councillors agreed to close it as a residential home.

'Asylum seekers are flooding into Harrow and we are really struggling to cope,' she said. 'We have an immense homelessness problem.'

Mrs Ney said there was a sharp contrast between the standards needed for residential homes and those required for a hostel for asylum seekers. It would have taken hundreds of thousands of pounds to put Whyteways into the sort of condition demanded by legislation on residential homes.

Whyteways currently has 59 asylum seekers in it. Most have come from Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Somalia, and Eastern Europe. Some use it as a base to attend college to improve their English.

A disused hospital ward has been reopened to house 61 illegal immigrants.

The Romanian gipsies, 28 women and their 33 children, were among 103 asylum seekers captured by police in Dartford, Kent, last Thursday.

The men from the group are being detained while asylum applications are investigated.

Kent County Council said its social services department had taken over a ward at Joyce Green Hospital in Dartford, and been given the option of using another. Spokesman Angharad Lynch said she could not say what the operation was costing, but the council would claim the money back from the Government.

Changing places: Whyteways is now a 'resource centre' for asylum seekers after elderly residents had to move out

Keys to Britain for another 310,000

By DAVID WILLIAMS
Chief Reporter

MORE than 310,000 people will be allowed to settle in Britain during the next three years, official figures reveal.
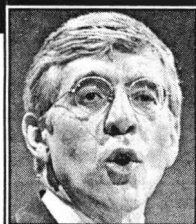
Nearly 120,000 will receive permission next year – 50 per cent more than in the past 12 months.

An estimated 135,000 of the 310,000 will be asylum seekers as the Government attempts to clear a massive backlog of applications.

Many more will be families of people allowed in earlier. Though the backlog is swamping councils and costing taxpayers £100million a year, the method of clearing it is controversial.

Immigration officials are also worried about the slow pace of removing those whose applications fail. Only 6,400 were deported or left voluntarily last year and the 1999 projection is just 8,000. Experts estimate that by 2002, there will be 65,100 awaiting removal, sparking fears that the Government might offer an amnesty.

The projections come from the Home Office's Research Development and Statistics Directorate. Britain is facing an expected record number of 44,000 asylum applications this year and the Government plans sweeping measures to cope with the crisis.

The Home Office says the dramatic increase in the numbers of relatives arriving is partly explained by cuts in the qualifying periods for both asylum seekers and those granted exceptional leave to remain.

Settlement figures also cover employment-related acceptances and people with UK grandparents coming from countries like Australia and New Zealand. Of the 61,900 granted settlement in the last year, 22,000 were wives joining husbands, 12,400 husbands joining wives and 11,300 children.

A total of 25 percent came from the Indian sub-continent, 23 per cent from Africa, 21 per cent from the remainder of Asia, 14 per cent from the Americas and 11 per cent from Europe.

Of 34,400 asylum decisions, 5,200 claims were granted, 3,600 people were not recognised as refugees but granted exceptional leave to remain in the country and 25,600 (75 per cent) were refused. Nearly 40 per cent of those granted asylum were from Somalia and 25 per cent from the former Yugoslavia. Almost 60 per cent of grants for exceptional leave were to people from Somalia, Afghanistan and Yugoslavia.

John Tincey, of the Immigration Service Union, which represents 'frontline' officers, accused Home Office officials of being 'mesmerised by the scale and complexity of the asylum problem'. He said: 'They have lost sight of the fact that bogus claims are only another form of illegal immigration and are allowing our border controls to wither away.'

Mr Straw is also facing attacks over revelations that scores of asylum seekers with convictions for burglary, benefit fraud and violence could be among the 10,000 people he is allowing to stay because their claims date from before July 1993. Tory spokesman James Clappison, who discovered that only criminals sentenced to more than a year in jail will be barred, said he was 'angry, surprised and very concerned.'

STRAW GAMBLES ON THE EURO TASK FORCE

Jack Straw: Risk

JACK STRAW is looking for a European solution to the UK immigration crisis, it emerged last night.

He is preparing to sign up to the European Task Force on immigration and Asylum, a Dutch-inspired body seen as the first step towards a common law for the EU.

The tactic, backed by Tony Blair, represents a risk for the Home Secretary. While some of the joint policies will be tougher than Britain's present stance, he could face serious embarrassment if other member states vote through softer measures than he would like.

The Task Force will initially take a broad view, identifying effective initiatives, drawing up a 'white list' of countries where there is little real chance of an asylum seeker having suffered persecution, strengthening financial ties and giving aid to countries which produce most 'refugees'.

Speaking in Brussels last week, Mr Straw said: 'Britain is not alone in having to cope with large numbers of asylum seekers and migrants – countries right across the EU are facing the same challenge.'

Latest figures show the UK become the second most popular European destination for asylum seekers, behind only Germany.

A Home Office source said last night: 'We see this as an added string to our bow. This Government has always been determined to crack the asylum nut and this will help. We have a broad consensus with our partners and do not expect any problems.'

Police cash in a flash

Immigrant gambler who sends his son out to beg

By KATE HURRY

HIS sorrowful face has been capturing the sympmathies of passers-by for nearly two months.

The ten-year-old beggar from Romania and his accordion have become a familiar sight on the streets of Brighton, Eastbourne and Hastings.

But those well-meant coins and notes dropped into the cap at his feet are funding the gambling habit of his asylum-seeking father, it was revealed yesterday.

And the pitiful expression on the child's face is soon replaced by snarling aggression should anyone – including the police – dare to ask him to move on.

The boy is one of a Romanian family of six who arrived in Eastbourne two months ago.

They are receiving around £1,000 a month in benefits on top of free housing. But the man's wife and youngest son have been forced to beg so he can squander their takings in arcades and betting shops.

Police have referred the matter to the Crown Prosecution Service, which is deciding whether to issue a court summons.

Further up the South Coast it emerged that another group of illegal immigrants

'I would like to bring my family here too'

from Romania had been put up at a £65-a night hotel. Last night the 21 women and children were being moved to a secret location after public outrage over their stay at the the Inn on the Lake near Gravesend, Kent.

Social services sent a minibus and five cars to the hotel while a dozen Kent police officers arrived in a riot van and two other vehicles to oversee the transfer.

When asked where the refugees were going, a social services worker said: 'We are hardly going to tell you that, are we?'

The 21 are part of a group of 100 gipsies who emerged from the back of a lorry which arrived at Dartford at the weekend.

Many were put up in unused wards at the town's Joyce Green Hospital – to the anger of nursing staff there.

The 16 children and five women were taken to the 78-room Inn on the Lake on Tuesday night.

The hotel confirmed that Dartford Borough Council is picking up the bill for the ten double rooms which is believed to have been reduced to £20-a-night.

Each room is equipped with en-suite bathrooms, direct dial phones, radios and satellite TVs.

The hotel is popular with local businesses for conferences. One guest said: 'It is a nightmare. I am here to meet important clients and now I find it is over-run by kids and refugees.'

The Romanian guests had few complaints however. One woman said: 'I have three children back home with my mother. I am hoping they will come to England as soon as I am settled.

'I am enjoying myself at this hotel. I would like to bring my family here too.'

By RAY MASSEY
Motoring Correspondent

Forces to keep fines from speed cameras

POLICE may be allowed to keep most of the cash raised from motorists caught on speed cameras.

Ministers say the move would let forces throughout Britain turn the controversial cameras into a real deterrent.

But motoring organisations warned that it could mean drivers being targeted, yet again, as an easy source of revenue.

The cameras raise some £17 million a year in fines, but it goes straight to the Treasury. Until now, many police chiefs have complained that they cannot afford to put film in all their cameras or prosecute every one of the thousands of motorists caught.

Drivers who are 'flashed' often hear no more about it and cease to treat the cameras seriously.

Now Gordon Brown and his deputy Stephen Byers have said they would 'look favourably' on any schemes to let camera operators keep more of the fines. They say there will be 'strict safeguards' to ensure the cameras are not used simply to raise money.

The RAC said last night it was disturbed by the move. A spokesman said: 'We are not happy at all. We believe speed cameras should be used to save lives. They are not there to make money for the police and local councils.'

The AA said it would not oppose the idea 'providing the cash is not used as a financial incentive to install more cameras.'

The Association of Chief Police Officers welcomed the change. Richard Brumstrum, Assistant Chief Constable of Cleveland and chairman of ACPO's transport enforcement technology committee said it could cut the death toll on the roads. He said: 'We will have more sites, more cameras, and they will be used more. The chances of getting caught will rise significantly.'

The current fixed penalty for speeding is £40.

The move is a change of policy for the Treasury, which has previously been unwilling to 'ring-fence' cash for specific projects. It will also allow the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to keep wheel clamping fees, to cover the costs of removing clamps and selling abandoned cars.

●A controversial new device that 'blinds' speed cameras with a flash of its own could go on sale in Britain. The device, reported in New Scientist magazine, has been developed by a photographer from technology in his studio. But the Department of Transport says using it could be illegal.

OUTCRY AS HOSPITAL TAKES IN 61 ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS FROM ROMANIA

They couldn't find my dying granny a bed but they open the wards for gipsies

By BARBARA DAVIES and TERRI JUDD

STAFF at an NHS hospital spoke of their outrage yesterday after two wards were reopened to accommodate Romanian illegal immigrants.

The wards at Joyce Green Hospital in Dartford, Kent, where there are 2,400 patients on the waiting list, have stood empty for two-and-a-half years.

But all that changed after 103 Romanian gipsies were found hidden in a lorry at the nearby freight terminal.

While the men in the group were taken to a detention centre, the wards are now home to 61 mothers and children, provided by social services with two nurses to look after them and four security guards to keep an eye on them.

By law, the gipsies must be given bed-and-breakfast accommodation while they wait for their political asylum applications to be

'They have money for cigarettes'

heard and are likely to remain in the hospital for several weeks. They are eligible to claim benefits.

A staff nurse said: 'It's outrageous that there is not enough money for patients but money can be plucked from thin air for these women.'

The sight of young Romanians lounging around smoking was particularly upsetting for Annette Larson, whose grandmother died last week after being left for 12 hours on a casualty trolley at the hospital because doctors could

Annette Larson and grandmother Rose, who will be buried today

Welcome to Britain: A Romanian girl smoking outside the ward

not find her a bed. She was 93 years old.

'It is absolutely disgusting,' said Mrs Larson, from Longfield, Kent. 'Why should they get preferential treatment over local people? I don't think they should be allowed to come here so we can spend money on them. There are people waiting to get into hospital – people who have paid their national insurance all their lives. That is what we pay it for. Then those

people come here and they get it all for nothing. They don't even have to wait.'

Her grandmother Rose Martin, who will be buried today, was sent to Joyce Green on November 5 with severe dehydration and a urine infection.

Mrs Larson said she was left on a trolley without a drip, a glass of water placed far beyond her reach. A cheese sandwich was left for her although she had no teeth. After

seven hours, her blood pressure fell and she began to fade but it was five more hours before she was moved to a ward. Yesterday in the hospital shop, young Romanian women were asking for change for £10 and £20 notes as they laughed and chatted. One shop volunteer said: 'It's an absolute joke. There was no money for patients when they needed money for beds in those wards, but the money was found instantly for illegal immigrants.

'It makes we want to spit. They seem to have money for cigarettes but where have they got it from?'

'Whole system is a shambles'

A hospital laundry worker, who took linen up to the wards where the gipsies are staying, said: 'None of the staff can believe the treatment they are getting.

'The radiators are blazing up there, but the women have got the windows open. They've got quilts and are being given baby clothes and shoes for their children.

'I know one woman whose hus-

band was transferred from the intensive care unit because the hospital wanted his bed. It's wrong that they can find money for these gipsies and not for our own patients.'

A source at Kent Social Services said the women would remain in the hospital until suitable accommodation could be found for them. 'We will have to house them while their claims are processed. We would usually put them in bed-and-breakfast accommodation but because of the large number of them, we needed to find somewhere quickly where we could place them.

'We have a legal obligation to do this. The final bill will be footed by central Government.'

The hospital has offered free use of the hospital wards, which are not being used because there is no lift access.

Dartford & Gravesham Community Health Council has been battling to keep open beds in the hospital, which is scheduled to be closed down and replaced by a new building.

Chairman Ernest Brook said Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust chief executive Ann Deane had assured him none of the hospital's resources was being spent on the illegal immigrants.

'Social services have supplied their own camp beds and staff. It is a terrible situation but I am assured hospital staff and resources are not being used for the asylum seekers.'

Kent County Council is currently housing 1,500 asylum seekers at a cost of £3.5million a year. Home Office Minister Mike O'Brien said Kent was receiving most of the funding to look after the immigrants from the Government.

'As soon as the new legislation is through, and we are able to create a new national agency, the national Government will take over most of the responsibility.'

He added: 'I think we need a complete reform of the whole of our asylum system. Quite frankly, it's a shambles, and people are abusing it all too often.'

The need was for decisions to be taken quickly on who was a genuine asylum seeker, he said.

Asylum seekers' £300m handouts

By DAVID WILLIAMS and SONIA PURNELL

ASYLUM seekers are costing the British taxpayer more than £25million a month in handouts, a Government Minister confirmed yesterday.

The true cost is much higher because the figures used were compiled in May last year, when the problem was far smaller.

And they do not include welfare payments to those actually granted asylum or permission to remain in the country.

The figures were disclosed in a Parliamentary answer by Social Security Minister Angela Eagle. They show that 45,000 asylum seekers received an average of £255.90 a month in income sup-

port while 36,000 were given an average of £356.90 monthly in housing benefit.

A further £42 a month council tax benefit was paid to 21,000 asylum seekers making a total annual payout in excess of £300million. Immigration officials say the current figures must be higher because of the sharp rise in asylum claims since then. They expect a record 44,000 will seek a new life in Britain this year compared with 32,500 in 1997.

Home Office statistics for October show that 5,010 sought refuge

– the highest single monthly figure ever and an increase of 67 per cent on last year. The figures released for last May, say the DSS, are based on 'benefit units' and may represent a single person or a couple. They do not include dependants within a family, such as children or grandparents.

Immigration officials point out that the £25million a month also fails to include key aspects such as bogus social security claims, multiple claims, the cost of investigation, medical treatment and legal aid.

John Tincey, of the Immigration Service Union, said: 'The Home Office figures reflect only people whose applications have not yet

been decided. There are many who have been refused asylum who have not yet left the system and it does not take account of those for example who have not been granted asylum but remain here on exceptional leave.'

The ISU believes the hidden cost of bogus asylum seekers in Britain is up to £2billion a year.

Robin Cook and other EU foreign ministers agreed yesterday to accelerate a crisis plan to curb the rising flood of immigrants and asylum seekers into Europe.

They said a task force to identify the problems at source, in the asylum seekers' home countries, should come into operation next month rather than later in the year.

The image of the persecuted refugee is an icon of our times. Refugees mostly leave their homelands in a state of fear and desperation, but are barely welcomed on arrival into England. Refugees in Britain have come to be seen as a burden on the welfare state. This has resulted in restrictions on housing provided by the local authority, and cuts in welfare benefits. The Asylum and Immigration act introduced in 1996[26] made a series of substantial changes to the asylum determination process, including the introduction of the concept of countries in which there is "no serious risk of persecution", and new criminal offences relating to employment. Although refugees often arrive exhausted, shocked, disorientated, and often penniless, most not knowing a word of the language of the country they reach, they are sometimes treated as criminals and are subject to immediate interrogation. Many of them have been tortured, persecuted and victimised. Only a few are granted asylum, and only after a long period of waiting. A system to feed and house asylum seekers while their applications are processed has now had to be put in place by local authorities. A growing number of asylum seekers to Britain – about 2000 a year – now also face the prospect of being held indefinitely in purpose-built detention centres on the authority of an immigration officer.

There is therefore a distinction to be made between our assumed 'liberal' attitude to refugees and the 'fear' they represent as a threat to national identity. The West feels sorry for them, as it feels menaced by them. Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968 led to stricter controls over

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[26] The Refugee Council Factfile, Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, September 1996

immigration and citizenship; and Margaret Thatcher, in a 1978 TV interview said that "people were really afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture." The term 'cultural difference' in this instance functions as part of a code which masks contemporary racism. The fear of migration, however, is not confined to Western countries. The Japanese are concerned about illegal immigration which their wealth invariably attracts, but which they see as a threat to Japanese 'homogeneous' culture. The sense that cultural identity is at risk is a significant feeling that is shared by both migrant communities and host societies, and it is the basis of extreme and often violent attitudes on both sides.

The exiles, refugees, and asylum seekers do not leave their countries, their 'homes', out of choice but because of extreme circumstances over which they have no control. Their dreams are of return to that space of stability signified by 'home'. Particularly for the refugee, or the exile, the promise of being able to 'one day' return home provides the necessary bearings which enables him to function in an alternative temporary and often alien environment. These, however, are dreams of an imaginary return: "Migration is a one way trip. There is no 'home' to go back to."[27] Nikos Paspatergiadis, in 'The Home in Modernity', states that existential homelessness is not a dismissal of the hope of home. In fact, there are only three options for the exile: to defer the homecoming to an idealised time in the future, to find a substitute home in the here and now, or psychological

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[27] Stuart Hall, 'Minimal Selves', in L. Appignanesi (ed.), Identity: The Real Me. Post-Modernism and the Question of Identity, ICA Documents 6, London: ICA, 1987, p.44

breakdown.[28] It is this category of individuals on which this research focuses, and includes asylum seekers, those granted refugee status, and the other group of individuals who are given "exceptional leave to remain" in the country. Seen in the context of their terms of existence, we can analyse the ways in which each individual or family constructs their private spaces.

The definitions and boundaries of documentary photography have evolved since its beginnings as part of its status as an 'objective' record. At the same time, contemporary photographers interested in the visualisation of 'real life' have reverted into their own private, domestic spaces for their subject matter. In my work, I use the 'everyday' to unravel the experiences of the people I photograph; at the same time, it is crucial to the discovery of new methods of visually expressing and understanding one's immediate environment. Chapter Three (The Photography of the Everyday) provides an analysis of work by the American photographer, William Eggleston, and provides a basis to the imaging of the everyday as a significant process in reality representation.

John Collier[29] states that the value of the inventory is based upon the assumption that the "look" of a home shows a significant relationship to the way the family is coping with the problems of life. Ruesch and Kees too, emphasize the importance of the presence and use of certain objects in the psychological make-up of the occupants:

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[28] "The Home in Modernity", from The INIVA Review, London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1997
[29] John Collier, Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967

> The selection of objects and the nature of their grouping constitute non-verbal expressions of thought, need, conditions, or emotions. Thus, when people shape their surroundings, they introduce man-made order[30]... And every building indicates in some way whether or not it is representative of those who live in it. This is particularly true about interiors, where the nature and arrangements of possessions say a great deal about their owners' views of existence.[31]

For refugees, particularly, because of the circumstances in which they leave their countries, many are unable to carry with them more than what is essential, or objects of invaluable significance, which are usually photographs. Thus, when looking at the interiors of refugee homes, the objects found within them take on a greater significance.

Drawing upon material from the information given to me by the individuals interviewed, and through the photography of the interiors of their homes, it is my aim to map out what may be felt almost universally, and not necessarily only by refugees or exiles. My own experience of being born to parents of a different race, religion, and nationalities, I have encountered the experience of being a stranger, even in the country of my birth. My partner is from Tabriz, in Iran, and is labelled 'stateless'. An "Aliens Registration Office" stamp on his photograph in his identity document emphasizes this. This project, including my photographic work, is both an expression and analysis of the experience of the stranger. It is an attempt to explore what it means to exist and live in a foreign country, and the problems involved in the processes of identification and the setting up of

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[30] Ruesch & Kees, Nonverbal Communication: Notes on the Visual Perception of Human Relations, California: California University Press, 1972, p.94

[31] Ruesch & Kees, ibid., p.132

a new 'home'. It is particularly the in-between space of belonging and exclusion that I hope to locate and visually identify — the experience of waiting in a transit lounge, in a kind of no man's land. (Marc Augé's concept of the 'non-place' is of particular relevance here). This will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Migration has often been viewed in terms of a singular linear pattern, and finite movements between a point of origin and a point of destination. Refugees, who remain in a state of exile for an indefinite period of time, are too complex to be situated within this conceptual framework. Thus, the refugees I encountered during my research range from being 'settled' migrants, to others whose living-space takes on the function of a tent, a temporary respite, a container which allows its occupants to celebrate or to express the 'self'. It is particularly those individuals who have been living in London for a longer period who seem to have 'grown roots' in their home environment, whereas others may be characterised by a strong vision of displacement, and uprooting.

The research for this project is not limited to data or information that I generated through the process of participant-observation and interviews. It was also drawn from written forms of expression created by the refugees. At the same time, newspaper articles, and social workers in this field are important sources of information in terms of the ways in which refugees are represented in the United Kingdom. By including and focusing upon the ways people perceive and define their private and public spaces within which they exist, this project therefore produces points of view which are dependent on the particular contexts in

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which they are made. Adopting the view that "home" itself is a cultural construction – not a fixed entity but a movable concept, we can then be able to examine critically the context within which such constructions take place.

Much of my initial research was conducted at the British Refugee Council where I obtained names and addresses of other support groups, such as the Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum (MRCF), and Vietnamese and Kurdish Associations. It was through these organisations that I made contacts with some of my interviewees. I also met other refugees through personal contacts with friends. Because the project was not intended to be a sociological study, there was no methodological quota set, whether it was to do with age groups, race or nationalities; the locations of these homes, too, span various areas across London, such as Elephant & Castle, Peckham, Wimbledon, Hammersmith, Colindale, Bayswater, Battersea and Wembley Park. None of these refugees was 'selected' as such; it was perhaps more of a random sampling. I approached anyone who was willing to speak with me. This was part of the process of resisting a clear 'mapping' of any one culture. Any representation of a culture, especially when researching on refugees in this context, is prone to stereotypical 'examinations' of particular cultures. Stephen Tyler has proposed a "Post-Modern Ethnography" which is appealing in theoretical terms, and to which bears some relation to the structure of this written project. In his article, 'Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document', he proposes a form of ethnography which 'evokes' rather than 'represents': "Evocation is neither presentation or representation. It presents no objects and represents none, yet it makes available through absence what can

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be conceived but not presented."[32] A postmodern ethnography is a composite text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in its readers an emergent fantasy of a possible 'reality'. Its nature is fragmentary, consisting of many voices: "A postmodern ethnography is a cooperatively evolved text consisting of fragments of discourse intended to evoke in the minds of both reader and writer an emergent fantasy of a possible world of commonsense reality, and thus to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect. It is, in a word, poetry – not in its textual form, but in its return to the original context and function of poetry, which, by means of its performative break with everyday speech, evoked memories of the *ethos* of the community and thereby provoked hearers to act ethically."[33] Rather than simply having an observer and the observed, there is discourse that is developed out of dialogue and interaction. According to Tyler, the purpose of a postmodern ethnography is not to find various means through which one can produce a better or more accurate representation, but how to avoid representation altogether.

The fourth chapter consists of groups of photographs taken in each home. The structure of the accompanying written text reflects the way in which I approached the people to be interviewed. All but one of my interviewees spoke fluent English. The Kurdish asylum seeker spoke relatively well, but we were also helped by a translator from time to time. I prepared a series of questions which would encourage each individual to speak more

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[32] Stephen Tyler, 'Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document', in James Clifford and George Marcus (eds) Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, California and London: University of California Press, 1986
[33] Stephen Tyler, ibid., p. 125 - 6

clearly about their situations, but I felt this technique to be too formal and unnatural for both myself and my interviewees. However, it was a useful method for me to obtain some specific answers about their present circumstances and what they perceive or define their "home" to be. It was also during this more formal session that I obtained some background information about the reasons behind, and their means of arrival in the United Kingdom. Although this 'formal' interview was important, what I felt carried equal significance was their everyday activities, and informal conversation. I often spent at least one or two hours in each house, and would be invited over for lunch or tea, or to sit with them in a pub. Perhaps it was from this day-to-day interaction that I extracted some significant information about each individual's way of life. Therefore, each section of photographs in Chapter Four will include extracts of the formal interview, the complete transcripts of which can be found in the Appendix. These have not been edited, except in the case of the interview with the Kurdish woman, where some grammatical errors were corrected. Other stories or significant information given to me after this are described within the written description and analysis. Therefore, the text provides a brief introduction to each of the refugees interviewed, and may be read in relation to the photographs. An in-depth analysis of these interiors and other verbal input will be provided in the chapter following it.

How are transformations of memory and the senses experienced and conceptualized? In other words, what elements within a culture enable the sensory experience of one's personal history to be evoked? Memory is perhaps stored in specific everyday items that form the historicity of a culture, items that create and sustain

one's relationship to the past as a sensory dimension. At times, especially in modernity, objects or artefacts of the 'old' cultural order are emptied of their indigenous meanings, but they leave their traces behind. Such "cultural" exotica are then inserted into the living-room space, as a kind of collector's artefact. These objects may not possess specific personal significance to the occupant of the house in which they are on display, but still serve the purpose of re-establishing one's links with the past, to a culture which has been left behind. This points to a second-order representation which allows one to return to his or her roots, but this is an imagined return. This may be seen as an attempt at ordering a dislocated world. Walter Benjamin wrote that the private collector experiences the dialectical tension of order and disorder, and that within each object contains a memory.[34] At the same time, the private space of each house and the small objects on display (functioning as fetish items) can be interpreted as a desire for an alternative space. The nature of family photographs and other snapshots allow them to function in similar ways. The photograph, both as an object and an image, represents a direct and intimate link to one's past. Collecting and accumulating objects that form one's 'baggage' is a growing feature in modern times; it is therefore not only the items that are being kept and displayed that are of significance, but also the activity itself, an investigation into how identities are formed through objects in private spaces. Chapter Five (Photographs, Memory, and Reconstructions of 'home') will therefore also constitute an analysis of the objects found in refugees' homes.

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[34] Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking my Library', in Illuminations, translated by Harry Zohn, London: Fontana,

In my work, I seek to describe the various ways in which people represent what they perceive as being significant to them. Of significance are forms of narratives which reflect the various processes of displacement. As John Berger postulates, "Home is no longer a dwelling, but the untold story of a life being lived."[35] In the fifth chapter, I will elaborate on the role and significance of storytelling, narratives told between migrants, particularly those stories that have been passed down through generations within a family. These narratives are intimately linked to memory and childhood:

> There is ground for taking the house as a tool for analysis of the human soul.. Not only our memories, but the things we have forgotten are "housed". Our soul is an abode. And by remembering "houses" and "rooms", we learn to "abide" within ourselves... House images move in two directions: they are in us as much as we are in them.[36]

Although the objects and decoration in each home offer some insight into the lives of the occupants, the basis of this thesis is far from being merely a "Through the Keyhole" experience. The home does not necessarily reflect or establish only economic prosperity or social status, and here, I choose not to represent them in terms of square metres or other material measures. Rather, I seek expression through a more direct and personal experience. Houses are frequently thought of as bodies, sharing with its inhabitants a life history. Similar to the ways in which people tend to construct or set-up their homes in their own 'image', they also use these house-images to construct themselves as individuals and groups. Seen in this way, a house would be an extension of the

1992, p. 61-9
[35] John Berger, op. Cit., p.64

'self', and the space surrounding each of us is also an extension of our personal space. Therefore, what is of interest is not only the function of the house as dwelling and environment, but also the form it takes, in terms of a body and its surrounding landscape. The two are not mutually exclusive and permeate each other. According to Gaston Bachelard, the space of the house is inhabited not just in daily life but also in the imagination. It is a 'topography of our intimate being', a 'feliticious space' with protective associations, a rich and varied poetic image which 'emerges into the consciousness as a direct product of the heart, soul, and being of man, apprehended in his actuality'.[37]

The house and the body are related in a series of complex, intricate, and subtle relationships. House, body and mind are in continuous interaction: the physical structure, the furnishings, social conventions and images of the house mould and inform the activities and ideas that are generated within its walls. Thus, when looking at refugee families and the set-up of their houses, we need also to explore the link between the occupant and the house; and the house and the experience and activities of those who dwell within it. Pierre Bourdieu describes the house as 'the principle locus for the objectification of generative schemes.'[38] The body, functioning in an ordered space of the home, 'reads' the house which serves as a metaphor for the embodied person. Through habit and inhabiting, each person builds up a practical mastery of the fundamental schemes of their culture. Bourdieu's essay on the Kabyle house prefigures the development of his concept of habitus, and the dialectical interaction between body and house plays a key

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[36] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, Introduction, pxxxvii
[37] Gaston Bachelard, ibid., 1994, Introduction, xxxvi, xxxv, xviii

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role in his analysis of the logic of practice. He stresses the significance of the house as an instrument of thought, especially in societies without writing. According to Heidegger too, the German word corresponding to "construction" is closely tied to forms of "being", "cultivating", and "inhabiting", and that the process of "inhabiting", and from there, "being", can only take place in a clearly limited or defined domain.[39] One can only occupy a space that is bounded, that has a beginning and an end, which provides a sense of a coherent whole.

Our relationship to space is therefore never neutral but expressive of all the broader contradictions that affect the intensity and clarity of living in a contemporary context. In setting up a 'home', we are investing in it aspirations to positively shape the space which we inhabit: 'Yet, beyond the satisfaction of his eliminatory bodily needs, man must also experience space in his home. At least, he must learn to experience it. The home must not be allowed to be an escape from space but a living-in space, an honest relationship with it.'[40] There is communication between the body and objects, the person and the world, which points to a kind of perceptual construction of meaning through the senses – senses which are not reducible to language. My interest with these 'homes' is therefore not restricted to their architectural features, or to be seen purely as physical structures. What becomes significant in the experience of the home is the relationship between the inhabitants, their

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[38] Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977, p.89

[39] Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" in Poetry, Language, Thought, New York: Harper Colophon, 1971, p.154, as cited by Kenneth Frampton in, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" in Hal Foster (ed.), Postmodern Culture, London: Pluto Press, 1985, p.24

[40] Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, "Man and His House" (1929) in Moholy-Nagy, by K.Passuth, translated by E. Grunz, London: Thames and Hudson, 1985, p309

ideas, and the shaping of the space of their home. The home may be thought of as a kind of microcosm of each individual's universe; the set-up of individual homes can come to represent the mind-sets of its inhabitants. Intimately linked both physically and conceptually, the body and the house are sources of signification, and both affect and serve as basic cognitive modes used to structure, think and experience the world.

The space of the community is not so much separated from, as intricately linked to the formation of "home". According to Marc Augé, both collective and individual representations are two sides of the same coin:

> Representations of private otherness, in the systems studied by ethnology, place the need for it at the very heart of individuality, at a stroke making it impossible to dissociate the question of collective identity from that of individual identity... Representation of the individual interests anthropology not just because it is a social construction, but also because any representation of the individual is also a representation of the social link co-substantial with him. By the same token, we are indebted to the anthropology of remote societies – and even more so to the individuals it studies – for this discovery: the social begins with the individual; and the individual is the object of ethnological scrutiny.[41]

Chapter Six (Representing 'Community') highlights the ambiguous existence of 'community' as an imaginary construct (Anderson) and develops my analysis of the ways in which a sense of belonging may be re-constructed within shared public spaces. Hence, my research also explores the spaces of refugee communities in London, a city inhabited by a whole range of migrants of various nationalities and cultural backgrounds.

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[41] Marc Augé, translated by John Howe, Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, London and New York: Verso, 1995, p.19,20

36, 000 asylum seekers entered the United Kingdom in 1998, and 9 out of 10 of them settled in the capital city. It is the perception of refugees arriving in the U.K. that London is like no other city in England. In a <u>Guardian</u> report on refugees in London, Agron Krasniqi, from Pristina, in Kosovo, who acts as Haringey Council's interpreter, states that most refugees prefer to stay in London: "They think there is more work here. Some were offered a place in Eastbourne but refused to go because they did not think there would be many opportunities." But Government agencies believe they have to send asylum seekers to the Midlands and the North to curb the surge of refugees in London. Krasniqi, however, is apprehensive: "They think London is the place and would not like anywhere else."[42] And this view seems to be accurate and shared by most asylum seekers who enter the capital.

The city itself is a multi-racial and cultural society, with more than 200 languages being spoken as first languages. The economic and physical growth of London, and its cultural development over the past 5 decades have, in a large part, been due to the influx of immigrants and refugees into the city. London, because of British history, has been shaped by global imperialism. Alongside the development of the inner city areas came the expansion of the suburban landscape of London, the ghettos of the early 20th Century. When looking at the sites of community spaces, and the location of the 'homes' of these refugees, it is important to consider how they are both spatially and economically situated within the city. Take for example, the large Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities living in

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[42] Peter Hetherington, 'Surge of Refugees a 'time bomb' for London boroughs', in The Guardian, 25

Spitalfields, East London. These consist largely of poverty-stricken people who are considered 'marginal' in British society, and yet they are living in the centre of the city. In locating the spatial areas within which these communities exist, questions relating to race, class, and immigration come to light. Significant to the set-up of "home" too, is the degree of inclusion or exclusion within the local and wider community. This points to attempts by immigrants at assimilation, and may be seen as part of the process of hiding 'otherness'.

For my research, I paid several visits to areas such as Brixton, Spitalfields, Tottenham, Bayswater, Edgware Road, the Isle of Dogs, and Southall to photograph these sites. I focused not only on the architectural transformation of these areas due to migration, but also attempted to visually depict the movement and the activities of the 'local' people – elements which form the social fabric of the city. The analysis of visual symbols of unity and belonging – such as flags, costumes, foodstuffs and other goods on sale at marketplaces – becomes significant. Much of what I have photographed, circles around main streets and shopping districts. Being able to buy and eat the foods to which one is used, and has always eaten, generates a sense of familiarity and 'homeliness' in the everyday lives of migrants. Also of interest are the outskirts and boundaries of these areas, where cheaper housing is usually located.

The analysis of communities in London also involves the public activities of specific groups. The Sudanese community, for example, is a very tightly-knit community, and quite often

organises events and also informal gatherings where its members can come together. Embedded in these public displays of togetherness is a need for a sense of belonging in the community.

> Originally home meant the centre of the world – not in a geographical, but in an ontological sense. Mircea Eliade has demonstrated how home was the place from which the world could be *founded*. A home was established, as he says, "at the heart of the real." In traditional societies, everything that made sense of the world was real; the surrounding chaos existed and was threatening, but it was threatening because it was *unreal*. Without a home at the centre of the real, one was not only shelterless, but also lost in non-being, in unreality. Without a home, everything was fragmentation.[43]

Home is the place from which everything else is mapped. According to John Berger, it is seen as the centre of the world, a secure and familiar place where one can be recognised by others. Papastergiadis makes a comparison between the existence of the exile – characterised by wilderness, chaos, and oblivion, and the experience of 'home' – symbolised by the embodiment of culture, order and history.[44]

There exists a clear opposition between the concept of 'home' and the existence of the refugee. An analysis of the construction of home will provide a clearer approach to the understanding of how we 'make spaces' in terms of modernity. Although we are familiar with modernity to some degree, the state of modernity itself is of 'temporary arrangements'. Modern identity is no longer bound to a specific past or to a particular place. It lays stress on the relationship between the home and the nation: the memory of the nation must also inform the life-

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[43] John Berger, <u>And Our Faces, my Heart, Brief as Photos,</u> London: Writers and Readers, , 1984, p.55 -6

[44] Nikos Papastergiadis, op. Cit.

narratives of the people. The symbolic space of the home in modernity is therefore a site of collision between both the traditional values based in stability, and unspecified desires for transformation. Papastergiadis makes a further distinction between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' home. In traditional terms, the home is seen as a complete container of memories and a site of identification. In modernity, however, the home becomes "a patchwork of silent ambitions and temporary arrangements".[45] Whether it is the food we eat, the clothes we wear, our customs or rituals we maintain, we live in what can be described as 'conditions of hybridity'.[46] For those who have in one way or another been displaced from an original place where we once perhaps 'belonged', 'home' can never really exist either 'here' or 'there'. Rather, itself a hybrid, it becomes a mixture, even a performance of a past self that is being re-constituted.

Therefore, when seeking a space for 'home', what becomes significant is not so much whether or not one has been or feels able to be settled, but on the movement between two places that is set about by displacement, and by the memory (at times itself displaced) of past places and events. It can be thought of as a space which produces and invents itself according to how one creates it. A passage that is mediated by memory, (and memory is concerned with, and assembled from, sensory and experiential fragments), this assemblage is an act of the imagination. Modernity itself can only be seen as an unfinished project, with its boundaries left open. Therefore, in every 'stable' place lies

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[45] Nikos Papastergiadis, op. Cit.

[46] Homi Bhabha, 'Signs taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree outside Delhi' in The Location of Culture, London and New York: Routledge, 1994

a potential of displacements. This points to a state of mobility, flexibility and changeability, which in turn signals the impossibility of a stable identity. Identity does not exist but its question is at work in the mutations of origin; and the origin itself does not exist, but is always ready to set itself up, to play itself out, through action and everyday life. Therefore, in modern life, the notion of 'belonging' is important. 'Belonging' functions as a catalogue or database from which people can draw selective aspects, elements and characteristics of identity. A sense of belonging or permanence plays an important role in the construction of a space for 'community', especially in a foreign context, as it allows for cultural similarity within difference.[47]

Hence, when considering how refugees create spaces for themselves, we need to analyse the fluid spaces where mutations of memory and origin take place. It is a vast area of an 'in-between' where what operates is not simply 'difference', symbolized by the characteristics of 'one', but to view it as the very space where memories are called up and utilised. This in-between functions as a journey through places of memory and origin. Therefore, the critical point is not the difference between an origin and a destination, but the movement that happens between these two states. The in-between is a process, a dynamic, a vehicle between oneself and one's origin, and should be thought of more as an ongoing process rather than an end-product. It is the space where the movement takes place, where identity is forever slipping, re-constructed or invented.

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[47] Akhil Gupta & James Ferguson, <u>Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science,</u> Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1997, p.16

> To live and die amongst foreigners may seem less absurd
> than to live persecuted or tortured by one's fellow
> countrymen. All this can be true. But to emigrate is
> always to dismantle the centre of the world, and so to
> move into a lost, disoriented one of fragments.[48]

Therefore, the structure of a refugee's home becomes a symbol of his or her journey. Similarly, Homi Bhabha, in <u>The Location of Culture</u>, speaks of the 'double frame' of the 'diasporic aesthetic'. The migrant desires both repetition and difference; the migrant home, therefore, combines the experience of novelty and familiarity. "Home" can be thought of as a floating boat-like place of existence, constituting an assemblage of the residue of origins, and fantasies of ends. The nation, according to Benedict Anderson, is an 'imagined community' – the 'home' too, therefore, might be thought of as an enacted space within which we play out roles and relationships of both belonging and foreignness.

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[48] John Berger, op. Cit., p.57

For the critical study of the history of the photograph as a cultural document, we need to first examine the connections between photography and anthropology. This will entail an evaluation of photographs conventionally used in anthropological research (which claim to represent an 'objective' reality) in relation to the history of and evolution in our understanding of documentary photography. Such an analysis is necessary for any practitioner who sets out to document people of a culture outside one's own, and for myself to articulate my concerns as an image-maker. These reference points relate closely with my reasons for choosing and utilising particular photographic processes (for example, the use of colour or black and white), and determining a photographic approach. This chapter will begin by tracing the beginnings of social documentary photography through the work of such photographers as Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine, and Walker Evans to the work by such contemporary photographers as Gilles Peress, Alex Webb and Susan Meiselas, with particular reference to their use of colour. A close analysis of the work of Bruce Davidson and Gilles Peress (both from the Magnum Agency, but working in different contexts and using different approaches to their subjects) will provide the starting point for an examination of the ways in which definitions of the meaning of 'documentary' have evolved over time.

It is first necessary to establish the importance of 'vision' in Western culture, where knowing is tied metaphorically

to seeing, and where modern culture is saturated with images. John Berger, in discussing the construction of visual communication, notes that in the visual element, "seeing", precedes language. While we use words to explain the world, we use sight to establish its context: "The way we see things is affected by what we know or believe."[1] In addition, what we know in anthropology must be understood in terms of its development as a practice as a specifically Western enterprise based on an idea of rational scientific discourse. Both photography and anthropology create a temporal distance from their object to preserve their authority.[2]

The beginning of the photograph as a social document, as a record of 'real' social events, can be traced to the late nineteenth and early twentieth Century through the works of photographers such as Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis. In fact, from its inception, photographic documentation affected perceptions of social status. In Britain, calotypes of people by William Henry Fox Talbot and by David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson depicted the apparel and the activities of the lower social orders. Their photographs caught public attention with graphic views of destitute and oppressive conditions under which immigrants had to live and work in America. Jacob Riis, a newspaper reporter, recorded the interiors of flop houses, tenements, slum homes and schools in New York City in the 1890s; he set out to produce social documents of urban poverty. Lewis Hine, a sociologist and teacher was also committed to representing the 'social', and photographed the inhuman conditions imposed on working-class

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[1] John Berger, Ways of Seeing, London: Penguin, 1972, p.8

[2] Victor Burgin (ed.), Thinking Photography, London & Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1982; John Tagg, The

children and immigrant labourers in factories and mines. He also photographed immigrants at Ellis Island, citing 'news value' and 'humanitarian interest' as motivating factors behind his interest in his subject. He ''followed' a selected group of immigrants, recorded their home life, their work life, community and recreational contacts, and their participation in fraternal and union organizations.' He ensured that 'the result ...would constitute an objective and factual document recording the significance, to the country, of the lives of many.. adopted citizens.'[3] As Alan Trachtenberg has also noted, Hine photographed immigrants "in the act of experiencing Ellis Island"[4], and he often posed his subjects to allow their individual qualities to be expressed, rather than representing them as "types". He is also best known for his photographs of child labourers in various industries in America. Hine attempted to show his working subjects in their environments in a detached and objective manner, and called his work (which he thought of as an educational process for the public) 'social photography'. However, from the 1930s, 'documentary' became the term used to categorize images meant to arouse a sympathetic response to those victimized by social circumstances beyond their control. Documentary, as was then defined, connoted a truthful yet poetic visual record of social conditions – a view of reality that the photographer had transmuted into art by choice of moment, point of view, composition and lighting. Documentary images appear to describe actual events, but they also exist to solicit an emotional response from the viewer. Viewers will at the same

Burden of Representation, Basingstoke: MacMillan Education, 1988
[3] Lewis Hine, "Plans for Work", Guggenheim application, October 1940, quoted by Alan Trachtenberg, in America and Lewis Hine: Photographs 1904 – 1940, New York: Aperture, 1977, p.118
[4] Alan Trachtenberg, ibid., p.124

time, 'learn' how to 'read' such imagery, to respond appropriately to particular subject matter, influenced by the context in which they are often encountered, that is, in newspapers or magazines. For example, the photograph titled 'Sharecropper's Home' (1937) by Margaret Bourke-White portraying a young black boy with his dog in a poverty-stricken environment evokes the viewers' sympathy towards such subjects to produce the desired effect. It portrays innocent victims (thus the common use of children and animals for similar purposes) in a house where newspapers used for insulation are plastered on the walls. The bare feet of the boy and the expressions on both their faces place them in striking contrast to the symbols of American consumer culture on these newspapers. Diminished in scale in comparison to their surroundings, the image aims to symbolize the plight of social and economic victims during the Depression.

In its early stages, the photograph as a social document tended to concentrate on social conditions. It set out to depict, in as detached and objective manner as possible, people in their working and living environments. The social document functioned as a mediator of a learning process: a photograph was a piece of evidence, a record of social injustice, but also a record of individual survival and human dignity. The term 'documentary' could be defined by any photograph whose primary purpose is the truthful depiction of reality. It was first defined as "a selective dramatization of facts in terms of their human consequences"[5] – a definition that came about when photographers working for the Farm Security Administration (FSA), under the direction of Roy Stryker, depicted the American Depression on

'human' terms. Walker Evans, amongst others like Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee and Margaret Bourke-White, provided a vital contribution to the documenting of the American Depression, and it is necessary to look at the context in which Evans was working - specifically as a photographer for the FSA. In 1936, he became involved in the project represented by most of the photographs reproduced in the book Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (1965)[6], which is accompanied by James Agee's text. During this time, he lived with sharecroppers and their families in Alabama. The photographs of Bud Fields, Frank Tengle, Floyd Burroughs, their families and households have become a significant part of American history. These powerful images display Evans's concern for the human condition; they express dignity and survival in the midst of difficult conditions.

By escaping to some degree the propagandist nature of working for the American Government, Evans successfully created a sense of 'realism'. His ability to create images that appear to lack subjectivity and the presence of the author furthered the claim that photography was an objective process. However, the mechanical nature of the medium does not erase the subjectivity of the photographer. It was Evans's particular photographic style that gave his images their 'factual' nature, enabling them to exist as historical moments in time. He usually adopts the full frontal approach, facing his subject square-on. As such, his photographs are seen 'in themselves', and what may be less noticeable is the photographer's constructions of a particular scene. Evans's objective, documentary style may then be

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[5] John Grierson, 1926, cited in Aperture, No. 112, Fall 1988, p.1
[6] Walker Evans and James Agee, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families, Boston:

considered his own subjectivity. The clarity and simplicity of his images are characteristic of his work.

Evans's objective, realistic, style makes his photographs function as documents of the 'American Depression'. Their clarity and simplicity create the objective quality of his work. Evans expressed his admiration for Gustave Flaubert: " the non-appearance of the author, the non-subjectivity. That is literally applicable to the way I want to use the camera and do." Evans achieves this realism by using subjects of the everyday - often street scenes, signs, billboards, and other objects such as shoes, an old family photograph, pieces of cutlery and kitchen utensils against the rough grained texture of a wooden wall. These scenes and objects speak as symbols of the world in which they are a part, and for the people who live in their environment. We find in his photographs a simple beauty in banal objects.

Evans's photographs for the FSA are characterised by their simplicity and directness. He had a keen interest in architecture, and most of what he photographed (whether it is a child's grave, a family portrait, peeling billboards or the interior of someone's home), his photographs resemble still lifes. He achieved impact in these 'minimalist' scenes by photographing his subjects head on, rarely at an angle, and through the use of an 8 X 10 view camera set at a small aperture, which gave his photographs absolute fine detail, which added to their sense of realism. The structured arrangement of Walker Evans's captionless sequences in <u>American Photographs</u> (1988) may

be evidence that his 'America' was not only realistic but also fictional and mythical. Lincoln Kirstein[7] in his essay, recognized that Evans had not only presented a picture of the country and people in a time of upheaval, but that he also wanted to extract from the chaos a layer of timeless American culture. Thus, at this level, his work can be seen as a rendering of significance lost by America's move from its small-town agricultural childhood to industrial, sterile, urban maturity.

As the history of the photograph indicates, its role as a social document was to describe and illustrate social conditions. The photograph was thought of as a mechanical reproduction of the 'real' world, independent of man-made interventions. As print technologies evolved, actual events, objects, and scenes could be photographed more easily in the world outside the studio, reinforcing the belief that still images were authentic documents of 'reality'. Their accuracy of detail and sense of immediacy allowed them to pass off as credible visual evidence, whether the aim was to keep an archive of descriptive records, publicize what was considered 'good work', educate and change public attitudes or effect a combination of these goals. The purpose of any type of documentary is to record and demonstrate what is deemed important about an event, person, or place. The finished project aimed to contain selected excerpts from the entire observational experience. These extractions represented the most crucial aspects of the researcher's observations that serve best to speak accurately about the whole. Hence Magnum's declaration that any one of its photographers could be sent to any war or to any place and return a week later with *one*, single archetypal image that

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[7] Lincoln Kirstein, Walker Evans, American Photographs, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1988

could represent the entire event. The inherent problem therefore with any documentary image, and most recently in debates around historiography, is that the information is transmitted to its audience via its author. In this sense, although it may have been widely believed that due to its mechanical nature the camera cannot lie, and that the photographer was always a non-interfering observer, we have now realized that not everyone takes the same picture of the same thing. Thus, the assumptions that cameras produce an impersonal, objective image yielded to the fact that photographs are not simply a record of events, but an evaluation of the world. Furthermore, each photograph, or what is actually published, has been selected by the photographer or dictated by picture editors and market concerns.

Charles Sanders Pierce proposed three fundamental classes of sign: the icon, index, and symbol. The photograph as an icon physically resembles the objects they signify. In this sense, they can communicate without translation. An icon can exist on its own to constitute a sign whereas most signifying systems require the reader or viewer to introduce a cultural stock of knowledge to decipher the codes of a subject. Rosalind Krauss too, describes the photograph as an index or trace, a signifying mark that bears a connection to the thing it represents by having been caused, physically, by its referent:

> Photography is an imprint or transfer of the real; it is a photo-chemically processed trace causally connected to that thing in the world which it refers in a manner parallel to that of fingerprints or footprints or the rings of water that cold glasses leave on tables. The photograph is thus generically distinct from painting or sculpture or drawing. On the family tree of images, it is closer to palm prints, death masks, the Shroud of Turin, or the tracks of gulls on beaches… technically and semiologically speaking, drawings and paintings are icons, while

photographs are indexes.[8]

Krauss continues to state that it is this quality that grants photography a "special status with regard to the real". Therefore, due to photography's mechanical and chemical means of production, to photograph something is also proof that this subject actually existed, that the photographer had at one time been in its presence.

However, photographs also function at the symbolic level, and may possess no obvious connection with the objects they signify. Symbols communicate through a series of social and cultural conventions - they have to be translated (selected, framed and composed) by the photographer, and decoded by the viewer in order to communicate. Rather than being a neutral form of representation, the photograph is shaped by a series of contexts and intentions. In his essay 'The Photographic Message'[9], Roland Barthes attempts to analyse the photograph as a means of communication by deciphering what it constitutes. It is a replica of the original reality ('a perfect analogon'), and he sees photography as a continuous message 'without a code'. It is for him neutral and passive - and any change in our understanding of the image is dependent on significance acquired when it is interpreted or translated by its audience. Although the photographic image often passes off as objective evidence, it "contains a 'photographic message' as part of a 'practice of signification' which reflects the codes, values and beliefs of a

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[8] Rosalind Krauss, "Tracing Nadar", in October, 5, Summer 1978, p.34
[9] Roland Barthes, 'The Photographic Message', in Image-Music-Text, trans. Stephen Heath, London: Fontana, 1977, p.19

culture."[10] Hence, the photograph remains complex and paradoxical in nature.

In the context of new ways of producing, disseminating and reading photographic images, it is increasingly difficult to establish clear distinctions, when attempting to define various categories of photographs or their interpretation. For example, does an image lose its documentary status if it is discovered that the photographer set a particular scene up for the photograph to produce the desired effect? How can we establish basic characteristics that define documentary photography? Does this method of photography represent a process of collecting authentic documents and any non-documentary photograph merely functionless lies?

The advent of digital imaging processes has accelerated discussions around the manipulation of, and the assumed truth *of* images. Photographers too are becoming increasingly aware of their role as authors of images, although a photojournalist's work is chiefly associated with the task of informing. On the other hand, photographers (for example, Nan Goldin) who approached their subjects not for the precise intention of informing have developed their work in the domain of documentary photography, their work being classified as such. It is therefore possible for certain photographs to be read and approached from a documentary perspective. A documentary photograph should have some general social significance: ".. whether it shows us family life in Paris.., the central square of Peking.. or a village cafe in Hungary, a sharecropper's cabin or a suburban living room, the

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[10] Graham Clarke, The Photograph, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997

documentary photograph tells us something important about our world – and in the best examples, makes us think about the world in a new way."[11]

'Objective' photography no longer defines documentary photography. Photojournalists co-exist in a competitive market, striving to achieve the most weighty images, that when published in newspapers or magazines, are not mistaken for anything but documentary images. However, its uses are now more widespread in an image-saturated cultural market where images are consumed like any other commercial product. Today, documentary photographs can be transformed into advertising imagery in a change of context from the newspaper to magazine or the billboard. The plight of stereotyped disaster-prone starving Africans are recurrent images used in Amnesty International advertisements; Benetton uses the shock-value of documentary images divorced from its original context to sell its clothes, justifying this through its slogan "United Colours of Benetton", which 'awards' it a 'universal' status, and its publication, 'Colors', 'a magazine about the rest of the world'.

One of the ways that we have understood documentary photography is as that which registers only what occurs, without intervention or influencing the course of actions or situations, the kind of photography that testifies to what and how things happen. Robert Doisneau's photograph entitled 'The Kiss', now a widely printed image, was a staged photograph. Despite bearing the marks of spontaneity and improvisation (such as movement and the out-of-focus foreground), the 'event' was planned, and staged

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[11] the editors, Documentary Photography, p. 7

by professional actors. Although this revelation was only made public in the 1990s, it has hardly affected the myth that surrounds the image as a representation of an age, a sentiment, embodied in a documentary photograph. The indexical nature of the photograph does not deny that these images are part of the real world, that they are based in reality, refer to it, and try to explain it. But it nevertheless disguises the fact that what is widely assumed to be an objective process of recording (rather than invention), the resultant product achieving the status of an authentic document of an event or a situation, is actually a constructed event based on the subjective understanding of one of a small number of individuals. Now viewers and readers are increasingly made aware that a photograph is only a representation, and is therefore a product of its author. Rather than an objective record, it reflects the photographer's comment on the 'truth' about the real world.

Dorothea Lange, like Walker Evans, was a key figure in the work for the FSA. One of her photographs, usually known as 'Migrant Mother', became one of the definitive images of the 1930's American Depression. It depicts a mother with her children camped at a roadside tent. We cannot see the faces of her two young children huddled towards her; she carries another baby in her left arm – drawing associations with images of the Madonna and Child. The father-figure is absent from the image, accentuating the physical hardship that she is experiencing and at the same time lending more weight to the strength of her facial expression and faraway gaze. One of a series of six images photographed at the roadside, it was highly valued at that time

for its sentimental content. Lange, as photographer, had no interest in the woman's identity or her particular history; the woman here functions mainly on a symbolic level. Abigail Solomon-Godeau[12] notes that in FSA work the American underclass became a spectacle for a more privileged class. FSA photographers chose "the poignant over the militant" and pathos over a call to action. Lange in this instance set out to visually dignify poverty, "to present her subjects as objects of compassion and concern".[13] The work did not attempt to portray specific people and their circumstances, but treated them as undifferentiated victims.

According to Victor Burgin, the history of photography and the practice of anthropology have tended to repress or conceal the process of production; that is, through the effacing of the photographer or anthropologist's presence and his or her cultural background. What these practices stressed on the other hand, was re-production, presenting a seamless, ahistorical view of the subject. Therefore, the ideological nature of the representation is hidden, and dominant social relations are reproduced and reinforced through the act of imaging those who do not have the means to represent themselves. Colonialism empowered Western culture to link itself to other cultures "in a mode of pure theory.. From that starting point, it avoids the representations that men in any culture may give of themselves, of their lives, of their needs, of their significations laid down in their language.. Instead, it sees emerging behind their representations the norms.. the rules.. the systems.. which it alone is

[12] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Who is Speaking Thus? Some questions about documentary photography" in Photography at the Dock, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p.169 - 83

privileged to enunciate and by means of which the West finds it possible to know that which is not given to or which eludes the consciousness of other peoples about themselves."[14]

Michel Foucault, in <u>Discipline and Punish</u> (1979), regards punishment as "a complex social function", and as a "political tactic", suggesting that both the history of the penal law and the history of the human sciences spring from a common matrix and "both derive from a single process of 'epistemologico-juridical formation'" so that "the technology of power may be made the very principle both of the humanization of the penal system and of the knowledge of man."[15] By such an analysis of "penal leniency as a technique of power", one can obtain a means of understanding "in what way a specific mode of subjection was able to give birth to man as an object of knowledge for a discourse with a 'scientific' status."[16] Foucault maintains that "observation makes each individual a 'case'"; "description is a "means of control and a method for domination". Jeremy Bentham's design for a model prison, the panopticon, served to 'reform prisoners' and 'treat patients', but also found further applications in the instruction of school children and to confine the insane.[17] The panoptic building places prisoners alone in well-lighted cells ranged in circular tiers around a central watchtower whose possible inhabitants (the watch-guard) cannot be seen by the inmates. "Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the

[13] ibid., p.179

[14] Michel Foucault, The Order of Things, New York: Vintage Books, 1970, p.376-7

[15] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, translated by Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage Books, , 1979, p23

[16] ibid., p.24

side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see: he is the object of information, never a subject in communication."[18] Foucault's notion of the eye of surveillance is useful in examining aspects of social control embedded in the relations of visual power. The surveying eye of Western photography documents various groups of 'exotic' people and the less privileged at home for the ruling gaze; anthropology often provided the institutional authority to distance these groups (and differentiate them as 'others') and to justify their unequal status. Knowledge is never neutral, and power relations are inherent in photographic images. Susan Sontag describes the camera as a weapon with which we can "shoot" the exotic and bring home a two-dimensional trophy: "There is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed."[19] Anthropologists often take sequential photographs of the most minute representations of behaviour in an attempt to analyse cultural differences. This somewhat resembles the approach taken and the resulting format of wildlife documentaries where primates are put under close observation, and every detail of their individual or group behaviour comes under scrutiny, and interpretations are made in relation to other species, including humans.

Andy Grundberg discussing Marc Riboud's book <u>Visions of China</u> (1981) points out that photographs 'suggest much but

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[17] op. Cit., p.205
[18] op. Cit., p.200

explain very little'.[20] Riboud's photographs of China draw simplistic conclusions and generalised interpretations about the 'improvements' made to Chinese culture through its increasing materialization. In Grundberg's opinion, although Riboud's work benefited from its historical overview (the photographer visited China across a span of years), and his poetic sense of black and white composition, the photographs in the book are not arranged chronologically, they are instead 'placed in sequences that often are visually superficial and glib.'[21] However, Grundberg also recognises that the root of such a problem lies at the heart of photojournalism as a genre and how photographs are expected to 'work' in books of this sort, where foreign (usually Western) photographers travel to 'developing' countries to supposedly document a culture they are outside of, and can barely comprehend: 'How is it that we expect an outsider – the ambulatory photojournalist, a glorified tourist – to deliver essential insights into a foreign culture? Too often style is all that the photographer brings to the subject – that, and preconceptions. Isn't it, after all, too much to ask for explanations when the photographer is only paying a visit?'[22] Very often, documentary photographs are assumed to be for the Western viewer, the viewer who consumes documentary photography in the safe confines of his or her domestic comfort – the snapshots of war, drama or human survival are always about 'strangers', the nameless 'others' whose reality can only be perceived through the photograph.

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[19] Susan Sontag, On Photography, London: Penguin Books, 1977, p.14

[20] Andy Grundberg, 'The Foreign and the Fabulous' in Crisis of the Real, New York: Aperture, 1999, p.180

[21] ibid., p.181

[22] ibid., p.183

The idea of the 'objective' viewpoint is related to documentary photography because of the false distinction between documentary and art photography. This belief in objective photography continues because photographs are assumed to be Reality, and photographers are assumed to merely record what exists in front of them. At the same time, anthropology is also closely tied to objectivity because 'scientific' discourse is believed to be rational and neutral, that is, a process which effaces any notion of subjectivity or emotion. However, with decolonization movements in the developing world (with the usual subjects of Western research achieving some degree of autonomy), anthropologists have begun to move away from traditional notions of objectivity, abandoning the authoritarian approach for a more self-reflexive mode of practice, often including themselves in their work. Hence the move towards subjectivity and interpretation.

Some photographers are also actively working on the boundaries of traditional photographic practice, creating neither postmodern art nor traditional documentary images. For example, Nan Goldin's Ballad of Sexual Dependency (1986) is a personal document, and is interesting in its ability to reflect cultural issues through first-person images. Jo Spence too, creates work that is personal, but her concern for gender, race and class issues expands the potential of individual experience to wider social and political documents. She also recognises the difficulties and complexities in representing others, particularly in Putting Myself in the Picture (1986).

The explicitly documentary photograph, in conventional

terms, may be characterised by its reluctance to be judged in aesthetic terms, or to be seen as a 'picture'. According to Wright Morris, it is this conflict between the pictorial and documentary that gives many photographs a dramatic tension that seeks resolution in a "decisive moment".[23] The tension created from these unresolved elements will often heighten the resulting image. Indeed, many successful documentary photographs (the work of, for example, Hine, Evans and Lange) are more than social comments, and their function is not purely informative, providing us with more than a message. Morris adds, "Pictorial elements ...both corrupt and enhance the ...social statement. There is a remnant of the *image* in every documentary, and the leavings of the document in every image."[24] Morris also points out that these inherent contradictions are characteristic of the photograph and need not necessarily be resolved:

> I think, that art by definition is an anthropological practice and anthropology by definition is an art.. I think that what art does is to reveal hidden, undisclosed, unarticulated codes within a culture.. The task of disclosure is what artists do everywhere. I think the job of the artist is to make manifest a shared but unarticulated belief or to find a new form for something which is known but not fully understood. It is a self-referential practice, and a cultural practice.[25]

The artist Susan Hiller was disillusioned with traditional (academic) anthropology and believed the participant / observer positioning to be impossible. Participant/ observation as a research method seems to be a pose adopted for only a limited period; the anthropologist would then take his or her data away

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[23] Wright Morris, 'Photographs, Images and Words', in James Alinder (ed.), Untitled 25: Discovery and Recognition, San Francisco: The Friends of Photography, 1981, p. 29

[24] Wright Morris, ibid., p.29

[25] Susan Hiller, Thinking About Art: Conversations with Susan Hiller, ed. Barbara Einzig, Manchester &

from the 'cultural site' studied to draw their own conclusions, the texts usually contained within traditional academic categories of recognition. Research material or data is 'gathered', and removed from the original context, and used within one's own society to create models and construct different meanings. Objectivity in the gathering or recording of information in this instance can only be a fantasy. Current trends in both art and anthropology point towards a new idea of multi-vocality, where the voice of the author is no longer central.

In her work, Hiller makes a conscious effort to not idealize 'otherness', and to not exploit the surface imagery or displaced symbols of other cultures. She draws her methodology from her background in anthropology rather than any specific theory. In her work, she does not project meanings onto cultural artifacts, which affects they way they are perceived. In Hiller's view, 'art is epistemology, the study or theory of the nature or grounds of knowledge, and she finds those grounds in culture, viewing it as a kind of invented lens.'[26] She therefore chooses to deal with fragments of everyday life — she recognises that a fragmentary view is all that is available, and also the potential of discovering new structures in the familiar. According to Hiller, artists are insiders who modify their culture while learning from it:

> Artists' work does not allow discontinuities between experience and reality, and it eliminates any gap between the investigator and the object or situation investigated… Artists change their culture by emphasizing certain aspects of it, aspects perhaps

New York: Manchester University Press, 1996, p.214
[26] Barbara Einzig, op. Cit., p.1

previously ignored. The artist's version may show hidden or suppressed cultural potentials.. revealing the extent to which shared conceptual models are inadequate because they exclude or deny some part of reality.[27]

Photography and its terminology of 'exposures' acquaint us with the fact that all images we see in fact represent events that occur in time. Therefore, underlying the discussion of photography is a concern with the nature of representation, a concern with documentation and 'truth'. Photography's concern with these issues has been intensified with the advent of technology, with our ability to digitally manipulate images, such that they can no longer be strictly read as 'documents', as indices of truth. What is photography's relationship to the 'real'? Is the 'real' only known through representation or the space outside of it?

In exposing the underlying structures of photography (particularly those serving documentary functions), it is necessary to make a comparison between a traditional style of documentary and a more contemporary approach in order to examine the ways in which photographers have significantly influenced and altered the meaning of the term 'documentary'. Specific reference will be made to the work of Bruce Davidson (an American photographer, who produced some of his most important work in the 1960s and early 70s), and Gilles Peress (a French photographer, working in the late 1970s to present).

Bruce Davidson describes himself as "the benevolent anthropologist" in that he wants to describe a world, but he also wants the members of the world to know that he is describing it.

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[27] Susan Hiller, op. Cit., p.24

He involves people, often strangers, in the knowledge that he is documenting them, and this necessarily changes the nature of his documentation. Just as it is inaccurate that the interviewer in traditional anthropological research is invisible, it is a fiction that the photographer is not there. And this knowledge affects the aesthetics and philosophical content of his work – it is closely tied to his practice as a photographer, with specific reference to his series of photographs of the residents in a poverty-stricken part of New York. This body of work has been compiled and published in a book titled East 100th Street (1970):

> What you call a ghetto, I call my home.' This was said to me when I first came to East Harlem, and during the two years that I photographed people of East 100th Street, it stayed with me. Home became an old man who grows grass between broken slabs of concrete in a tenement backyard, children behind windows covered by chicken wire, walls with pictures of Christ, Kennedy, and the American flag... Home is formal family photographs, a boy with an African-head medallion on a rooftop who wouldn't let me photograph his pigeons because he wanted them to be free...[28]

This statement from Davidson opens with one of his subjects pointing out to him the difference in viewpoints and the social distance that exists between the photographer and his subject. It is also a reminder to the viewer of Davidson's photographs to reflect upon whose point of view is being represented, to recognise the subjects' position, and to empathise with people in the photographs. Davidson describes the boy with his pigeons; for him, freedom was synonymous with not being photographed. This reflects Davidson's awareness as an image-maker, understanding the importance of context, and subject/ object positions in the

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[28] Bruce Davidson, introduction to East 100th Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970

production of his photographs. During the two years that he worked on this project (1966 - 68), he lived with his subjects for lengths of time because he did not want to exploit them. He also took many thousands of photographs and gave around two thousand prints to his subjects. In his publication, Davidson's position as an outsider to the community is not hidden, and every effort appears to have been made to 'repay' these people with the photographs he took of them. He regards his work as anthropological in the sense that he is trying to describe their world, their experience, and the details of their surroundings, as seen through his eyes. Despite the gulf that exists between the perceiver and who or what is perceived[29], the people he photographs are shown knowing he is there.

Davidson began his career in 1956 when he joined the Magnum Agency as a photo-journalist. Although he made a living as a documentary photographer, he was committed to exploring his own personal concerns. What is also significant is that although he has had the experience of photographing famous people and charting 'great events', he has not chosen these images for his photo-autobiography (Bruce Davidson Photographs) as those central to his concerns as an artist. The residents of New York's East 100th St. seem to be typical subjects of Davidson's photographs, and to whom he could relate; his photographs are deeply personal statements about them. Accordingly, the texts accompanying his photographs in books are equally personal. He regards his work as a struggle to find and re-define himself:

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[29] This kind of subjective documentary puts emphasis on the photographer as the author of these images; take for example too, the work of Robert Frank, the Swiss born photographer, in The Americans.

I needed to get close to people again, in a way that involved not just watching and commenting, but sharing, a give and take that would give me a sense of myself too. Somehow or other I came to the block and its people. I came to give and receive, attracted by their pride, their sense of style and life. The people on East 100th Street don't have things, they have people…. As I said, I don't think that it really matters why or how I came to East 100th Street, except that I came here needing to communicate with living things again. And I was permitted to go into a life that I didn't know, and experience it in a way and make things in it, from it, with my camera. I have come away with much more than photographs. East 100th Street does not contain the best of life, but it's alive. I think it's better to be alive sometimes than to have the best of life. The "good life" to me, looks dead. From this distance, it looks dead.[30]

While Davidson's basic concerns remain the same throughout his photographic career, his method of working evolves from a candid style (he acknowledges the influence of his friend and colleague at Magnum, Henri Cartier-Bresson), to a more conceptual approach involving direct confrontation with the subject with a camera on a tripod and the use of a flash. He approaches his subjects in East 100th Street in this way, and they often pose for the photographer, with a view camera on a tripod. He considered this 'eye-to-eye' stance as an important reflection of the way in which he confronted and communicated with his subjects. His ability to adapt form to content may not only be the result of his experience of working for hire, but also arises from his urge to get inside a culture or place and be altered in the process, learning from within how to convey what he finds. The darkness of the photographs in this series serves to convey the density of his experience.
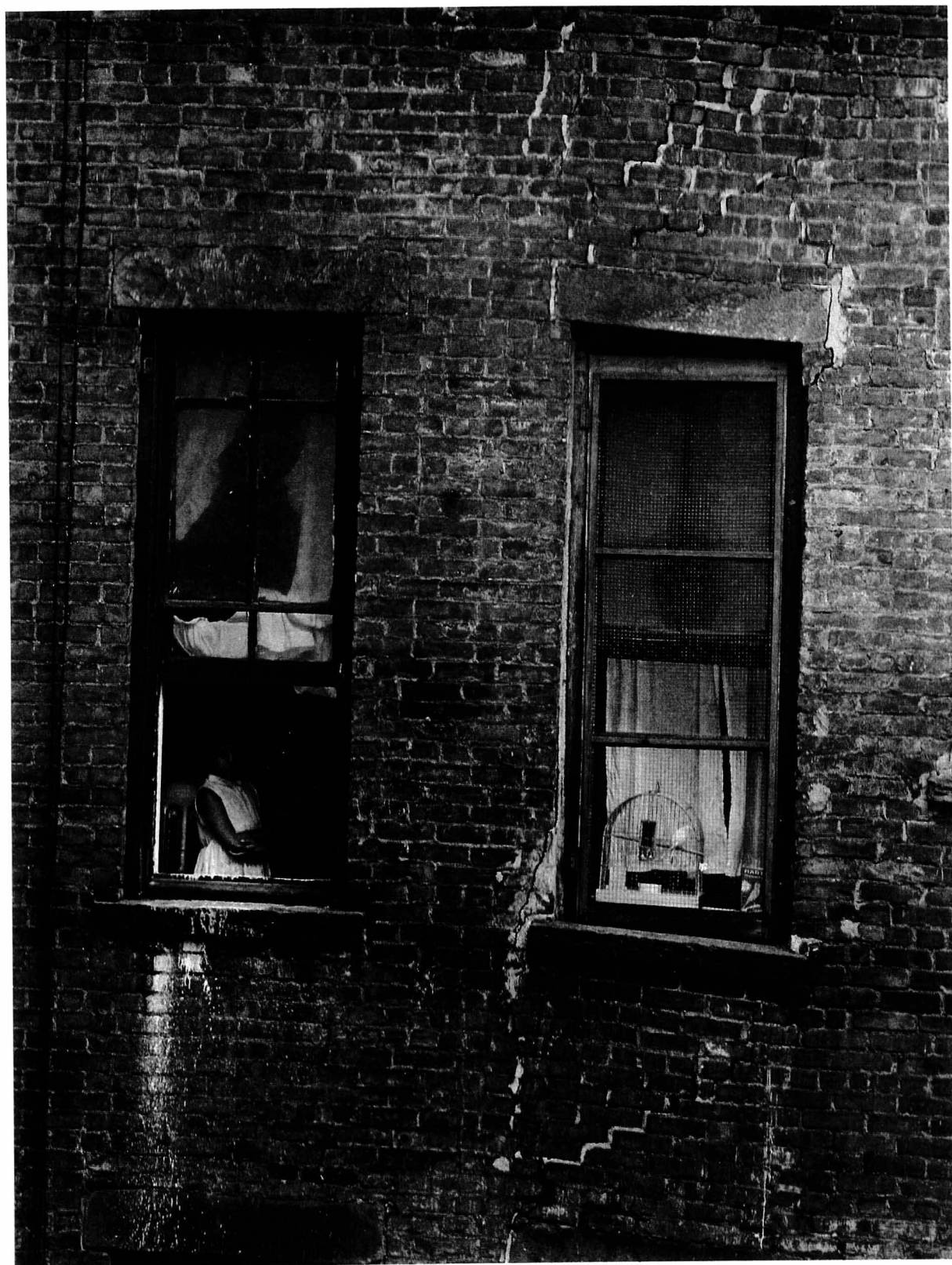
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[30] Bruce Davidson, du, March 1969, p.155
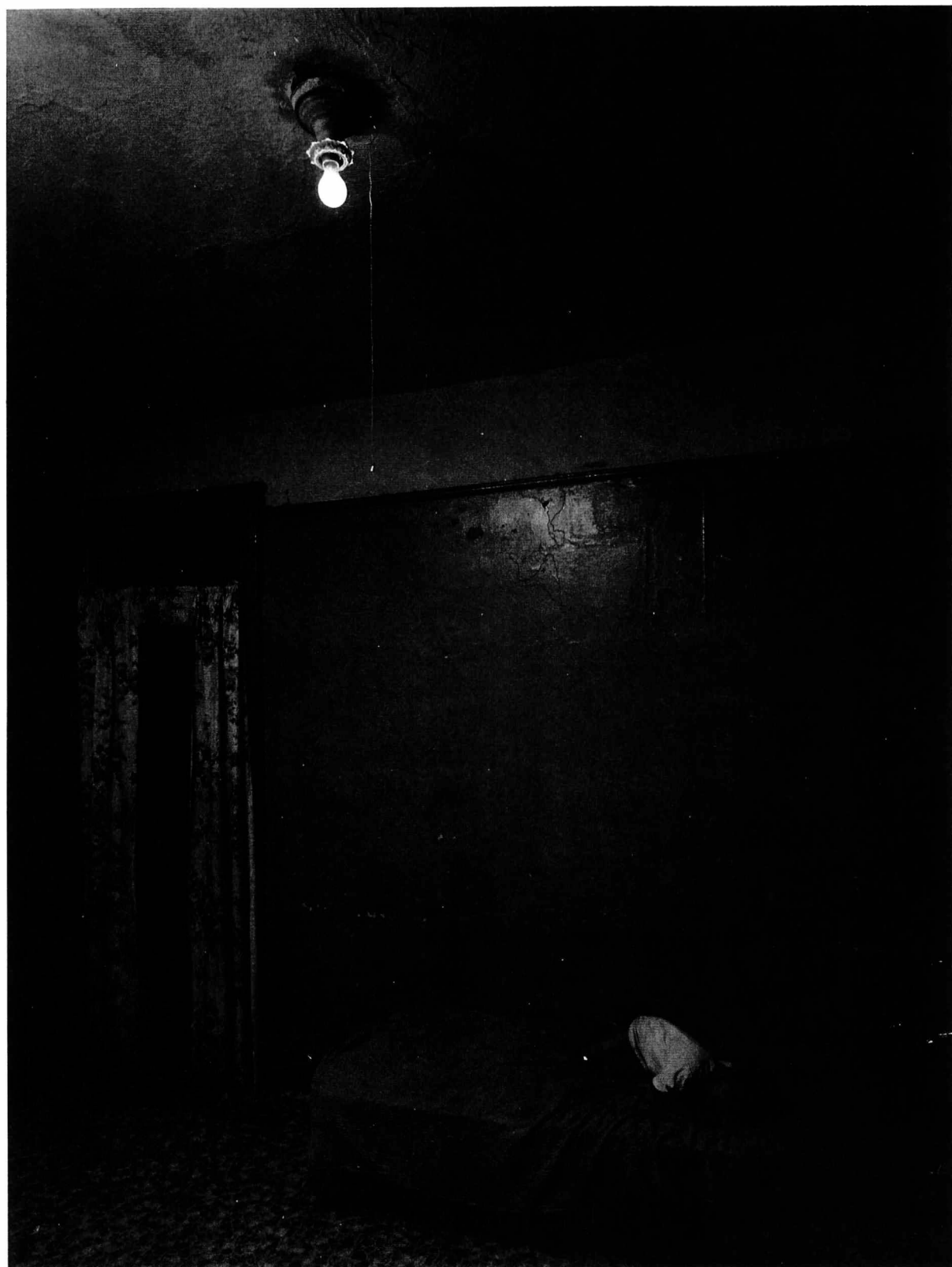
8. Bruce Davidson, Untitled, from East 100th Street, 1970

9. Bruce Davidson, Untitled, from <u>East 100th Street</u>, 1970

11. Bruce Davidson, Untitled, from <u>East 100th Street</u>, 1970

10. Bruce Davidson, Untitled, from <u>East 100th Street</u>, 1970

12. Bruce Davidson, Untitled, from <u>East 100th Street</u>, 1970

Davidson describes his use of a 4 X 5 Linhof as part of his need to work in a 'slow' way. Rather than going toward something, he was really trying to get away from the fast photojournalistic approach he had relied upon so heavily before. His desire therefore, was to work slowly, with a tripod, to be in the picture by his obvious presence to the subject, and to avoid that sense of the voyeur created by squinting through the viewfinder of a 35mm camera. Enlarging on this criticism of the 35mm approach, Davidson pointed out that "when you are working with a view camera on a heavy tripod, the only thing connecting you and the instrument is your little finger on the cable release. You stand there, looking, seeing the whole scene at once."[31] At the same time, he wanted absolute control of depth of field.

The photographs in East 100th Street act as a personal documentation of the residents in Spanish Harlem – the images are poetic in ways that the viewer or a passerby would not imagine the 'real' world to be like. The images in the book have been arranged and placed into a specific sequence; it opens with long shots of buildings and streets, followed by portraits of people, mostly within the interiors of these homes. The opening of the book signals to the viewer how to approach this work, reflecting the photographer's journey or passage into their world. Image #8 depicts the poverty and isolation of the child. The room is virtually bare – cloth (for curtains) is draped over the frame of the entrance to this bedroom, the sheet placed roughly on the bed emphasizes the bareness of the room. The child's posture is contorted, almost uncomfortable – he is staring blankly, chest towards the bed, almost like the form one adopts when crying

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[31] Michael Edelson, 'Bruce Davidson: East 100th Street', Popular Photography, October 1971, vol. 69 (4),

alone as a child. The child is in the bottom right corner of the image, accentuating the empty space above and around him. The bare light bulb and the thin string attached to it for a switch mirrors the child's solitude. The cracks and textures of the surfaces of the wall and ceiling are accentuated by the light, reinforcing the sense of poverty and deprivation.

Images #9 and #10 were also photographed in bedrooms, considered the most private of spaces. Image #9 emphasizes the poverty of this old man and his dog through the bareness of the mattress and the pillow without its cover, the cracks on the floor and the grim interior of the room. The darkness under the bed makes the 'discovery' of the dog's silent presence at the immediate moment consoling. But the image of the man alone with his dog draws its associations with homeless people on the street, with nowhere to go. The single pair of shoes under the bed may perhaps be the only object that distinguishes his time in and out of bed. The old man lies in bed with all his clothes, including his coat, on, which could perhaps mean the lack of heating in his flat, or illness, or even the lack of motivation to get out of bed. We can see daylight through his window. His blank stare and resigned expression sum up the aimlessness of his existence. He lies there still, corpse-like.

There are no pillows on the bed where the young woman lies in Image #10. A heart-shaped object with a flower in the middle hangs on the wall above her head. She seems relaxed and seems to have been caught in an inner moment - holding her right shoulder

with her left hand, seemingly day-dreaming about someone or something. The sheet on the bed is ruffled, and the presence of the ash-tray at the corner of the bed may imply the presence of someone else smoking during conversation with her; perhaps Davidson himself.

Tatty old mattresses both without and with sheets draped untidily over them appear to be recurring signs of poverty. Similarly, the images of caged birds that the residents keep seem in many ways to symbolically mirror his photographs of people (including children) staring out from windows of their flats framed with chicken wire. Image #11, for example, which is a view from the outside depicts a parallel condition with the bird in the cage at one window and the girl looking out the next window. Davidson perhaps used this visual mechanism to express his ideas of entrapment towards some of these people as being the victims of social and economic conditions. At the same time, this photograph is not only about entrapment, but also access on the part of the viewer. It emphasizes in some ways our position as 'outsider', an observer of these scenes, with limited understanding.

Bedrooms, however, are not the only areas of the house that Davidson photographs. Image #12 shows three people posing for the camera: a child on the left with a half-smile, perhaps trying to please. The man in the middle looks rather serious, but not threatening, and the old woman on the right, despite her age stands next to him (he is probably her son), her arm around his shoulder. The child holds her hand. This photograph of this family is about togetherness, the intimacy of the subjects

towards each other. As they stand around their dining-table in the kitchen, the photograph displays the pride and dignity of the subjects in their surroundings. There is a fridge in this home, and table-cloths on the table, plants to decorate the fridge-top and a pair of birds for pets. As Davidson's images show, the poverty of these people creates a lifestyle that grows out of their condition.

Davidson photographed his subjects in their environment. He had to win their confidence by demonstrating that he respected them. His awareness of his own position as photographer and outsider is reflected in the honesty of his approach. Davidson's photographs resemble in form the documentary work of his predecessors. His work is about perceptiveness, about the reading and interpretation of the specific content and qualities of each image, about having empathy for the characters that he portrays. Like those who photographed before him, Davidson worked within the idea of an ordered world that can be perceived, represented and understood. However, an important difference that sets Davidson apart from most other traditional documentary photographers is his commitment to acknowledging his position as someone from a more privileged social background intruding into a poorer community. Although Davidson temporarily occupies these private spaces of people socially distanced from him, and extracts, perhaps even steals 'intimate' moments, his relationship to his subjects remains crucial in that he acknowledges this intrusion. His images, however, resemble traditional documentary photographs in their style and composition. This means that a viewer with no prior knowledge of Davidson's working method or when responding to his photographs

outside of the context of his accompanying statements may 'place' his work in the same category as the documentary work of Walker Evans.

Davidson's choice of subject matter and his approach do reflect a concern for those on the periphery of society – indeed, some of the photographs in East 100th Street show piles of rubbish – perhaps hinting to the fact that those things which are traditionally discarded are of importance. The viewer of these images performs the role of the detective, putting together traces, producing value-read interpretations from the fragments of evidence available. This rather traditional mode of producing and looking at images can be contrasted with the work of more contemporary photographers such as Gilles Peress and Alex Webb whose work would be categorised as the 'new documentary', which questions more explicitly the position of the photographer.

Gilles Peress, also a documentary photographer, worked over a five-week period during the 1979/80 seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran. His photographs from this period constitute neither a documentary study nor an analysis. The fragmented nature of its narrative does not tell any one story, but rather, these images are a visually explosive record of the photographer's encounters, and perceptions as he moves through the cities and countryside of a nation in upheaval. The dislocated, chaotic style mirrors Iran's troubled climate, its dislocations, both at historical and individual levels. Image #13, titled City Park, Tehran, portrays a mother holding her child, dwarfed by the sheer scale of the wing of a grounded aeroplane, highlighting the experience of the individual within a

larger socio-political climate.

Produced in the form of a book: <u>Telex/Iran - In the Name of Revolution</u> (1983), Peress's photographic work is published alongside telexed textual communications with various people, mainly lab technicians and his associates at Magnum, the photo-agency he worked for. The text opens up a new dimension to these images; it functions as a constant reminder of all the other external forces that dictate the 'value' of a documentary photograph, and highlights the process of production and post-production. Take for example, Image #15, the photograph taken off the television of a gagged man, and the significance of the text that accompanies it. The telexed message is from Peress, clarifying the context within which this image was shown on the television. This clip from the television, rather than portraying an American hostage held at the Embassy (as outsiders to the scene immediately assumed it), is an informational training guide for Iranians on how to capture a hostage. It reveals the ease with which a photograph can be misinterpreted, especially in the context of war. At the same time, Iran itself as a people and nation seems to be prone to stereotypical associations of 'the terrorist' and 'Islamic fundamentalist', for example, in the depiction of Iran as a backward, fundamentalist regime in the film "Not Without My Daughter", where Sally Field's character directly refers to Iran as a 'backward, primitive country'. These photographs initiate our understanding of how knowledge is formulated in the way that they suggest the distance between our presumptions and true perceptions. What is therefore significant to this body of work is the use of text in relation to the image.

13. Gilles Peress, City Park, Tehran, 1979
14. Gilles Peress, Ghost-ride, Amusement Park, Tehran, 1979

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PRO DOMINIQUE
NOTHINGS HAPPENINTG.   AM TIRED . OUT OF MONEY. TWO CAMERAS WENT
DEAD IN BEHESHTEZARA CEMETERY. WILL PROBABLY RETURN MONDAY PLANE
PLS ADVISE IF ANY PROBLEMS LOVE GILLES
✢
MAGNUM UI
212549 PARK IR
✢✢✢✢✢✢✢✢✢✢✢✢✢✢✢✢✢

PRO GILLES PERESS
ⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢⅢ URGENT
IMPOSSIBLE YOU LEAVE. RUMOR HOSTAGE WILL BE FREED NEX T THURSDAY
ALSO LIFE INTERESTED... PLS STICK IT OUT.
BISES DOMINIQUE

16. Gilles Peress, Arms market, Kurdistan, 1979

LIFE IS NOT INTENDING AT ALL TO RUN A LARGE STORY. THEY ARE
LOOKING FOR ONE PICTURE FOR THE END OF THE MAGAZINE AND
I THINK YOUR   YOUR HEROIN SMUGGLERS WOULD FIT.
I HAVE CONTACTS   79-219 TO 79-359.
IS IT COMPLETE? BIBIS DOMINIQUE.
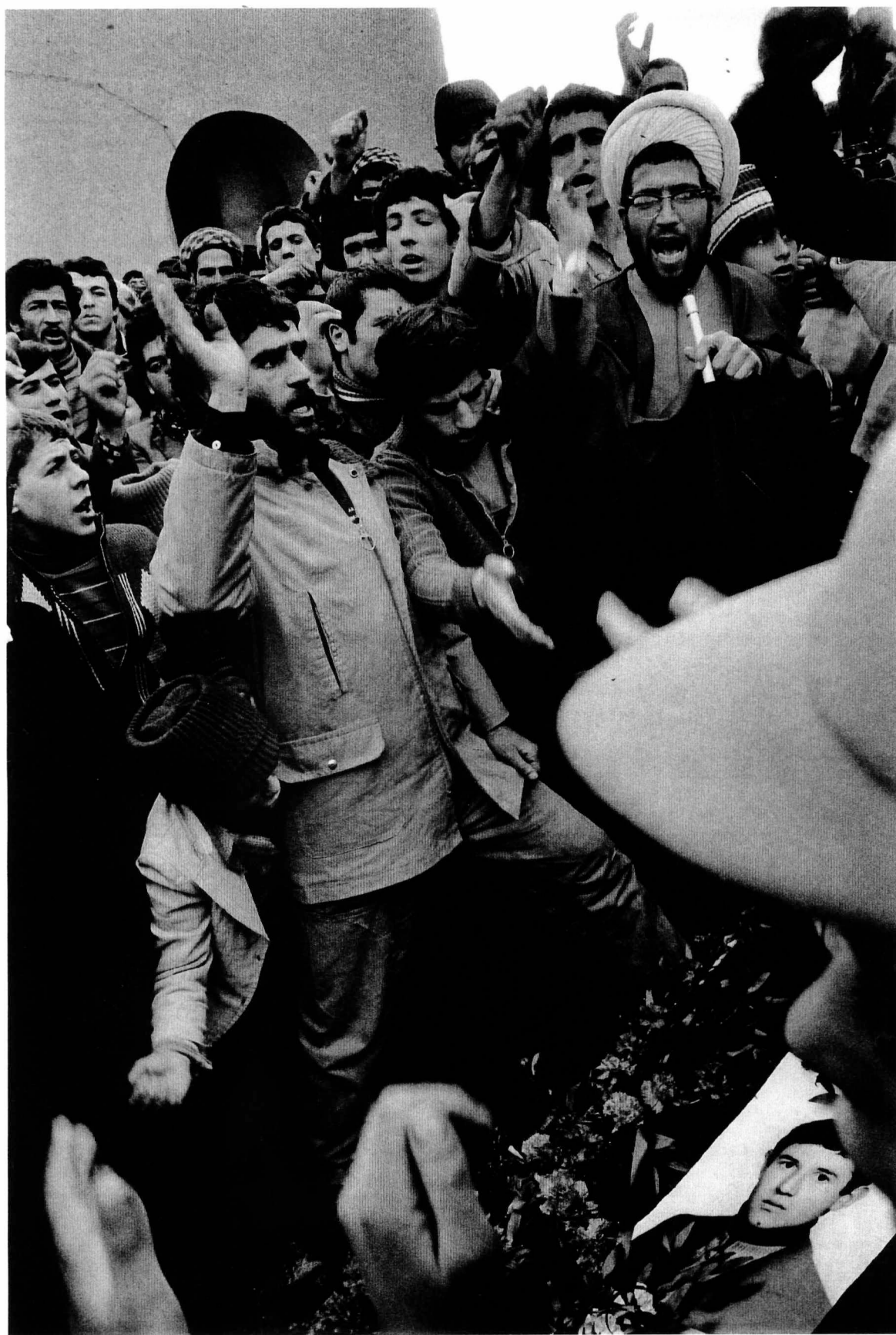
17. Gilles Peress, Burial, Tabriz, 1979

Unlike the telexed messages, the captions (which serve to place each image within its original context) are not printed alongside each photograph, but are listed at the end of the book. This structure or 'arrangement' almost instigates the viewer to 'formulate' a reality from the given evidence, and then to flip to the back of the book to discover a more accurate picture, a structure which works very much like a puzzle book:

> In one sense, photographs, like the exotica of a past century, act as *objets rapportes* – not always meaningful, either in content or in beauty, but by virtue of the distance they traveled, significant. Like a talisman whose original symbolic meaning is illegible, they do little to describe other people and place, but go a long way towards measuring the distance separating perceptions and cultures.[32]

The telexes, exchanged between Peress the photographer in Iran and his agency in Paris and New York, are documents of another kind, plotting the simplifications, distortions, banalities, incomprehension, and venality of the process of collecting and diffusing information. His telexes describe moments in his experience of being arrested, of being unsure if his film was exposed at the right speed, and at one point, of wanting to leave the country (Image #16). These telexes provide a background to the news event. These visual and telexed textual communications produce a disturbing portrait of a country in revolution – penetrating beyond the usual photographs of mass rallies and slogan-bearing crowds, his work is very much an individual's experience of revolution, a personal document of a public event. At the same time, Peress acknowledges that his work is in many ways personal – his telex messages strongly reflect his own experience. Indeed, the book opens with the following statement

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[32] Nan Richardson & editors, Telex: Iran – In the Name of Revolution, Zurich, Berlin, New York: Scalo Press, 1997, p.3

by the photographer: "These photographs, made during a five-week period from December 1979 to January 1980, do not represent a complete picture of Iran or a final record of that time." [33] Interspersed throughout the book, the telexes provide a parallel narrative and equally chaotic subtext to the surface upheaval. What emerges from these fragments is a more complete picture: the line separating the objective from the subjective becomes a meaningful demarcation. Events and individuals are always subject to the hovering whims of emotion and destiny. At times, this work is not without its humour. For example, in relation to Image #14, the telexed message from his agency requesting confirmation as to whether Peress had photographed what was deemed an important news event – the attack on the Russian Embassy – is juxtaposed with a image of a couple on a ride in a horror tunnel at a theme park. The comic expression on the man's face contrasts with and hence undermines the importance or 'news value' of the 'big event'. What Peress had chosen to highlight in this instance was the everyday lives of individual people, documenting a kind of 'small history':

> In this context the photographs are asserted as questions rather than answers, a strategy in keeping with a growing disbelief that it's possible to present conclusions without involving the reader in the photographer's attempt to understand. The revelation of the image is located in the telling, not just the evidence of what has been told.[34]

Picture editors did not easily accept Peress's pictures of Iran. Rather than produce an easily digested representation of a new event, his pictures capture the mood and experience of being in the middle of crowded streets in the chaos of a revolution.

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[33] Gilles Peress, Telex: Iran – In the Name of Revolution, Scalo Press, Zurich, Berlin, New York, 1997

[34] Fred Ritchin, 'In Our Time – The world as seen by Magnum photographers', New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1989

The camera angle is often tipped, and the frames crop their subjects off at unexpected moments. The use of shadows to create ominous atmospheres (as if things are about to erupt), the mix of both trivial and conventionally significant detail confuses the narrative sense. In contrast to Davidson's more traditional approach (the belief that the photographer could construct specific ordered meanings in photographs), Peress's photographs are deliberately visually incomprehensible. Rather than attempt to construct meaning out of an event which took place in a foreign culture, Peress's approach to his subject and aesthetic structuring of his book (including his declaration at the beginning of it that his photographs in no way represent an objective record) presents us with a kind of deconstructive documentary, a mode which does not seek to speak a unified truth and provide distinct answers, but one that is self-reflexive, questioning traditional approaches.

Contemporary photojournalists seek pictures that convey more complex and sophisticated meanings, both social and personal. Today, it is common to find the work of current photographers not only in newspapers, but also compiled into books and hanging on gallery walls. Grundberg attributes this shift from 'journalistic to aesthetic presentation' to the establishment of the *Life* Gallery of Photography in 1986, where their news magazine photographs were marketed as works of art.[35] At the same time, we have seen the emergence of work by photojournalists such as Susan Meiselas, Gilles Peress and Alex Webb, whose pictures looked like art. Rather then to produce a unified and simple view of the

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[35] Andy Grundberg, 'The 'New Photojournalism' and the Old' in <u>Crisis of the Real</u>, New York: Aperture, 1999, p.185

situations and events they encounter, contemporary photojournalists seem more interested in the complexity of issues, and in conveying a taste of their experience of them. They differ from their predecessors both in style, and particularly in the content of their photographs. Traditionally, photographers such as Bruce Davidson believed that a well organised or composed photograph could automatically communicate a clear meaning about its subject. On the other hand, 'Meiselas, Peress, and Webb seem more acutely and self-consciously aware of the abyss between photographic appearances and the events they portray.'[36]

My photographs for this project consist of both black and white and colour images, which identify the framework within which I approach my subject. Black and white has conventionally and traditionally been largely associated with the documentary photograph, the 'monumentalizing' of great, significant events. It possesses a quality that declares itself as an authentic record of an individual or an event. Black and white was therefore traditionally used for what was considered "serious" subjects, such as the front pages of newspapers and historical archives. The history of photography has been dominated by black and white, which is equated with momentous events - Robert Capa's D-Day landings, and among others, work by Margaret Bourke-White and Henri Cartier-Bresson. It is only relatively recently that colour pictures have appeared in newspapers at all. Moreover, colour images are the stuff of advertising, like the lush film and advertising posters and the double page spreads in Sunday supplements. Thus monochrome has the currency of official

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[36] Grundberg, op. Cit., p. 188

document or archival record, possessing nostalgic associations; in war photography, it filters out the 'physicality', the chaos and disorder, distancing the subject and creating a timelessness. Photographs succeed in evoking and distancing, eliminating all sound, extracting and displacing the subject into another time. There is perhaps no escape from the realism and immediacy of the colour picture. Advertisers, on the other hand, are adopting black and white shots. They are not only cheaper to produce, but connotes with fine art and documentary photography. Being associated with traditional photojournalism, black and white can speak more about 'authenticity', 'class' or nostalgic qualities than colour.

Colour, on the other hand, has largely been associated with the trivial world of glamour and advertising photography, the shiny glossy pages of commercial magazines. Until recently, colour and black and white had its very distinct uses, signaling ways in which the viewer should respond to a particular image. How did this situation first emerge? And how does the use of black and white or colour influence the subject matter and the reading of an image? In different ways, the use of black and white in photojournalism has become a cliché and has been recognized as such by readers and viewers. Changes in perceptions seem equally important as changes in technology that has introduced colour to newspapers as never before. It is significant too, that although we experience the 'real' world in colour, it is the timelessness of black and white photography that seems to be associated with 'objective reality'.

Richard Rorty, in <u>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</u>

(1980), describes colour as being pre-conceptual, existing purely as 'raw feels'.[37] He cites Sellars's distinction between awareness-as-discriminative-behaviour and awareness as what he calls being 'in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says'.[38] He analyses a child's ability to respond to stimuli and postulates that our immediate response lies outside of what we understand and formulate within language. Colour, for example, does not evoke an ordered response:

> But suffocation, heat, ecstasy, pain, fire, redness, parental hostility, mother love, hunger, loudness and the like, are "known" pre-linguistically.. They are known just by being *had* or felt. They are known without being able to be placed in classes, or related in any other way to anything else.[39]

Rorty talks about colour as being pre-conceptual, pre-language, and about the senses. It seems to escape the structure of black and white, our response to which is constructed in language. For example, our response to the colour 'red' possesses no logical grounding, and is *there* before any rationalization. Therefore colour is about stimuli, it is non-propositional and non-conceptual.[40] It is about discrimination, stimuli, and awareness.

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[37] Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, London: Blackwell, 1980, p182

[38] Sellars, Science, Perception and Reality, p169 cited by Rorty, ibid., p182

[39] Rorty, ibid.,p184

[40] According to Tim Crane, there are kinds of states that are claimed to have non-conceptual contents, for example, states of the information-processing cognitive systems, such as the visual system, and conscious perceptual experiences. In perception, many aspects of the world are presented to the perceiver, yet there are no attached assumptions that the perceiver has a distinct concept for each aspect of the world that he or she perceives. Take for example the experience of colour: it may not be plausible that each of us has a distinct concept for each precise shade of colour that we are able to perceive. Therefore, perceptual experiences have non-conceptual contents. (Tim Crane, The Contents of Experience: Essays on perception, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) However, John McDowell argues that to treat the content of experience as non-conceptual renders the relation between mind and world deeply problematic: the idea that experience involves being presented with an unconceptualized 'given' which the mind then goes on to conceptualize. By contrast, he argues that the content of experience is wholly conceptual. For example, he claims that we have discrimination between colours, that we do have a 'recognitional capacity, possibly quite short-lived, that sets in with the experience' (John McDowell, Mind and World, Cambridge, Mass. and London:
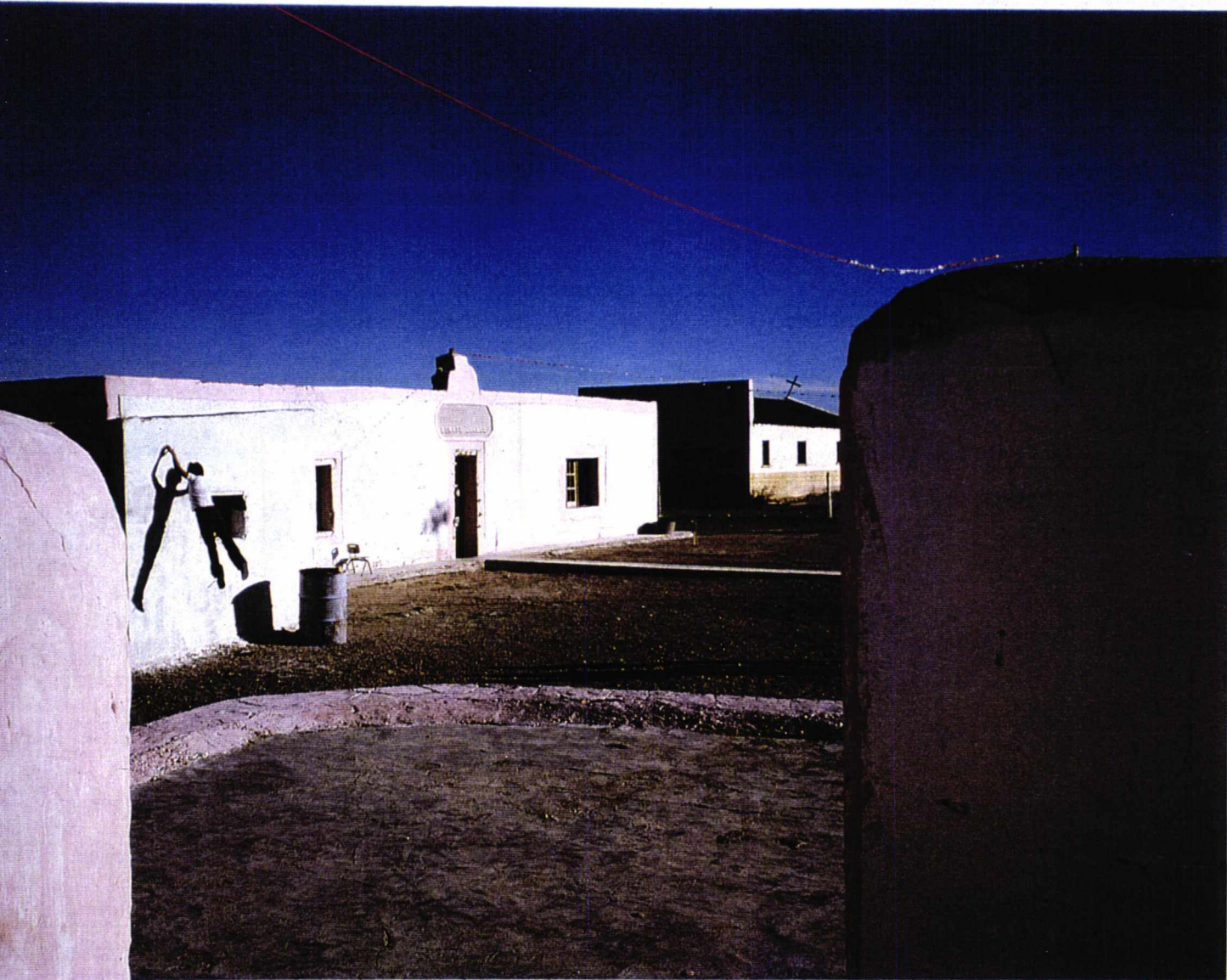
18. Alex Webb, Untitled, from <u>Hot Light/ Half-Made Worlds</u>, 1986

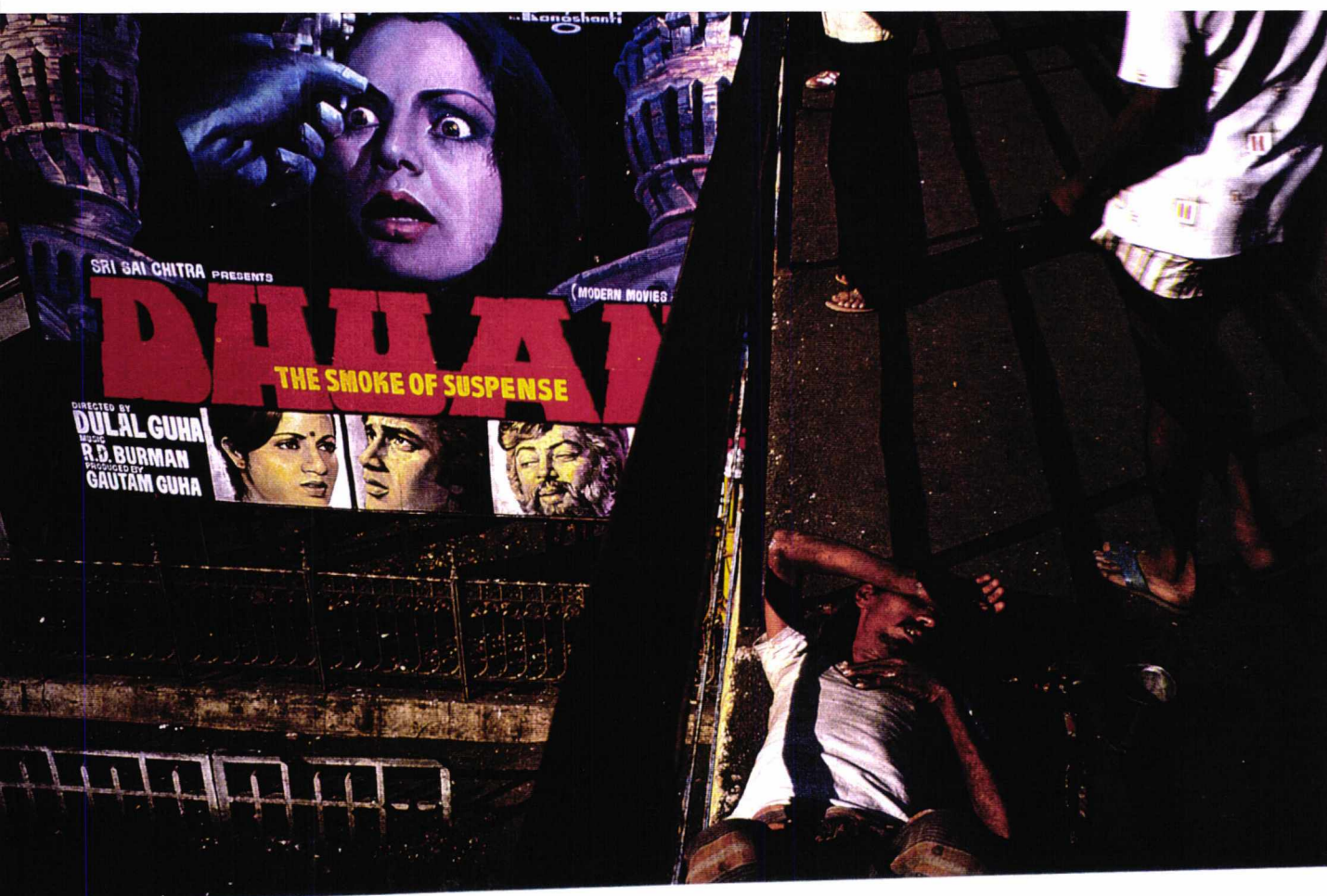19. Alex Webb, Near Torbeck, 1987
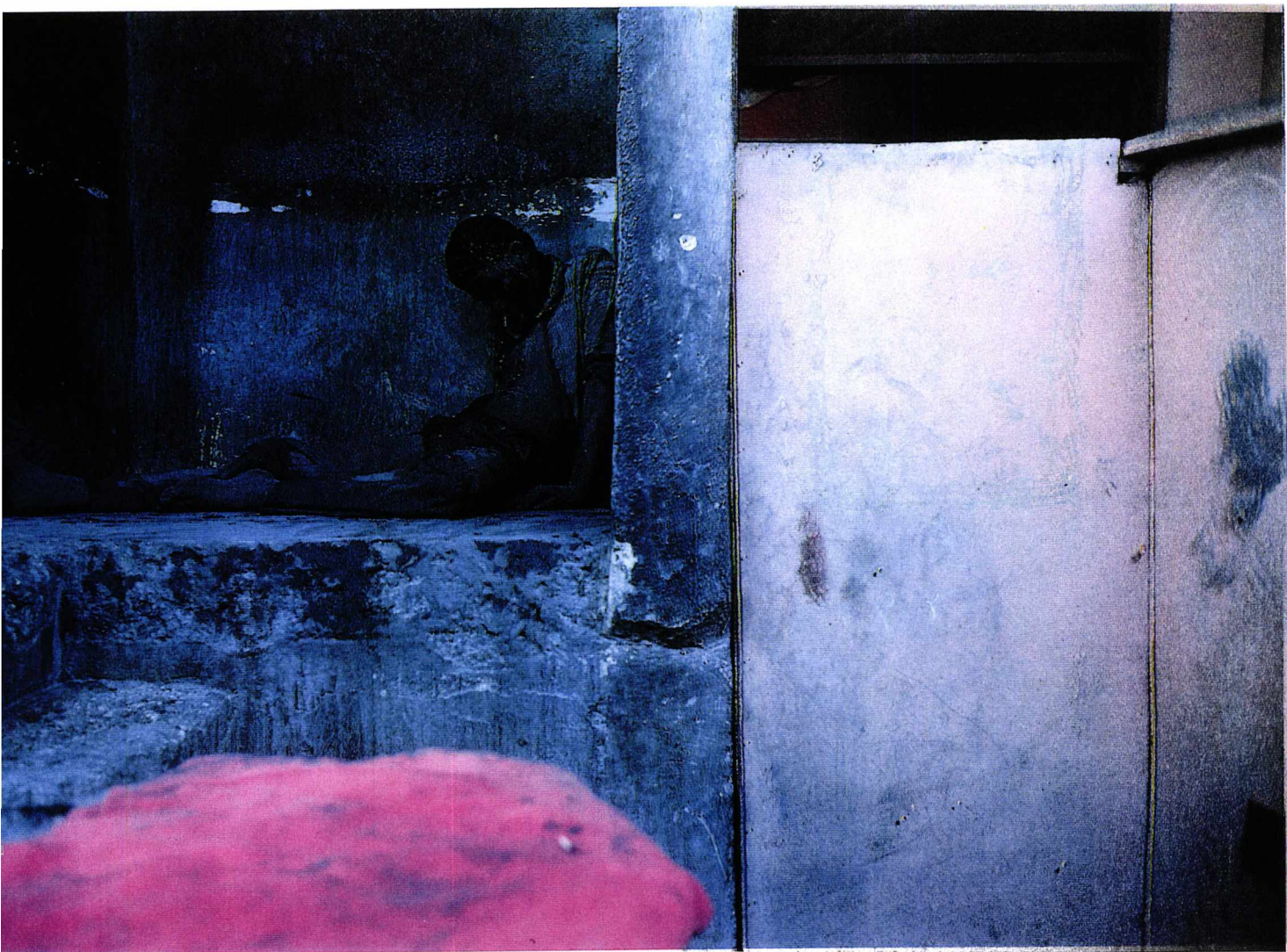
20. Alex Webb, Port-au-Prince, November 1987, Killed by the army

21. Alex Webb, Port-au-Prince, November 1987, Shot by anti- election gunmen
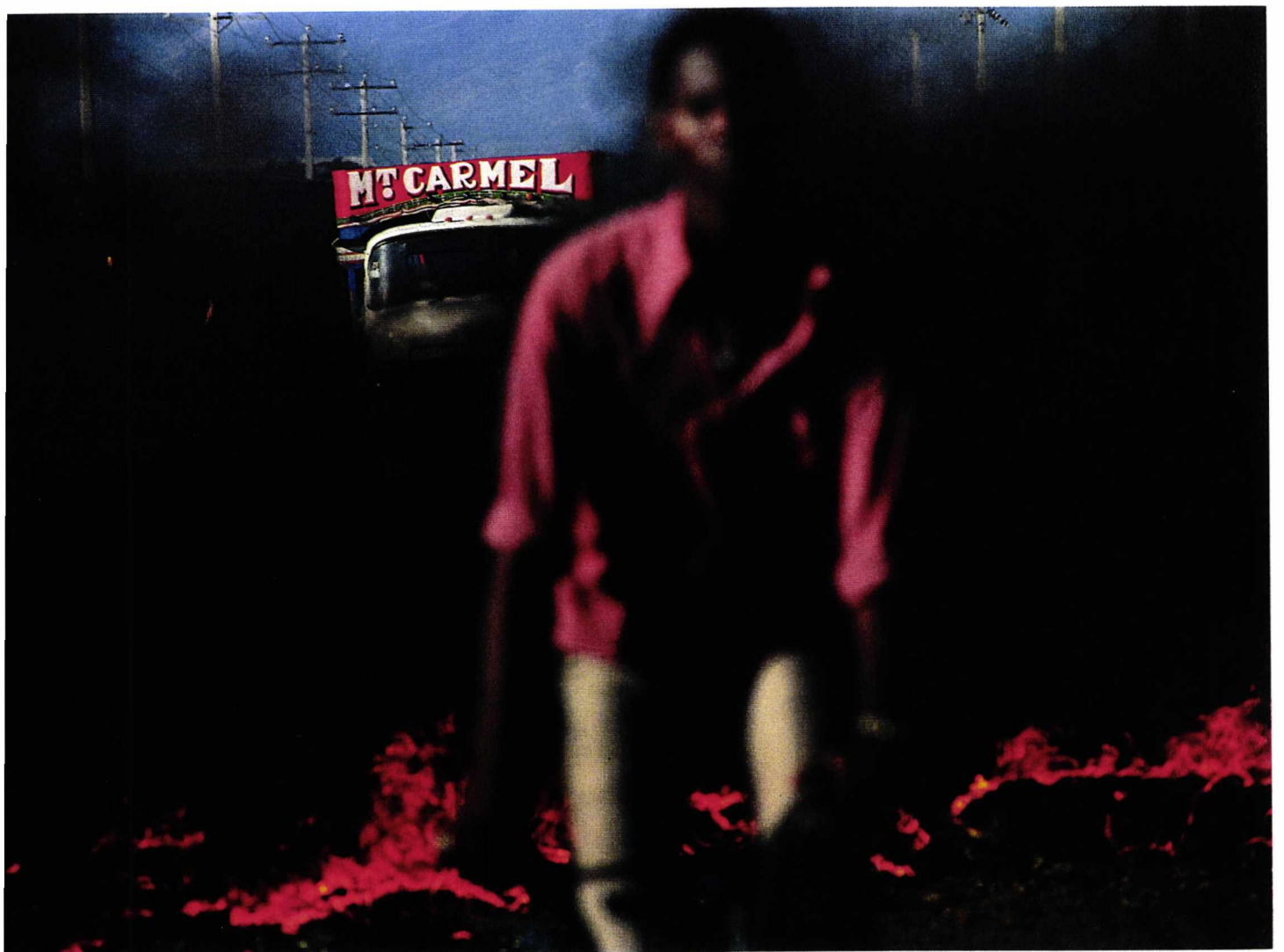
22. Alex Webb, Port-au-Prince, Nov 1987, Burning barricades set up by anti-election forces

23. Alex Webb, Untitled, from <u>Hot Light/Half-Made Worlds</u>, 1986

24. Alex Webb, Untitled, from Hot Light/Half-Made Worlds, 1986

Black and white, on the other hand, is conceptual and propositional – its awareness is constructed within a logical space. According to Rorty, monochrome possesses an order that necessitates the justifying of things, and the organizing of sentences, and knowledge.

Amongst contemporary photographers who work in this medium, Joel Meyerowitz is well-known for his use of colour to create mood and a sense of place, William Eggleston's complex work involves the use of colour awareness against signs, flags and inscriptions, things which belong to a linguistic order. Similarly, Lee Friedlander's fragmented compositions seem to use a pre-language against the order of language and signs. He draws out the tension in his subjects through creating a conflict between 'raw feels' and rationality, interfering with meaning, and 'sense'. This analysis of the play between the linguistic and non-linguistic is fundamental to how pictures work when one is working in colour. It draws attention to how we begin to notice something and to deem it important or significant, in relation to language and pre-language.

Alex Webb, another photojournalist from the Magnum Agency, uses colour awareness in his landscapes and portraits. The viewer notices more easily and responds immediately to the colour in the background than the actual event or activity that is in the foreground. With black and white, the viewer is often drawn to the subject of the image. The fragmented nature of Webb's work gives the viewer no real opportunity to clock the universe in which these things exist. He presents us with disjointed

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Harvard University Press, 1994, p.57). And this recognitional capacity is, he argues, fully conceptual.

narratives, an incomplete syntax of bits of bodies and other fragments of objects, and flashes of saturated colour in his photographs from the tropics: Hot Light/ Half-Made Worlds[41] (1986), and Under a Grudging Sun[42] (1989), a series of photographs taken in Haiti. Image #24, for example, seems to be an accumulated expression of the intense heat – a man is asleep in a rickshaw, the soles of his feet red, the ground is cracked, a dead, dried swordfish lies 'preserved' in the heat.

His first book, Hot Light/ Half Made Worlds grew out of his obsession with the tropics and it captures the colours, the heat, the mystery, and the vibrant life in tropical regions around the world. The use of the white walls of the buildings, against the brilliant blue backdrop of the sky in Image #18 is a clear illustration of the significant motifs in Webb's work. We also notice the forms within the photographic frame, the shapes and patterns which define its space – the tilt of the man against the wall is balanced by the tilt of the cross on the roof in the background. In his later publication, Under a Grudging Sun, Webb focuses on a particular time and place, Haiti, during the brief period after the departure of its infamous dictator, Jean-Claude Duvalier (1986 - 1988). He had made several visits to Haiti, but when he returned during "Haiti Libere", he noticed a new sense of freedom in the people, some of whom were the poorest, and most oppressed, when they had a hope for democratic reforms. What Webb also witnessed during this period is the dashing of those hopes, and the horror and violence that took over Haiti.

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[41] Alex Webb, Hot Light/ Half Made Worlds, London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986
[42] Alex Webb, Under a Grudging Sun: Photographs from Haiti Libere (1986-1988), London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989

Webb is very much involved in the scenes that he photographed, and brings us as viewers into the streets, the markets, and the lives of the people that he has photographed. His work makes palpable the sense of imminent violence, the ripe and sensuous colour and the heat amid chaos and desperate poverty. The intimacy and the emotional complexity of Webb's depiction of Haiti deviates from the selfless objective voyeuristic mode that photojournalists are supposed to adopt:

> .. What I recall most vividly are the sensations of Haiti: the acrid smell of charcoal fires and open sewers; the sight of cracked and calloused feet; the enveloping heat; the pounding, unyielding sun; the splash of colours that almost seem chosen to ward off the inevitable tragedy of Haitian life; and Haitian laughter, sometimes mocking, sometimes freeing, that erupts unexpectedly in the midst of apparent misery.[43]

The effect of the colour and the oppressive heat (people are sweating, the underneath of their feet are dry, cracked and sandy) on our senses transforms an apparent reportage into a mournful diary of estrangement. His scenes are visualised through jagged shadows that camouflage and often obscure the human beings within them. He uses contrast to emphasize primary colours – often setting off intense tropical hues against areas of deep shadow. The disjointed space has psychological implications – the harsh irregular patterns, the very abandonment of the local people under the sun, express his consciousness. Image #19 is framed by blocks of saturated colour, and distinct to Webb's style, a lamp-post divides its space into halves. A large knife penetrates the right edge of the photograph, we notice the dark skin underneath the purple jacket, ominous and threatening; the left of the image is a bright green, where a young goat is

chewing on grass, creating a contrasting idyllic world. Webb therefore uses scattered but intense colour so that the aesthetic structure matches the psychic tension of his work.

It is difficult for the viewer's attention to settle on any specific object in these profuse photographs, laden with visual excitements that distract from narrative or are in the 'wrong' place. In Image #20, a striking pink blob in a bluish picture steals the scene, to the detriment of a corpse – a man killed by the army – slumped in an alcove above this pink. Although these two elements may not be deemed of equal importance to the mind of the viewers, Webb includes them both in the field of this photograph. Similarly, in Image #21, the shadows and colours of the walls, the clothing worn by bystanders, and the corpse in front of them are significant elements within the frame. At the same time, the body language of the gathered crowd on the pavement by the street where a dead man lies somewhat confuses the viewer. They seem to be meeting for a chat, arms behind backs, and the gesture of shaking hands amidst the sight which confronts them displays a kind of indifference, perhaps even an immunity or anesthetization to the experience of death. Image #22 is another example which works along the same vein. What is in focus in this image is the advertisement on the truck in the background – the vibrant red mirroring the colour of the man's shirt and the cinders around him. The man appears laboured, his body bent forward, clasping a fire extinguisher. Although he is in the foreground of the event, he has been rendered out of focus.

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43 op. Cit., p9-10

25. Susan Meiselas, Street Fighter, Managua, Nicaragua, 1979

Colour can enhance particular moods and atmospheres, producing a sense-relationship with a picture. Its current role as the dominant medium for photojournalism heightens the tension between aesthetic and documentary concerns by interrupting, even violating the traditional associations of colour to beauty, and black and white with the authentic 'truth'. Colour has often been derided as too 'decorative' for 'serious' photographic work (it is tainted by its common use in advertising and glamour magazines) and black and white is largely used to invoke the hard times of the Great Depression in America as depicted by the Farm Security Administration photographers.

Aside from colour – contemporary photojournalism reveals some important tendencies. The pictorial styles of Gilles Peress, Alex Webb and Susan Meiselas (for example, Image #25) represent an advanced stage in the development of 35mm-format photography from Cartier-Bresson, to Robert Frank and Garry Winogrand. Cropping and composition have become progressively more radical, the relationships between the centre of the frame and its periphery, the relationship between foreground and background have also become increasingly complex. This 'decentering' approach (with its lack of structure and visual cohesion) can lead to a more complex sense of the 'decisive moment', where the photographer seeks to express something beyond a melodramatic climax.

This kind of challenge to traditional pictorial formulae is accompanied by an increased fascination with the incongruous, and the seemingly unreal or surreal. Thus, war appears somewhat like a costume drama in Meiselas's well-known picture of Sandinista's

in a street fight, grouped against a wall as if posed for a fashion set-up. The framing and use of saturated colour in Webb's photographs heighten the artificiality of the situation, exposing the presence of the photographer.

Traditionally, two strands of photography were commonly recognized: as a work of fine art, or as social documentation. Photographers such as Edward Steichen strove to grant photography the status of fine art. Photographs that fit into this category are characterized by their dedication to form, the subjectivity of the photographer, and their uniqueness. Galleries began to exhibit photographs in this form, and the notion of the photographer as artist and visionary was created.

The boundaries between the old identification of art with self-expression and formal concerns, and of photojournalism with objectivity and a preoccupation with content are now being blurred. As it has sometimes been put, "If it's out of focus, it's art; if it's in focus, it's photojournalism." The out of focus image inevitably reminds us of Robert Capa's famous photograph of the D-day landing. Where can we then 'place' such an image?

Therefore, there is no longer a clear distinction between art and photojournalism. It is now commonplace to find what would traditionally be deemed documentary images hanging on walls in art galleries and museums. Webb's and Meiselas's images are far from being conventional news photographs, but closer to the picturesque shots of Eliot Elisofon and Ernst Haas, both of whom

pioneered with colour in the 1950s, before it became widespread.

In discussing the relationships between documentary and art photography, Allan Sekula notes that the idea of 'art versus documentary' creates an unworkable dualism in which 'expression versus reportage', 'inner truth versus empirical truth', and 'affective value versus informative value' become part of an oppositional series of distinctions and exclusive categories. This separation overlooks the reality that both strands are representational works within a socially constructed context. The photograph on its own presents the possibility of meaning. It relies on context, discourse, and text, to create specific meanings.

The work of contemporary 'documentary' photographers brings into focus the subjective nature of the photographic process. In the past, the assumed objectivity of documentary practice entailed looking at the subject from a distance, requiring a detachment that implied an inability to understand other cultures and their productions. Indeed, 'vision' in Western culture is privileged over the other senses because of its detachment from its objects. Although the representation of others still remains complex and fraught with ethical implications, contemporary photographers have, in the examples of Bruce Davidson and Gilles Peress, highlighted their position as an outsider to communities that they have photographed. Davidson was sympathetic towards his subjects, 'penetrating' a particular community by living with the people he photographed, and yet he remained inherently separated from them. Peress, Meiselas, and Webb, on the other hand, have in their chosen photographic approaches, not only presented mere

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glimpses of foreign cultures that are 'alien' and incomprehensible to them, they simultaneously draw attention to, even expose, their own positions as photographers of events to question the process of the documentary project. As an image-maker, it is therefore crucial to establish my own placement within the culture that I am working in; at the same time, my photographs are not intended to serve as a definitive 'study' of particular migrant or refugee cultures – rather, they present themselves as fragments of individual lives. As such, part of my purpose is to highlight the importance of photography in its role to represent an ambiguous reality that invites reflection and analysis, where seeing is also an act of thought. The following chapter introduces the significance of the everyday as a starting point in visually addressing the question of 'home' and identity. Images of domestic spaces should therefore be regarded as meaningful expressions of the complexities (and perplexities) of identity and its representation.

"The panoramas of an era unfold through the mundane."[1]

The everyday as an integral part of life is often over-looked. The object that is near, familiar and ordinary does not usually awaken desire. Photographers are today increasingly interested in exploring domestic spaces, which through the analysis of material possessions and their collection and display, and viewed in relation to the occupants of these homes, may form incisive commentaries on aspects of society as a whole. Photographs of domestic spaces and private lives have only recently been regarded as a significant part of 'reality', and given significance in the hierarchy of representation. Indeed, the objects found in someone's home are, to an extent, markers of their identity, whether real or desired. And in my work, I have chosen to photograph aspects of the everyday – from subjects in their living-rooms, to close-ups of the contents of their kitchens, generating within these items the fetishistic attribute that could be applied to any art object. This chapter therefore traces the uses and increasing recognition of the photography of the everyday, beginning with the example of the French photographer, Eugène Atget, to an analysis of the work of William Eggleston, a contemporary American photographer. I hope to illustrate that the photographers and artists whose work I comment on, and their commitment to photographing aspects of their surroundings which are so often taken for granted encourages the viewer to re-look at the familiar. In this way, perhaps the dislocating effects of forced migration may not only be found in

images taken in war zones or refugee camps, but in the set-ups of private, domestic spaces.

Eugène Atget, in the late 19th and early 20th Century, took much interest in photographing incidental items, details that did not fit into any grand scale of things. He referred to himself simply as a maker of documents – producing photographs of clear, uncluttered views of Paris. He often photographed parks, corners, staircases, facades, doors, alleys and interiors, mostly devoid of human beings, but invariably suggesting a human presence. These empty scenes conveyed their significance as part of a city, particularly Atget's own feelings about Paris. His intimate point of view presented a subtle revelation of the simplest aspects of his environment. Following Walker Evans who was devoted to revealing the commonplace in a direct way (photographing aspects of the ordinary during the 1930s[2]), Bruce Davidson in the 1960s and 70s photographed the interiors of apartments and their inhabitants in Spanish Harlem, in a collection titled East 100th Street, which was discussed in the previous chapter. Davidson's approach is significantly different from Atget's neutral view of the everyday. Davidson adopts a compassionate and personal approach – his work is about perceptiveness, about reading and understanding the images, and to have empathy for the characters in the pictures, as opposed to being disengaged from his subject. But Davidson's work is also about chaos and disorder (or the inversion of order) – what is discarded or conventionally deemed insignificant becomes central in his photographs.

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[1] Mark Holborn, 'The Homefront', Creative Camera, No. 214, October 1982, p. 680
[2] Evans's photographs of interiors in the homes of the three tenant farmers (in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men) depict objects that are 'basic' to everyday life, for example, cutlery, chairs, photographs pinned on

This renewed interest in the 'ordinary' was also made evident in Martin Parr's series of photographs of interiors through which he explores notions of British taste, consumerism and identity. Originally produced as part of a documentary project by the BBC in 1990/1, Parr photographed 30 of the 50 households filmed for the television series, Signs of the Times. Magda Segal and John Taylor are two other photographers whose work involved a focus on domestic spaces. Segal's photographs of homes in London[3] presents the ordinary lives of their occupants as 'extraordinary'. Stimulated by her personal interest in these interiors, she photographs her subjects within the familiar confines of their domestic environment. Similar to the way August Sander defined individuals according to their social standing, Segal titles her photographs not with the names of the people she photographs, but by their occupation and the location of their home, setting up a correlation between one's type of work and living-in space. John Taylor employs a different approach[4]. All photographed in one location, at his sister's house in New Southgate, North London, his work expresses a search for insignificant details, mapping out the interior of a home in a 'typical' English suburb. Focussing on the banal and the everyday, it demands a re-looking at objects that constitute our daily lives, things that are normally overlooked. Indeed, the absence of human subjects in his photographs, and its apparent ordinariness with no distinguishing features, opens up the possibility that this could be 'anyone's house'. Recently, Richard Billingham, a young British photographer, produced a whole series of photographic

walls. At times, the isolation of the single objects separates them from their function, transforming them simply into shapes and forms.

[3] Magda Segal, London at Home, Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 1993

[4] John Taylor, Ideal Home: A Detached Look at Modern Living, Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 1989

representations of personal family life – with honest and intimate portrayals of his tattooed mother, alcoholic father, and family pets in his home in the Midlands. Featured in the exhibition I Am A Camera (2001) at the Saatchi Gallery, Billingham's raw and gritty documentary photographs of his home life evoke intense emotional responses from its viewers.

The work of American photographers such as Bill Owens, Joel Sternfeld, William Eggleston, and Bruce Charlesworth feature prominently in questioning the security and stability of the familiar domestic space by capturing the pervasive melancholy of everyday events, environments and characters in American life. Ideas of the everyday have since become increasingly popular. Peter Galassi, in his introduction to the exhibition publication of The Terrors and Pleasures of Domestic Comfort[5] (1991), suggests that this movement into the private arena represents not so much an advance as a retreat – a withdrawal from the world's troubles into the secure domestic cocoon. Val Williams, with reference to the work of Martin Parr and Daniel Meadows in the project entitled June Street (1973), points out that this fascination with everyday domestic objects such as 'rubber plants, coal fires, and electric wall clocks' represented the beginnings of a kind of documentary which was 'more interested in satire, irony and self-reflexivity than in making monumental photojournalistic statements.'[6]

Recently, documentary photography has returned to its roots for its subject matter. These modern photographs, like the first daguerreotypes, often depict families and domestic interiors.

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[5] Peter Galassi, The Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991

26. Joachim Schmid, from <u>Pictures from the Street</u>, begun in 1982

However, this resemblance to the old family snapshot is only superficial as they set out to establish other functions besides their immediate use as part of a private family album. As an early example, Jacques Henri Lartigue's photographs of his family and their friends demonstrated the possibilities that the 'adventures' of daily life had to offer as a rich source of imagery. It is not surprising today to find photographs which portray intimate domestic scenes and which resemble the contents of photo albums hanging on gallery walls. Contemporary photographers have utilized a traditional vernacular format to produce a more intentional, coherent exploration of the functioning of photographs in our lives. Nicholas Nixon's visual 'charting' of his wife and her sisters (in the series titled 'The Brown sisters', dating from 1976) at regular intervals is an indication of the current trend in photography where everyday images (what would conventionally be called snapshots belonging inside a family album) are re-contextualised in a gallery. Joachim Schmid's photographic project Pictures from the Street (Image #26 is an example) entailed the retrieval of multiple 'anonymous' snapshots that had been discarded and re-constituted in galleries as artwork. By using 'found' images that take on a new, elevated status, his work may be described as intentionally 'anti-museum', simultaneously contributing to and subverting academic photo-history.

Photographers have re-discovered a new reality on which to comment, reflecting not only a reborn interest in intimate, private lives, but also a realisation that it may perhaps be too complacent to attempt to produce a definitive and unified world-view through any means of representation. They therefore turned

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[6] Val Williams, 'The World of Interiors' in Creative Camera, #314, February/ March 1992, pages 15 - 18

their cameras away from traditionally accepted documentary subjects (events that contributed to a 'larger' social history) and instead attempted to find basic truths in themselves and their immediate surroundings. This subjective approach is not entirely new – Jacques Henri Lartigue in particular had concentrated on photographing his family and friends. At the same time, this move towards documenting one's private lives and spaces reflect the growing tendency in modern culture to 'market' even those aspects of life which were traditionally considered as private. In contemporary society, even privacy is made consumable: the 'live' performances of Jeff Koons copulating with his then-wife Cicciolina used promotional methods that are characteristic of advertising campaigns. This advertising of the 'private' is dominated today by the use of web cameras in domestic spaces[7], where everyday lives are put on display for almost anyone to access.

In his study of the still life, Looking at the Overlooked – Four Essays on Still Life Painting, Norman Bryson characterizes Dutch still life as quintessentially rhopographic in its concern for 'low-plane reality':

> What makes Dutch still life so unique is the symmetry between this anonymous, self-effacing technique and the particular range of possibilities afforded by rhopographic painting. Rhopography works against the idea of greatness; while human beings may be capable of extraordinary heroism, passions, ambitions, it leaves the exploration of these things to others, and against megalography it asserts another view of human life, one that attends to the ordinary business of everyday living, the life of houses and tables, of individuals on a plane of material existence where the ideas of

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[7] For example, the popularity of the Jennycam, and television series like 'Big Brother' has prompted many households to set up their own cameras, allowing anyone who visits their web site to access their private spaces.

> heroism, passion, and ambition have no place. The Dutch
> painters of still life are true to this rhopographic
> scale of values in that they make no use of painting as
> a vehicle for bringing to the world the uniqueness of
> personal vision. They are not attracted by still life
> as a mode of self-expression, or by the possibility of
> raising their art to Olympian heights.[8]

Bryson traces this artistic concern for the 'lowest' reality and its concurrent critical devaluation back to the Classical period. He explains that the 'rhyparographer' is the 'painter of rhyparos, literally of waste or filth; the association is with things that are physically or morally unclean'.[9] This distaste is reflected in an ideology that is still with us. The taboo of what is considered to be 'unclean' offers opportunities for artists like Mike Kelley and Jeff Koons to transgress these boundaries, prompting them to take on the role of rhyparographer as anti-hero.

Similarly, the Swiss artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss produce works based on everyday life; for them, it is quite important to be 'talent-free'. For example, their museum exhibit titled 'broom cupboard' simply puts on display reproductions of all the contents one would expect to find in a broom cupboard beneath the stairs in a museum. The playful intervention by these artists, fulfilling their role as part of the paraphernalia of the marginal, remind their viewers of the existence of workers, painters and cleaners that also work at the museum. Fischli and Weiss also published a collection of photographs in a book titled Airport, containing photographs taken at airport terminals, mostly of airplanes. As artists, they are interested in a form of 'dehierarchization', a kind of reversal of order where small-scale

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[8] Norman Bryson, Looking at the Overlooked— Four Essays on Still Life Painting, London: Reaktion Books, 1995, p. 60 - 95

[9] Norman Bryson, ibid.

events take precedence over 'larger' social events. Their intention is to create a kind of 'dumb' anti-aesthetics that deliberately smacked of amateurism, a position that undermines the status of 'art photography' and associated notions of 'high art'.

The shift in the viewpoint of the camera as an objective, impartial witness to the photographer as subjective 'traveller' is reflected in the rootlessness felt in the work of American writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Jack Kerouac. Both producers and consumers of the photograph have recognised the myth of 'objective' reportage. As a result, what has arisen is a genre of openly subjective and impressionistic response to and interpretation of personal experience. Robert Frank's The Americans (1958), for example, provides a series of personal and observations of a country through the critical perspective of an outsider. Contemporary photography tends to focus on the momentary and metaphorical rather than what is static and 'monumental'. The absence of a clearly defined subject is characteristic of contemporary street photography. A thematically 'aimless' approach is reflected in the attraction to 'drifting'; thus, it is not surprising that photographers such as Garry Winogrand and William Eggleston are drawn to in-between places and situations without apparently coherent narrative. Indeed, as Eudora Welty describes Eggleston's photographs in The Democratic Forest (1989): "familiarity will be what overwhelms us."

> Looking at Eggleston's pictures you begin to see potential photographs of his in every direction.... Eggleston is a virtuoso at transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary, a power that lies in the heart of photography. His work grants us access to a private world in which we might recognise a wider one. Its

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dimensions are both intimate and universal, its language both lyrical and profoundly disturbing.[10]

Although William Eggleston may not necessarily be defined or labeled as rhyparographer, his work can be considered rhopographic. Rhopography is the depiction of that which is passed over by greatness. Where megalography is concerned with the heroic deeds of gods and heroes, the rhopographic is concerned with the insignificant and the everyday. His pictures of the apparently banal and nondescript appear to be randomly taken, and resemble snapshots more than conventionally accepted photographic artwork. Indeed, his favourite subjects are telephone poles, garage doors, radiators, and road intersections. By redeeming what is conventionally discarded or disregarded, Eggleston's photographs threaten to upset the hierarchical ideology of significance established through convention and repeated representations.

William Eggleston first became widely known through an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1976. Significantly, Eggleston's avant-garde approach during that particular time was considered by critics as vulgar and aesthetically deficient, while today, he is considered to be among those revivers of the photographic image who have been influencing the medium since the late sixties.[11] Critics regarded Eggleston's work as anti-formalist, which seemed to jeopardize the ranking of photography as an artistic medium with galleries and contemporary critics in the 1970s. What had been canonized then was the reliable black and white 'fine print' in the tradition of such

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[10] Mark Holborn, introduction to Ancient and Modern, London: Jonathan Cape, 1992. Also in Mark Holborn, 'William Eggleston: Democracy and Chaos', in Artforum, Summer 1988, p. 89

photographers as Edward Weston and Walker Evans. Photographic quality was almost automatically equated with black and white expression as opposed to the obtrusive media and popular culture, which exploited the excesses of colour in film and advertising.

Eggleston's photographs relate very closely to everyday forms of expression. As in Pop Art, which emerged around the same time as Eggleston's photographic practice, everyday life is the point of departure from which Eggleston develops his characteristic aesthetic language. Whilst his photography touches upon certain aspects of modern painting, Eggleston works out his aesthetic strategies primarily within the context of television and cinema, glossy magazine and anonymous postcard photography. Eggleston's photographs are the expression of a roaming, personal imagination which is often described as idiosyncratic. Devoid of any immediately recognizable social or political commitment, his photographs provide insights to the viewer into his own private world, the centre of which is his hometown Memphis, Tennessee and its environment: streets, houses, gardens, interiors and their natural context. Eggleston achieved a new photographic perspective which is entirely his own - his images are mostly the expression of a kind of anarchic approach which is not bound by any of the photographic conventions that had existed before. Bearing only a superficial similarity to the aesthetics of family snap photography, Eggleston's work displays a deep insight involved in perceiving and photographing his environment. At the same time,

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[11] Mark Holborn states that the 'formal issues raised by the structures of Eggleston's images worked to question (traditional) notions, and the ensuing debate was vital in the acceptance of colour photography as a medium for serious work.' (Artforum, Summer 1988, p.91)

his low-key aesthetic masks the complex work that many viewers may not make the effort to understand.[12]

Eggleston discovered new and unexpected forms of what he considered to be 'beauty' in the seemingly mundane surroundings of everyday life. His deceptively simple images reveal hitherto hidden and intricate pleasures of the visible world. Although many of Eggleston's photographs capture scenes of suburban shoddiness, there is an inherent aesthetic structure in his work. Whether it is the awkward alignment of telephone poles, or ceramic bottles at a rubbish dump, Eggleston creates poetic beauty out of the ugliest of objects or monuments: "He addresses the meanest objects with unstuttering love."[13] As Mark Holborn also observes, "the startling potential of photography is the ability to create the exotic from the immediate or to elevate the mundane to the edge of the sublime."[14] Eggleston's work is dedicated to showing the substance of daily life, in all its beauty, humour and horror. The seemingly careless method of cropping is characteristic of much of his work. With a casualness reminiscent of a snapshot, he portrays seemingly unconventional material (and therefore he has often been regarded as 'idiosyncratic' in his choice of subject matter), from parked

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[12] Mike Weaver introduced the concept of 'the photograph as cipher' where the viewer experiences the sensation of meaning when looking at particular photographs without having to know, or symbolically interpret its meaning. Using Eggleston's work as an example, Weaver distinguishes between a symbol and a cipher: 'The symbol is the means by which the essentialist (of pure transcendence) takes off for abstract speculation. The cipher is the mediating element through which the existentialist (of immanent transcendence) surpasses the contingency of concrete existence. The decisive moment of perception is when the ordinariness of things becomes thoroughly photopoeic, in the sense that they are illuminated not just by the light of the sun but by the flash of the mind. Thus the polysemous language of the cipher does not speak to the intellect so much as to the imagination... through which we recognise the existence of the metaphysical element in mundane life.' (Mike Weaver and Anne Hammond, 'William Eggleston: Treating Things Existentially' in History of Photography, Volume 17, Number 1, London: Taylor and Francis, Spring 1993, p.56). Therefore, in the nature of the cipher, one recognises that meaning can be intuitively perceived rather than being intellectually 'thought'.
[13] Malcolm Jones, quoted by Stanley Booth, 'William Eggleston',
http://www.salon.com/people/bc/1999/09/07/eggleston.html

cars, and radiators, to dirt roads and shoes under a bed. He works with 'actuality', and within it – he chooses to photograph the self-evident world that confronts us all. Despite their apparent banality, Eggleston's photographs are defiantly intelligent; the work as a whole possesses an underlying structure in terms of its subject matter and approach. Stripped of all pretension and reduced to only the facts, his images are accurate descriptions of the objects and places that he sets out to record. An essential point of Eggleston's work is his determinedly 'anti-heroic' subject matter.

Much of the interest and merit of Eggleston's work is often attributed to his use of colour. Indeed, he is widely considered to be one of the most important colour photographers in America. It was in the 1960s that Eggleston abandoned black and white photography to experiment with new colour technology. Through the use of colour, he attempted to portray more accurately the tactile qualities of life in the rural south. Eggleston's use of colour is never functionless – colours exist in his photographs because they exist in his world. But not all colour is natural – he is able to use the qualities of different types of film to create unnatural results. Colour photography, which until then had enjoyed serious application only in an advertising context, was employed for the first time as an artistic medium in its own right. For Eggleston, colour is no longer an aspect of the photographic image to be treated separately, as has traditionally been the case, but a natural vehicle of expression, a self-evident aspect of the visible world as we all know and experience it: as a component of light and nature and a whole diversity of things. With Eggleston,

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[14] Mark Holborn, op. Cit., p.680

colour is an unproblematic and obvious quality in both picture and reality. Through his work, he has overcome the rift that has hitherto existed in photography between phenomena and their own specific colourfulness. Colour for Eggleston is now the actual driving force of the image. Indeed, he heightens details and intensifies colours so that what the viewer encounters is something surreal and uncanny, and therefore vaguely unsettling and claustrophobic. If his photographs were printed in black and white, the image would lose its essential aesthetic quality.

Eggleston produces dye-transfer prints, whose colour scale offers a superior degree of saturation and transparency. It is a costly and complicated technique which has usually only been used commercially. Through this process, intense colour can be achieved in a print, for example, in a photograph titled 'Greenwood, Mississippi, 1973' (Image #27) where Eggleston photographed a light bulb against a red ceiling. He describes the colour in his original print as "red blood that's wet on the wall". Indeed, Stanley Booth describes his work as: 'The first private colour photography that was equal in technical quality to advertising photographs, it was truly subversive, lavishing the kind of attention on everyday reality that had been reserved for selling products."[15]

His sensitive use of colour, its variations and intensities has allowed him to develop his technique by supplementing his dye-transfer prints with C-prints, which is a straightforward photographic process. Its superior quality and durability compared with earlier negative materials can be compared with Cibachrome,

27. William Eggleston, Greenwood, Mississippi, 1973

28. William Eggleston, Miami, from <u>The Democratic Forest</u>, 1989

29. William Eggleston, Memphis, from <u>The Democratic Forest</u>, 1989

TO RELIGHT OVEN PILOT:
REMOVE OVEN BOTTOM BY RAISING
FRONT EDGE AND SLIDING FORWARD
PILOT IS LOCATED AT LEFT REAR OF
BURNER. LIGHT PILOT WITH A MATCH

30. William Eggleston, Memphis, 1972

which was the most commonly used material among photographic artists in the 1970s and 80s. Another advantage of using negative film is that it allows Eggleston to overexpose the film, which adds a certain luminosity and produces a pastel effect, while the dye-transfer printing technique still makes possible the retention of saturation and depth.

William Eggleston's colour photographs of suburban landscapes are intimate close-up views. Although the tones within his photographs are usually subdued and lighting is relatively flat (in comparison, for example, to Alex Webb's multiple 'landscapes' of bold and saturated colour), Eggleston creates a sense of intimacy through his use of colour. The subdued colours also brings the viewer closer to the faded snapshots of their own memories, however remote one's experiences may be from Memphis or other towns that Eggleston photographed in.

William Eggleston uses his colour awareness against signs, flags and inscriptions, which are viewed as linguistic objects that belong to a social and symbolic order. His use of colour, on the other hand, is related closely to human perception and our sense responses to various stimuli. In a photograph titled 'Miami' (Image #28), for example, a building painted in shades of green dominates the space in the entire foreground of the image. Words painted in green 'Blue Grass' hang against each of the two visible faces of the short tower that rises out from the roof of the building. A silhouette of a plane and light blue sky lies in the background of the image. Eggleston's placing of the layers of green at the bottom foreground of the photograph transforms what

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[15] Stanley Booth, 'William Eggleston', http://www.salon.com/people/bc/1999/09/07/eggleston.html

might be the roof of this building into green grass in a landscape, and simultaneously uses the text which describes 'blue grass' to contradict and confuse our visual understanding of the image.

> Later when I was having dinner with some friends.. someone said, "What have you been photographing here today, Eggleston?"
>
> "Well, I've been photographing democratically," I replied.
>
> "But what have you been taking pictures of?"
>
> "I've been outdoors, nowhere, in nothing."
>
> "What do you mean?"
>
> "Well, just woods and dirt, a little asphalt here and there." I was treating things democratically, which of course didn't mean a thing to the people I was talking to..I am afraid that there are more people than I can imagine who can go no further than appreciating a picture that is a rectangle with an object in the middle of it, which they can identify. They don't care what is around the object as long as nothing interferes with the object itself, right in the centre. Even after the lessons of Winogrand and Friedlander, they don't get it. They respect their work because they are told by respectable institutions that they are important artists... They want something obvious. The blindness is apparent when someone lets slip the word 'snapshot'... The word has never had any meaning. I am at war with the obvious."[16]

Eggleston's much quoted phrase "I am at war with the obvious" somewhat reinforces his dedication to what *is* obvious in the *real* world. What he despises and is at war with is perhaps the idea of it, the disregard, or rather the contempt in which it is held. The 'obvious' he makes reference to would be photographic artists and their work which have traditionally been so easily accepted as 'valuable' by art institutions and galleries, and which viewers therefore immediately deem 'important'. Through his work, Eggleston not only calls for a re-perception of our immediate

environment, but insists upon a re-evaluation of the worth of art objects: Thus, "..Eggleston's belief has been and remains that what the resolutely high-minded call banality is the stuff of life itself."[17] His images are mainly of common everyday scenes and objects; they may seem at first glance undistinguished, but they are rarely banal. "I think, personally, that the world is so visually complicated that the word 'banal' scarcely is very intelligent to use."[18] His compositions are far from snapshots, even if one understands the term as an oversimplified and overused analogy. What Eggleston's work also highlights is the consequence of a culture of repetitive visual programming, the anesthetization of our ability to see. There is nothing accidental or amateurish in Eggleston's characteristic 'grab-shot' technique. Each frame, if not actually the result of study and reflection, is the product of a quick and skilled eye for colour and cropped asymmetry.

Eggleston published The Democratic Forest in 1989. By then, he had photographed extensively in the American West, Kenya, Egypt, Georgia, Louisiana, England, Germany and Austria. The book is based on 12,000 photographs and consists of edited material in book form. Founded on a system of order and equal representation, he describes his work as an ordering of 'chaos'.[19] Place is the subject of this series of photographs. They range widely and are varying; he finds the mundane and the ordinary in landscapes, cityscapes, and street scenes, both in long views and close-ups. Through his photographs of dirt paths, parking lots, back gardens and domestic objects, he brings the familiar to us. The

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[16] William Eggleston, The Democratic Forest, New York: Doubleday, 1989, p171-173
[17] Stanley Booth, 'William Eggleston', http://www.salon.com/people/bc/1999/09/07/eggleston.html
[18] William Eggleston, interview with Ute Eskildsen, Eggleston: The Hasselblad Award, Spano Publishers, 1999

photographs are not arranged in any clear structure, and remain ambiguous. As Eudora Welty[20] points out in her introduction to the book, among the merits of the pictures is the fact that they make ordinary reality accessible in a way that was outlined by Walt Whitman and Walker Evans, but simultaneously, they 'leave everything to be said'. Although human beings are very rarely present in all his photographs, their presence is always vividly felt. Indeed, his photographs are full of implications. Take for example, in Image #29, the photograph of a red plate with remnants of what might have been a greasy fried egg still on it. Used cutlery, a ball of red fluff, and a small transparent bag of tortilla chips are left with it on the table. This photograph describes a recently vacated space; it is somewhat reminiscent of a scene-of-the-crime photograph taken by the police as evidence. In such images, Eggleston uses the things that are left behind to suggest a human presence, or an event that has just taken place.

Scenes of everyday life are therefore deceptively loaded, and houses may be full of revelations. At the same time, as Ian Jeffrey notes in an interview with Mark Haworth-Booth, "photography, in a visual art sense, was the equivalent of finding people who could articulate the commonplace and give it a new weight and depth."[21] For him, photography took on a role to make 'nuanced and quite mysterious perceptions.' Along these terms, I prefer to work in the everyday world, selecting my photographic subjects from domestic interiors, and uncovering the potential of these most familiar surroundings. My photographs could in some

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[19] Mark Holborn, 'William Eggleston: Democracy and Chaos', op. Cit., p.88
[20] Eggleston's approach is 'Southern' and Welty, too, is a Southern writer whose short stories 'indulge' in the obvious and ordinary as extra-ordinary.

ways be seen as a kind of anthropology concerned with the connections between an individual and his or her lived-in space. The selection of particular scenes or objects, the composition of the photograph and the attention to light and colour however, reflects a mode that considers the aesthetic dimensions (not simply the symbolic, 'readable' aspects) of my work as constituting equal significance.

According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, sociologists and anthropologists often approach their understanding of human life largely through the analysis of internal psychic processes and the relationships within and between groups of individuals.[22] However, objects around the home also embody goals and aspirations, shaping the identities of those who occupy the home. The presence, the display of material objects in private spaces therefore serve as important markers of identity. The way in which a home is set up directly influences the way a viewer, or an outsider would respond to that particular space – whether one would 'take up', identify with or consider the possibility of occupying that space, or whether it is deemed incompatible and immediately rejected as 'bad taste'. It is perhaps the dream aspect of a particular future that determines one's response to certain places. Take for example, the colour photographs of interiors in the 'living' sections of newspapers or glossy interior design magazines – both the physical space, and the components of the photograph (colour, lighting, tone) are set up to invite viewers in to occupy these spaces. Carpets, wooden

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[21] Ian Jeffrey, 'Articulating the Commonplace', from an interview with Mark Haworth-Booth, in History of Photography, Volume 21, Number 4, London: Taylor & Francis Ltd., Winter 1997, p. 330

[22] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, The Meaning of Things: Domestic symbols and the self, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981

flooring or curtains are photographed to bring out the grain, the textures of the fabric. Furniture is usually sparsely arranged in minimalist, neat surroundings – the emptiness inviting the viewer in to fill this space that has become an almost 'universal' fantasy space. At the same time, the complexities of how individuals make their choices when setting up home environments are resolved differently according to the life situation of the occupants and their aspirations. The cultural definition of identity in taste is only one parameter of that situation:

> What is the cultural significance, if any, of creativity in home arrangement? That this question has received relatively little attention should not be surprising. The design of the home, as a space we inhabit and a place we imagine, is so much a part of us that seeing with the eyes of others is difficult. And, beneath the smooth surface of the obvious, the intricate relationships between the microcosm of the home and the social macrocosm are difficult to unravel.[23]

The everyday surroundings of our immediate environments are often taken for granted to the extent that they are usually overlooked and left unexamined. For my work in refugees' homes, I am interested in the arrangement of objects for decorative and symbolic effect, and also the articulation of rooms and furnishings. The process of choosing the principles of decorative order and furnishing arrangement contributes to making a 'personal statement' of the ways in which an individual articulates his or her identity, and also how one wish to project certain aspects of this identity. The display and arrangement of objects within the home constitutes both an advertisement and reinforcement of the 'self'. Such 'statements' occupy an increasingly central place in the redefinition of meanings in our culture. The photographic

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images of interiors presented in the next chapter have taken as their subject the familiar and the everyday, and at the same time, they reveal particular histories, endowing these spaces with their individual poignancy.

Homes are made rather than simply built, entailing an interweaving of personal imagination, lived relationships and shaped surroundings. An understanding of home becomes a means for organising the world and orienting our passage through it. Because homes are constructed from material, social, and cultural resources (and are bound up in the relationships which sustain those resources), discourse about the home contains a complex interplay of personal subjectivity and cultural ideal. As Gaston Bachelard[24] has shown, subconscious imagery of home orients being in the world, overlain with codes, experience and practical knowledge acquired in childhood. Therefore, ideas of home find one kind of integration in the practice of everyday life, and another in the very different space and temporality of memory and dream.

Therefore, objects around the home do not simply function as tools for survival; instead, they reflect the identities and embody the goals and aspirations of the occupants of the household. Living environments, which represent their distinctive trajectories, are created and shaped, cultivated from personal and familial histories, and stability in a social space. As Moholy-Nagy observes, in addition to the social, economic, technical and hygienic factors that traditionally govern the building of a house, human beings must also 'experience space in his home.' This means that it is not the practical aspects of construction that

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[23] Tim Putnam, 'Aesthetics of the Living-room', Issue 7, London: Design Museum

are significant, but the 'experience of space, which is the basis of the mental as well as the physical well-being of the inhabitants.' We must therefore regard the home as a flexible and mobile spatial situation, incorporating the rhythms of everyday life, as Moholy-Nagy considers it to be "an organic part of life itself."[25] He proposes that interior spaces could perform a more stimulating function than simply protecting 'dwellers' from bad weather. Besides the necessity for functionality within the domestic environment, the home should also be conceived as a space which must be shaped, hence the need for shaping the space that we occupy and inhabit. Thus, an analysis of domestic interiors may serve to reflect larger individual and cultural identities.

Whatever the cultural significance of a constructed environment, houses must be transformed to turn them into homes. The principles of arrangement of features and artifacts have been understood as a way of representing and placing the self or the household in the world. Within homes of all kinds, the meanings of it are continually redefined as inhabitants commit themselves to the personalisation of their dwelling spaces. This is however dependent on the array of ideas and means available to support decoration, furnishing and alteration. We need therefore to examine more closely the relationship between the process involved and the results of identity representation within the home. Here, co-ordinated photographs and interviews with the occupants are important, which takes us to the following chapter.

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[24] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Reverie, Boston: Beacon Press, 1960
[25] Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 'Man and his House' (1929), in K. Passuth (ed.), Moholy-Nagy, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1985, p.309 - 310

Chapter Four – Views of the Interiors: Photographs, description, and analysis

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John Collier's <u>Visual Anthropology</u> (1967) provides a popular account of how photography can be used as anthropology. The text focuses mainly on techniques to be used in fieldwork, representing ways in which to use photographic, visual communication as a quasi-quantitative tool. Photo-elicitation is the most famous 'technique' presented which describes a method where anthropologists show informants photographs and ask them to talk about them. Other than the fact that this mirrors the approach used in a psychiatrist's study, most of such information represented in visual images can be obtained from actually asking the people whose homes are being photographed. Photographs included in any form of research should be integrated within the text, as they not only provide information but also need to be contextualised. Therefore, this chapter provides descriptions and a detailed analysis of my photographs of the homes of refugees residing in London. The photographs are divided into different sections based on each interior photographed. These 'settings' are supported by information obtained from the occupants in each home, whether these comments are specific to the arrangement of the interior or particular objects on display around the house, or more general statements about their perception of 'home'. The written text that accompanies each series of images is crucial in establishing the scene and providing some necessary background information of the occupants and also my experience of photographing and interviewing them.

The paraphernalia of the domestic environment, the debris of clutter that we gather around us serves the function of naming, and labeling who we are and where we come from or belong. In looking at and photographing these spaces, we are also reconsidering the nature of their value. The question of value is one which re-iterates both the fetishistic character of the objects displayed, and the particular characteristics of social relations embodied in their material form. The arrangement of the home describes not only the functionality of one's domestic environment, but it also reflects a space of longing and presents the possibility of belonging.

The first home I visited as part of my research in December 1996 was that of a Kurdish asylum seeker, hoping to gain refugee status. Mina Swara was born in Iraqi Kurdistan and moved to Iran when the Kurdish movement collapsed in 1973. She left her country 25 months before the interview, and is living in Hammersmith, west London, with her husband and her son who was twenty months old when I met the family. I met Mina Swara through the Kurdish Association in Hammersmith. She was a little hesitant about the interview, and especially wary about having her photographs taken. She was suspicious of my intentions, also because she at first could not figure out where I came from. She told me there were spies around, people she could not trust – I 'could be from the Home Office', she said.

When she did feel more comfortable with me, she narrated in some detail past events that resulted in her move to England. She described to me how she was shot in the stomach by an Iranian soldier, which prompted her escape out of the country. Mina lifted
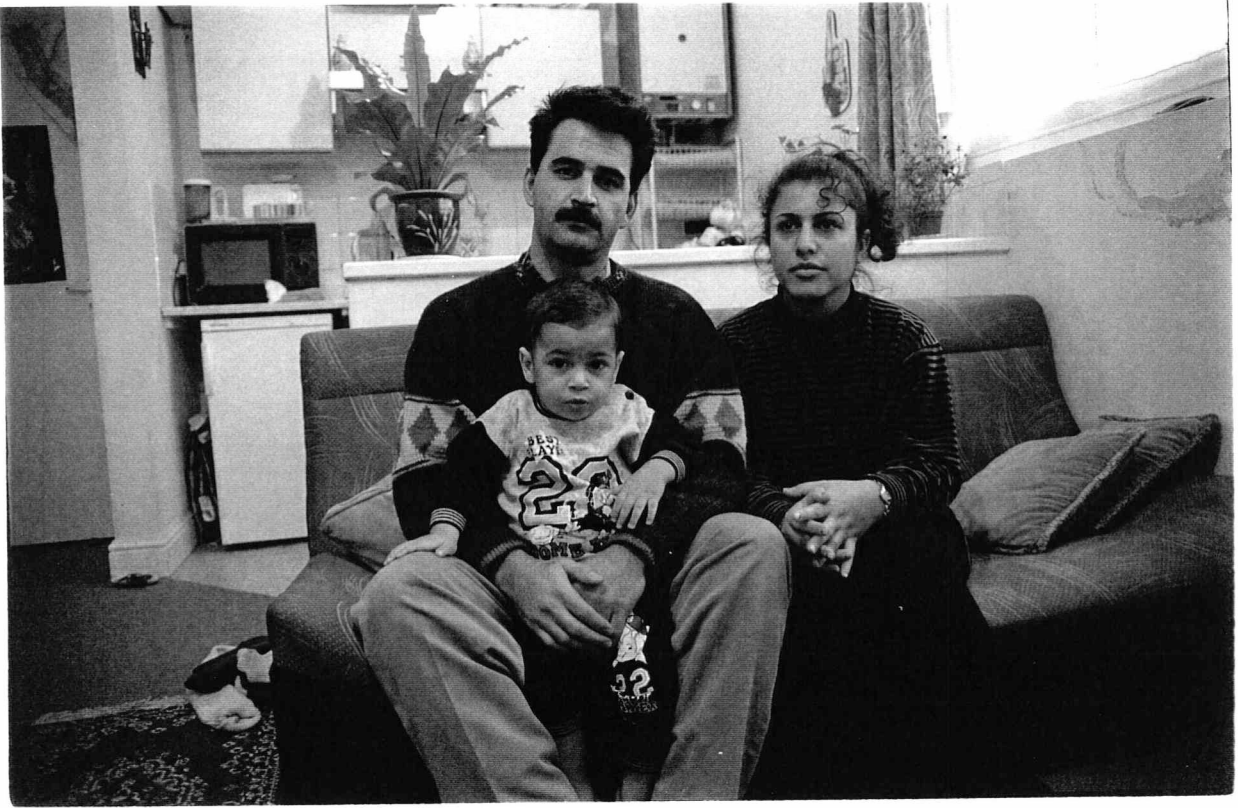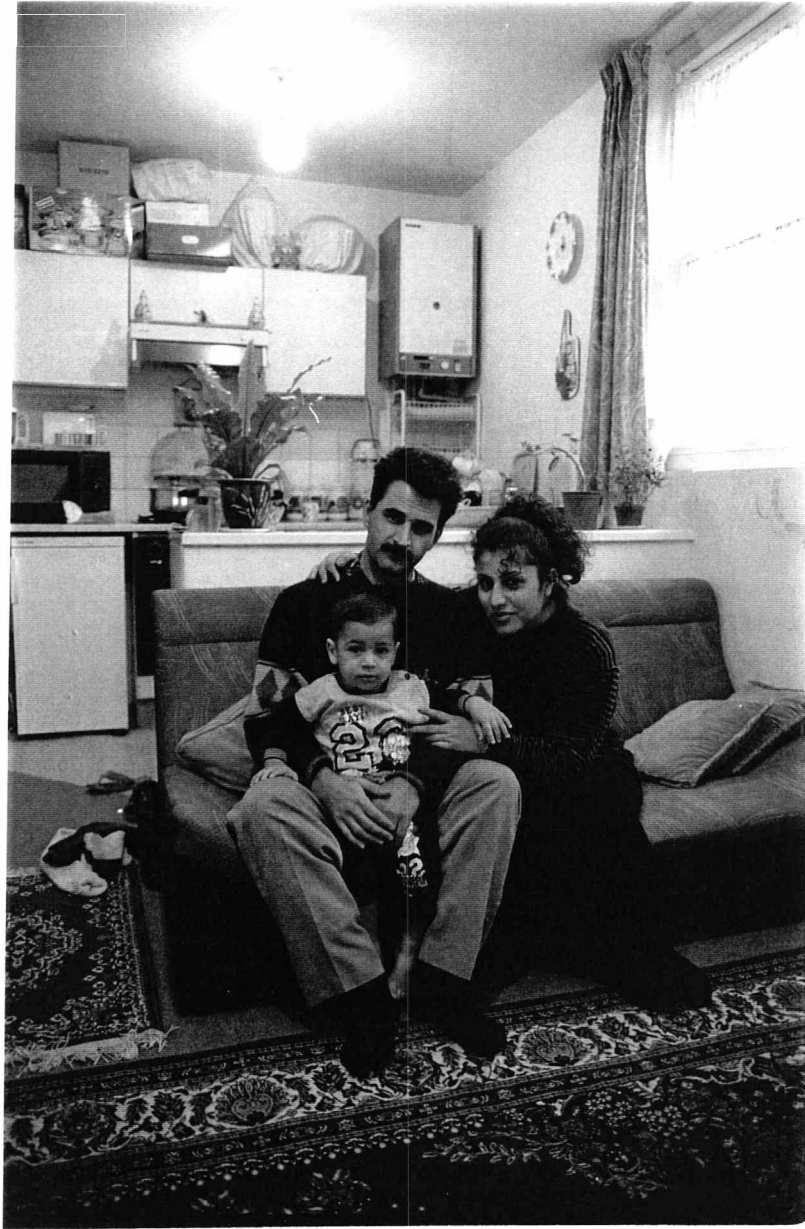
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31 and 32: Hammersmith, London, 1996

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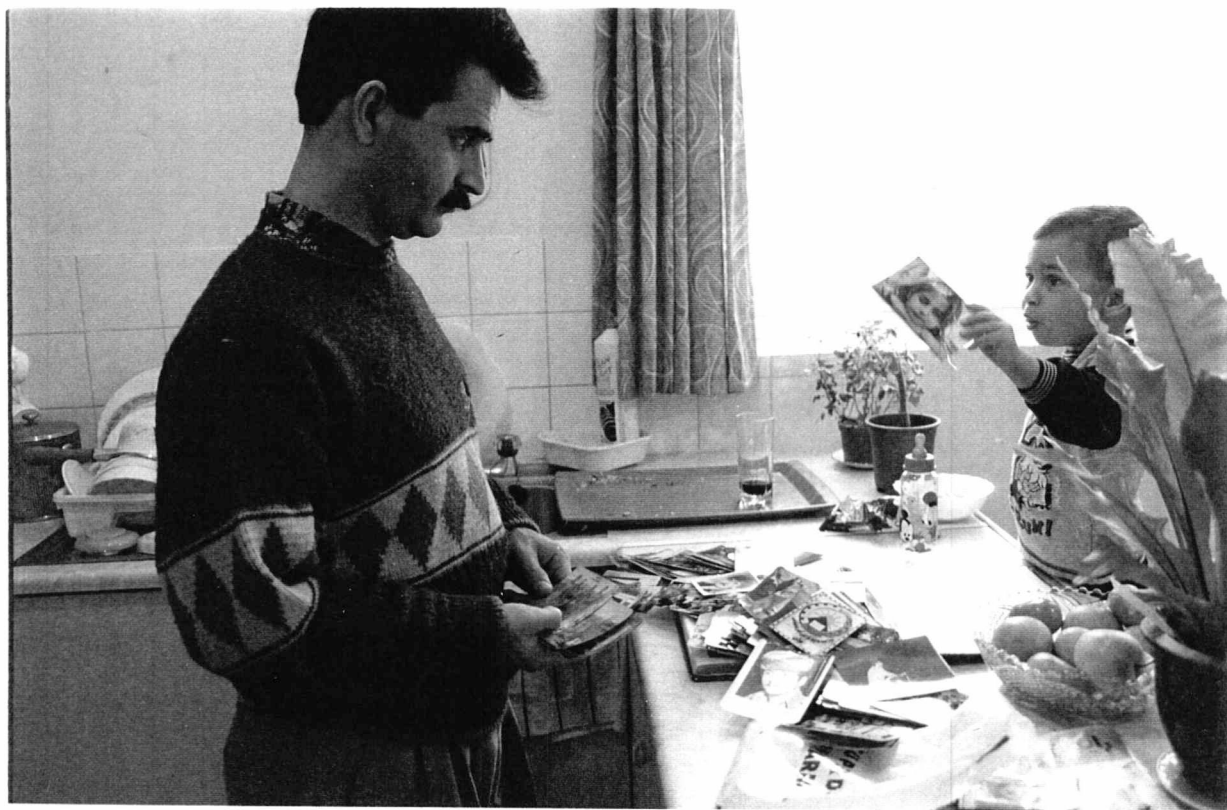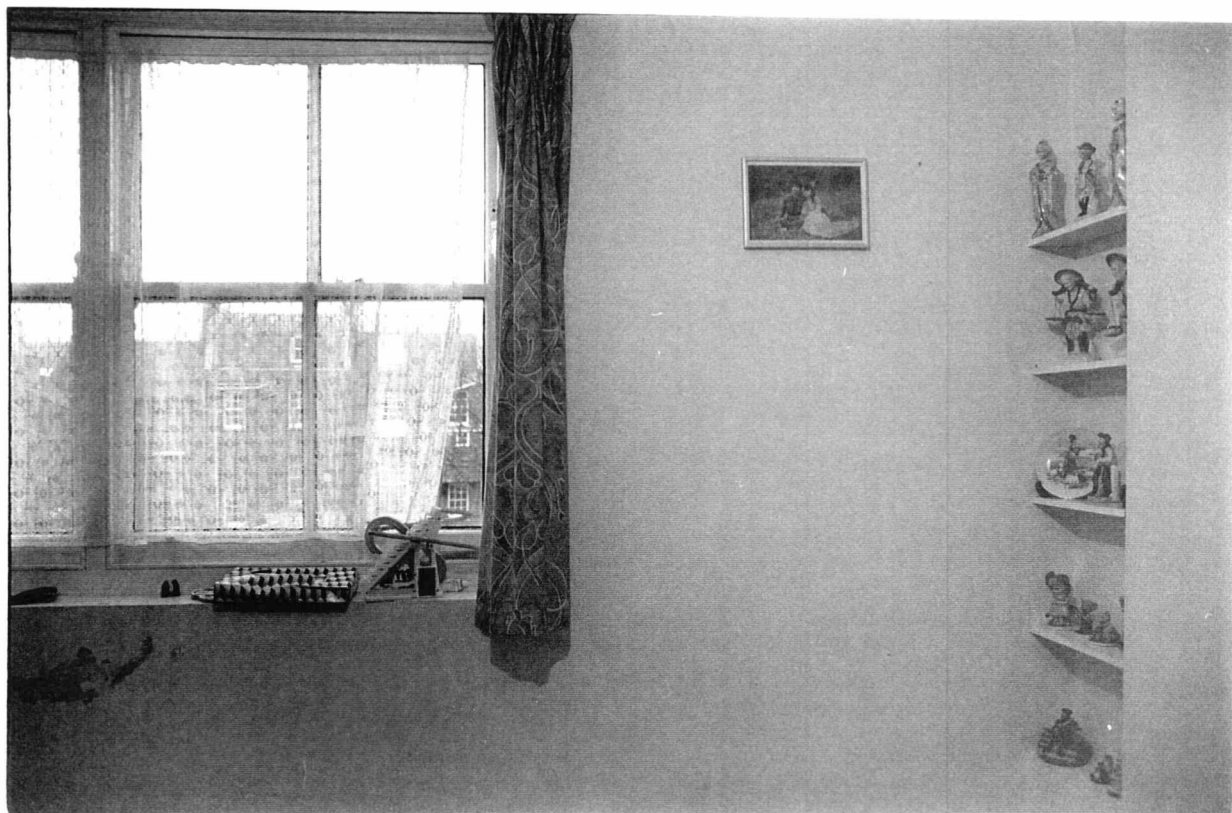
her shirt to show me the bullet wound, which I chose not to photograph.

Our second meeting took place at her council flat in Hammersmith. The small one-bedroom flat that Mina and her family lived in had a narrow hallway, and an open-plan design – where the living room is connected to the kitchen, and partially separated by a kitchen counter/ work-top. The former occupants of the flat had left the furniture in the home – a sofa in the living room, and a fitted kitchen. She told me she bought most things she had from the market – especially foodstuff, which she buys in bulk. Her home was decorated with a few pictures, and porcelain statuettes of milkmaids also purchased from the local market in Hammersmith. A framed photograph of a snow-peaked mountain (Images #32 and #34) was hung in such a way that it became the centrepiece of the living room. The height at which the photograph hung from the wall (above eye-level, almost touching the ceiling of the room) transformed it almost into a sacred object, of religious significance, something one had to look up to admire. In the foreground of the image are two very carefully arranged rifles. One could almost imagine the moments before the photograph was taken – someone running up, perhaps even the cameraman, to re-arrange the weapons, to prop up this precious structure. These guns formed a distinct shape of a pyramid, mirroring the angular peaks of the landscape in the background. There are no trees or other vegetation in this image; the rocky mountains add to this atmosphere of a hostile inhabitable landscape. There seems to be no recognizable sense of place for me as the onlooker. For us as outsiders therefore, this image may not be a particularly significant geographical location, but this was a territory she was familiar with – she told me the photograph was taken in the

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mountains where she lived. Mina smiled when I asked her about the photograph, and she said she brought it with them from home and that this image represented the KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party) – these were the AK-47 rifles the peshmeghars[1] used. She first asked if I was familiar with this make of gun, and proceeded to describe to me how to work the 'Kalashnikov' assault rifle, and imitated the sounds the gun makes when fired.

Hanging below the first photograph was a large picture of a landscape at sunset. The lush, saturated, primitive orangy-red colours, the use of the setting sun was reminiscent of postcards one would receive from a friend on holiday – they suggest a stereotypical image which is usually associated with advertisements for tourism. One could see them in the same way we respond to Athena posters of dolphins in saturated blue oceans or postcards of holiday beaches. At first glance, this image seems to jar with the content of the picture above. A 'picturesque' beach of waves and the sunset, the stretch of snow-capped mountains – then the pair of rifles, exuding a strong presence, transfixes the eye, almost confuses the onlooker. With images such as these, we become more concerned with how the image feels rather than with how it looks or what it actually contains. Their simplicity and purity adds a kind of spirituality and idealism, sustained by the nostalgic imagination – somewhat reflecting a desire for tranquillity in far-away places. In this sense, both the image of the rifles and the seascape below it reflect the nostalgic desire for an imagined and irretrievable pure place of origin. Inserted in the corners of this large framed image are two family snapshots – one of Mina and her family, and the other of two children (her

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[1] The peshmeghars are the Kurdish 'freedom-fighters', a group to which both Mina and her husband

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relatives) on a beach.

A wedding photograph of Mina and her husband (Image #33) hung on a wall in the living-room. It was photographed in the mountains of Kurdistan. She became sullen when I asked her about it and only said, "I haven't seen my mother or my father in 11 years. They could not come to the wedding." This was because both her husband and herself were in hiding, and could not reveal their location even to their parents for fear of persecution. Although this image is their wedding photograph, it remains distinct from conventional wedding portraits, which are very often studio-based and more formal in their structure. What we see here is a couple sitting on a grassy slope, adorned in clothing prepared specially for the event. I was told this photograph was taken by a friend. Also hanging on a wall in her living-room was a copy of John Constable's The Haywain (Image #31) which Mina had bought from the local market place, together with the seascape. Several family photographs were inserted into the edges of the frame. She stated that she liked the painting (just like the statuettes of milkmaids) because they looked foreign and 'English' to her.

Her husband was watching a game-show on television when I entered; he sighed repeatedly, complaining that he was bored with his lifestyle and that he could not find proper work. I asked him what items they had brought with them from Kurdistan, and he went to the bedroom and brought from there a plastic bag full of photographs. He laid them out on the kitchen work-top to show these pictures to me (Image #36). A large number of these images consisted of group snapshots of their guerrilla group mostly dressed in khaki, some wearing turbans. He picked up a portrait of

belonged.

a man, pointing out 'Aso'. There were several photographs of this man that I had come to recognize (in Image #37 - Aso's black and white photograph sits below the colour photograph of the KDP emblem). Aso was a close family friend and a peshmeghar. When they were living in the mountains of Kurdistan, he had made a promise with Mina's husband that they would name their first child after the other, in the event that either of them were to be shot and killed. Aso did indeed die soon after the agreement was made - and as promised, when Mina's child was born in London, he was to be named after him. However, when Mina was about to have her son officially named on his birth certificate, she was asked by an Englishwoman what her baby boy was to be called. Mina was then told that "Aso" sounded like a bad word and that she should call him something else. She could not find the word 'Aso' in the dictionary, and in confusion, telephoned her brother in London to ask for help. He didn't know what it meant either. The promise broken, they eventually decided to name their son Shahin, which means "hawk" in Persian.

When I asked Mina about her perceptions of England before and after she arrived, she explained that her brother arrived before she did, and therefore she knew that she would have a relatively greater degree of freedom in her adopted country. However, she also said, "When I first arrived here, I was happy but not too much. Because when I worked in the mountain ten years ago, I had a very different life. When I worked there, I worked for my people. Now, I just stay at home and look after my baby. But at least I know no one is going to kill me..." Although she is safe from persecution, this newly found 'freedom' also meant a physical and psychological displacement, a loss of self and identity.
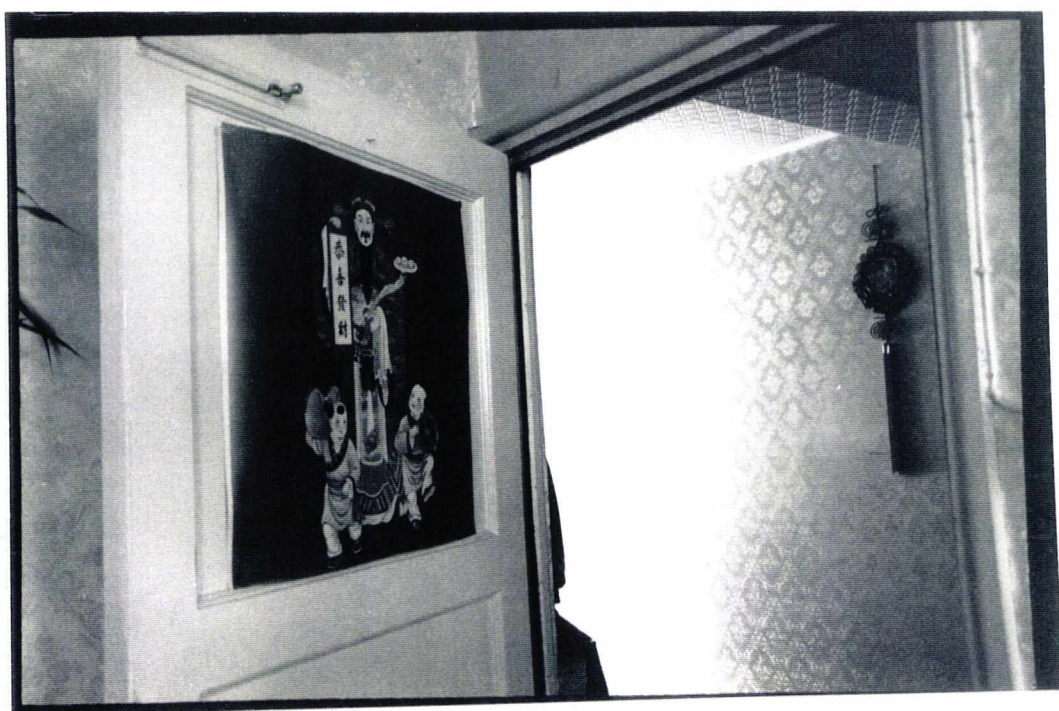
40. Walworth, London, 1997

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Hong Son Vuong is a refugee from North Vietnam. He was 21 years old when I interviewed him in March 1997, and lived with his family in a council flat near the Elephant and Castle (Walworth), South-east London. I met him through my brother, who attended the same Art College (the London Institute of Art) in Camberwell as he did. 'Son' (pronounced 'Sohn'), as he preferred to be called, lived in a small two-bedroom council flat. Traditional Vietnamese ornaments overwhelmed his living-room. He was watching 'Knight Rider'[2] on television when I arrived at his flat to interview him and he later played a videotape of his favourite Taiwanese star singing karaoke. Son gave me detailed information about specific objects in his living-room, and what their significance or functions were. From the information obtained through an informal interview with him, I understood that most of these ornaments served to provide a kind of reassurance, a re-affirmation of his family's Vietnamese identity:

> I do not see my family as the typical Vietnamese family. We might keep ornaments in the house to remind us of where we came from, but we are quite isolated from the Chinese community. My mother is still quite religious, by the way. She goes to pray at the temple sometimes.

His mother was chiefly responsible for the 'look' of the home, and although I was told by Son that she still maintained ties with her homeland (she travels there occasionally), the objects displayed in their living-room served no practical purpose but functioned mainly as symbols of a past that needs to be retained and re-affirmed. The extension or representation of the self in the home may therefore involve the collection and preservation of memorabilia and the setting up of a decorative order or structure.

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[2] 'Knight Rider' was a popular American television series in the late 1980s that starred David Hasselhoff (as 'crime-fighter') and his side-kick, the 'intelligent' talking car, Kit.

His mother's establishment of the arrangement of the living room and Son's 'distance' from it reminds us that personal identity in the home is entangled with the individual and collective identity of others sharing the living space.

The first photograph in this series (Image #40) captures the cluttered atmosphere of Son's living-room. Looking at this interior, it is difficult to imagine walking out of this space and encountering the tower blocks and council flats of Southeast London. The interior decor seems to represent nothing that is definitively 'English' – perhaps one would notice the 1950's radiator (part of the original 'fittings' that came with the flat) after consciously stripping away the excess, the overwhelming objects on display in this overcrowded space. The room appears to be almost entirely divorced from English culture, and set in another context.

The frame of this photograph is filled with objects inside its four edges – the repeated patterning on the laminated ceiling paper, complete with a cluster of three floral-shaped glass lampshades imposes itself and 'weighs down' the space. The black and white of the image transforms the space into a series of abstract shapes and forms. The living-room in this council flat was small, and every corner was filled with emblems related to Vietnamese/ Chinese culture and religion. Most of the room's contents were obtained directly from Vietnam during his mother's trips back to the country, such as the picture hanging in the centre of the wall, and the Chinese junk on the mantelpiece. On the far left of the image is an altar with the Buddhist Goddess *Guan Yin* (Image #46). The urn that sits on the radiator is called

a *Tan Xiang Lu*, and is used for the burning of joss-sticks. The Happy Buddha (with the large belly – a symbol of wealth and prosperity) is on the right edge of the mantelpiece. To the left of the image is a cheese plant, and a large 'Fortune plant' (it is believed to bring in prosperity and good luck) is on the right. The cheese-plant was perhaps in fashion in the 1960s, but is perhaps no longer as popular today. The plant may be a very small detail, but it fits in with the rest of the décor.

The social situation, the habitus was well established even outside of the home. Despite the cluttered ornamentation of his home, Son describes himself as being well-assimilated within English culture. Indeed, this degree of assimilation was regarded by some of his Vietnamese peers as a kind of betrayal, a hypocrisy towards his own 'authentic' culture, described by their distinction between the image of his exterior (the colour of one's skin), and his identity:

> Because I speak with an English accent – I left Vietnam when I was very young and spent the most part of my childhood here – and do not conform to the typical Chinese dress codes, I am often referred to as a 'banana'. This word is used to describe individuals who look Chinese but whose lifestyle and mannerisms resemble those of a "white" man. Most of the Chinese and Vietnamese here dress in that Hong Kong gangster manner, and I don't.

A lamp in the shape of a dragon is on top of the large television (Image #41). To the left of the television set is a pot of plastic oranges. These little oranges (known as 'chen' in mandarin) are usually placed inside a house during the Lunar New Year as a sign of wealth and good luck. Another pot of fake lotus plants in a blue and white porcelain bowl is displayed on the right side. The colour photograph showing the bright orange of the plastic fruit,

the blue and white bowl (which one can almost immediately associate with Chinese porcelain) and the pink hue of the lotus flowers works better than the black and white version of the image. It replicates the real scene through a more direct experience of the space. Black and white, on the other hand, documents more objectively the contents of the formal space. Son told me the jade horse on one of the speakers is there because jade is believed to have powers to 'guard the family against evil' (Image #45).

The role that language plays in determining an individual's degree of assimilation within a foreign community is significant. Son speaks both English and Vietnamese fluently, and so does his grandmother. He admits that this is unusual for a grandmother since the older generations of Vietnamese who arrived in England tended not to want to learn to speak English. Indeed, his grandmother appears to have taken up some newly-found 'cultural practices':

> I speak fluent Vietnamese... My parents do not speak much English.. However, my grandmother speaks the most fluent English. She came together with us, and lives by herself in Rotherhithe. My grandma does not act her age, and is definitely not like the traditional Vietnamese woman. She goes to play bingo several times a week, and travels around London to visit us and the rest of the relatives.

On the door to his living room is a picture of a Chinese religious priest holding up a scrolled text, which means 'happiness and prosperity' (Image #47). An ornament made of jade hangs in the small and narrow corridor leading to the main entrance of the flat (Image #48)- jade is believed to keep away evil, therefore it is a common practice for Chinese women to wear jade bracelets from a young age to protect the individual from

harm. There is a coloured poster of 'Street Fighter Ex', featuring a cartoon version of a young Asian male, dressed in martial arts gear in the entrance to Son's room.

I asked Son where he feels his 'home' to be – whether he consciously felt more British or Vietnamese. Quite significantly, his allegiance to his homeland is linked to football (a contemporary kind of 'nationalism', the same way Visahan from Sri Lanka expresses his devotion to cricket in my interview with him). He makes reference to Stanley Kubrick's Full Metal Jacket in his description of the South Vietnamese:

> I do not have many memories outside this flat. I still feel patriotic about Vietnam. (*What do you mean by this?*) Oh, I support them in football. I guess although I know more about the U.K. than about the country in which I was born, I am still in some way attached to it; and I would like to go back. Not to live there, just to see what it looks like now... I'm a Vietnamese, and I'm also British. What can I do? Frankly, I know more Irish jokes than I know South Vietnamese jokes. Sometimes I do joke with Trang (a refugee from Saigon). She likes to call me "VC"; and in retaliation, I like to tease her with something from (*Stanley Kubrick's*) Full Metal Jacket, where prostitutes are trying to chat up "soldier lovers" or "G.I.s" – they say, "Fucky! Fucky! Want some fun?"

Son would graduate in a few months with a degree in Graphic Design. When questioned about his plans for the future, he expresses a kind of resignation to what he believes is the fate of all Vietnamese migrants, regardless of how qualified they are:

> I intend to find a job in Graphics, whatever there is available. However, I know I am destined to the wok. Somehow, we always end up opening take-aways wherever we go, and whatever we do. My uncle was a VC, and has two University degrees in Chemistry and Maths, and he's still making stir-fries here.
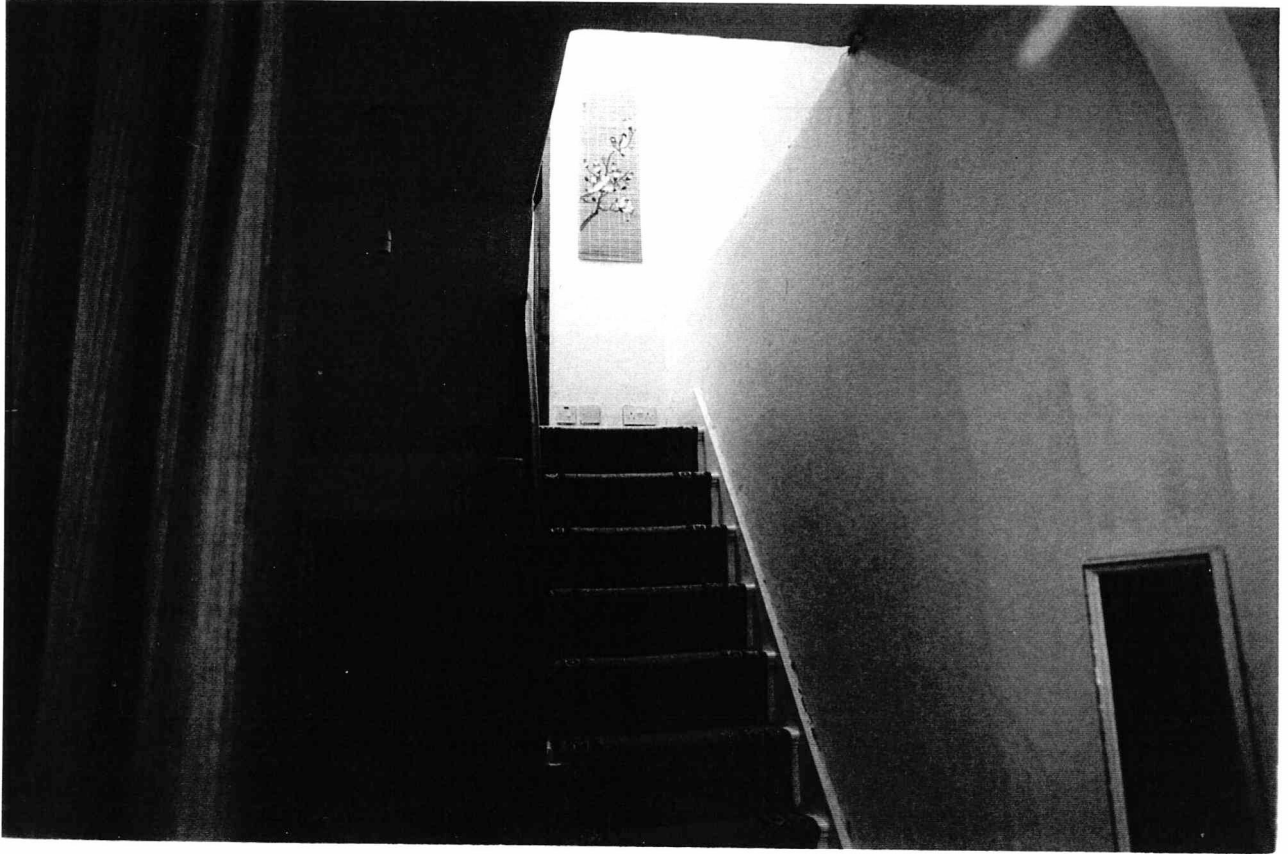
50 : Peckham, London, 1997

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Sister Nicole, a nun and refugee from Vietnam, has worked with the Vietnamese Housing Association[3] for over 20 years. Now retired, she continues to work closely with the Vietnamese refugee community in London, particularly in the southeast. My brother and his Vietnamese friends introduced me to her, and I first met and interviewed her at her home in Peckham in May 1997. Sister Nicole did not speak very much about her personal experiences but provided some detailed observations of Vietnamese culture and its communities in England:

> I think those people who are educated tend to cling to Vietnamese values and identity. My colleague in France is a well-educated lady. I was having a conversation with her one day, and I could not believe the extremes to which she was inclined to go. She said to me to encourage tradition amongst the refugee community here – that they should not be eating bread, only rice. Why is she clinging to such a symbol?(!) This only shows the fear of something exterior and not profound. For this reason, a lot of people here fear mixed marriages. However, the younger generation that was born here tends to be more open, inclined to not differentiate.

Sister Nicole's house in Peckham, Southeast London was filled with books (Rabindranath Tagore is one of her favourite poets) and decorated with Vietnamese ornaments. A map of Vietnam (labeled in French), together with a Vietnamese hat, and a picture of 'Madonna and Child' adorned one wall in her living-room (Image #51). There were several other wall-hangings of images of bamboo trees and Chinese junks, and the word '*fu*', which translates from Mandarin to 'wealth and prosperity' (Image #53). This is hung in virtually every Chinese household because it is believed to bring in luck.

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[3] The Vietnamese Housing Association is an organisation that helps to arrange housing with the local Council for Vietnamese refugees or immigrants entering the country.

She thought at the same time that it might be of interest to me to see and to photograph an embroidered rug that young Vietnamese girls had crafted at the community centre in Peckham (Image #52). As I understood from her comments in the interview, being able to sew and cook also constituted an important part of being a modern Vietnamese woman. In the interview, she describes the four main virtues which Vietnamese women should follow. She was proud of their skill and handiwork, holding up the tiger-embroidered rug for me to photograph. I took another photograph in her living room of a statue of a young woman playing a musical instrument known as a 'Gu Zheng' (Image #54). The graceful and submissive stance of the woman seemed to embody the virtues that Sister Nicole spoke about, an accurate portrayal of the female in Chinese culture: "Vietnamese identity is based very strongly on the image of their women. Vietnamese women are unashamedly feminine, projecting an image that is unperturbed, a femininity that is strong."

When asked whether or not she thought most Vietnamese in London would eventually return to the country of their origin, she replied it was an unlikely possibility because of the length of time most families had spent in this country. She also commented, that except for the minority of individuals who are 'not so open' and 'see a real danger in adopting a culture here', most members of the younger generation are increasingly better assimilated within the community, perhaps due to the fact that they can now speak English fluently. This may also be due to the fact that small Vietnamese communities are dispersed throughout London, in areas such as Peckham and Hackney, and Vietnamese shops ('that

sell more Western things as well') have been opened to cater for these groups in those areas:

> The skinheads around here even used to kick pregnant Vietnamese women, and we were always picked on. Nowadays, the Vietnamese girls are much better dressed; they look more modern, and so fit in better.

I asked her what she thought was the Vietnamese concept of 'home': "Our hearts are in Vietnam, but due to economic reasons, we stay here." Indeed, ingrained customs and its repeated practice through generations are factors which Sister Nicole felt held the Vietnamese together in a close-knit community:

> It is also ancestor worship that makes us remain very Vietnamese. It is a very profound practice to respect the dead, respect our roots. Because these are the connecting links to your history, you feel you belong. At the same time, we have photographs and pictures of the dead and also our past. It is good to establish that link to our tradition. So no matter what happens, there will always be something left there.

55: Colindale, London, 1997

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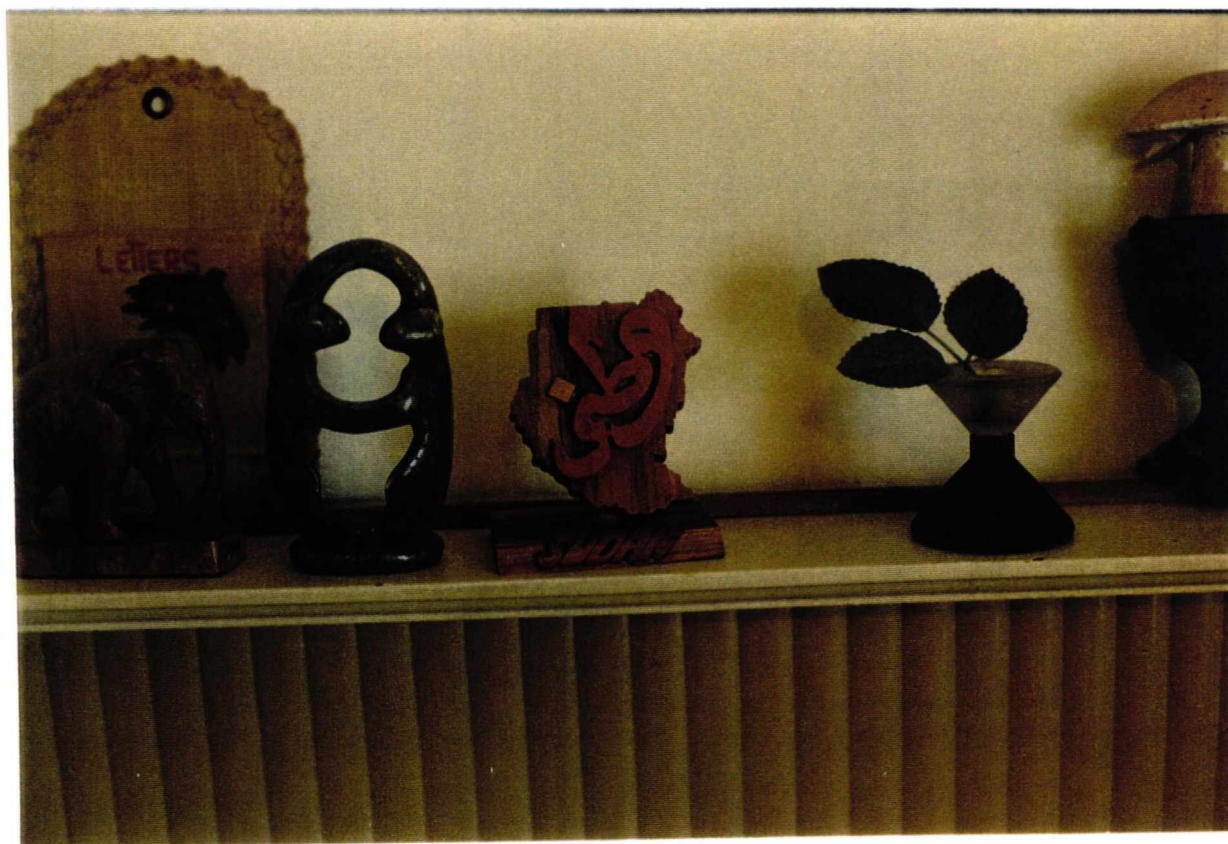
Osman Ali Hummaida was born and lived in Khartoum, Sudan, and arrived in the United Kingdom in 1992. He now works for the Sudanese Victims of Torture Group, a charity organisation based in Clapham, South London. I first met him at a conference for Sudanese women and I interviewed him in his home in Colindale, Northwest London in June 1997.

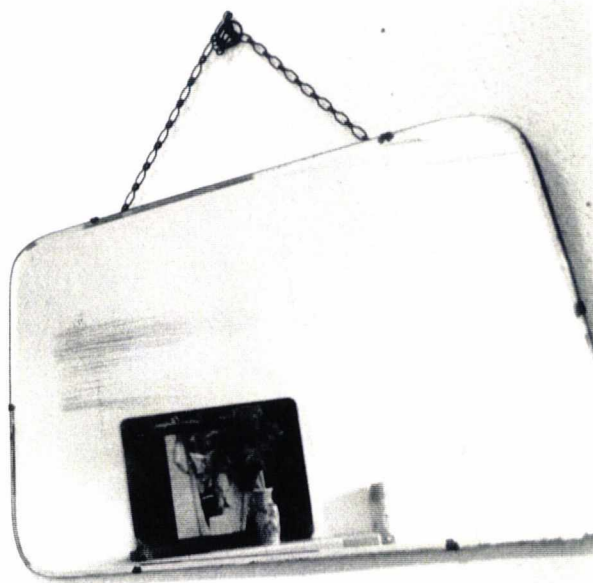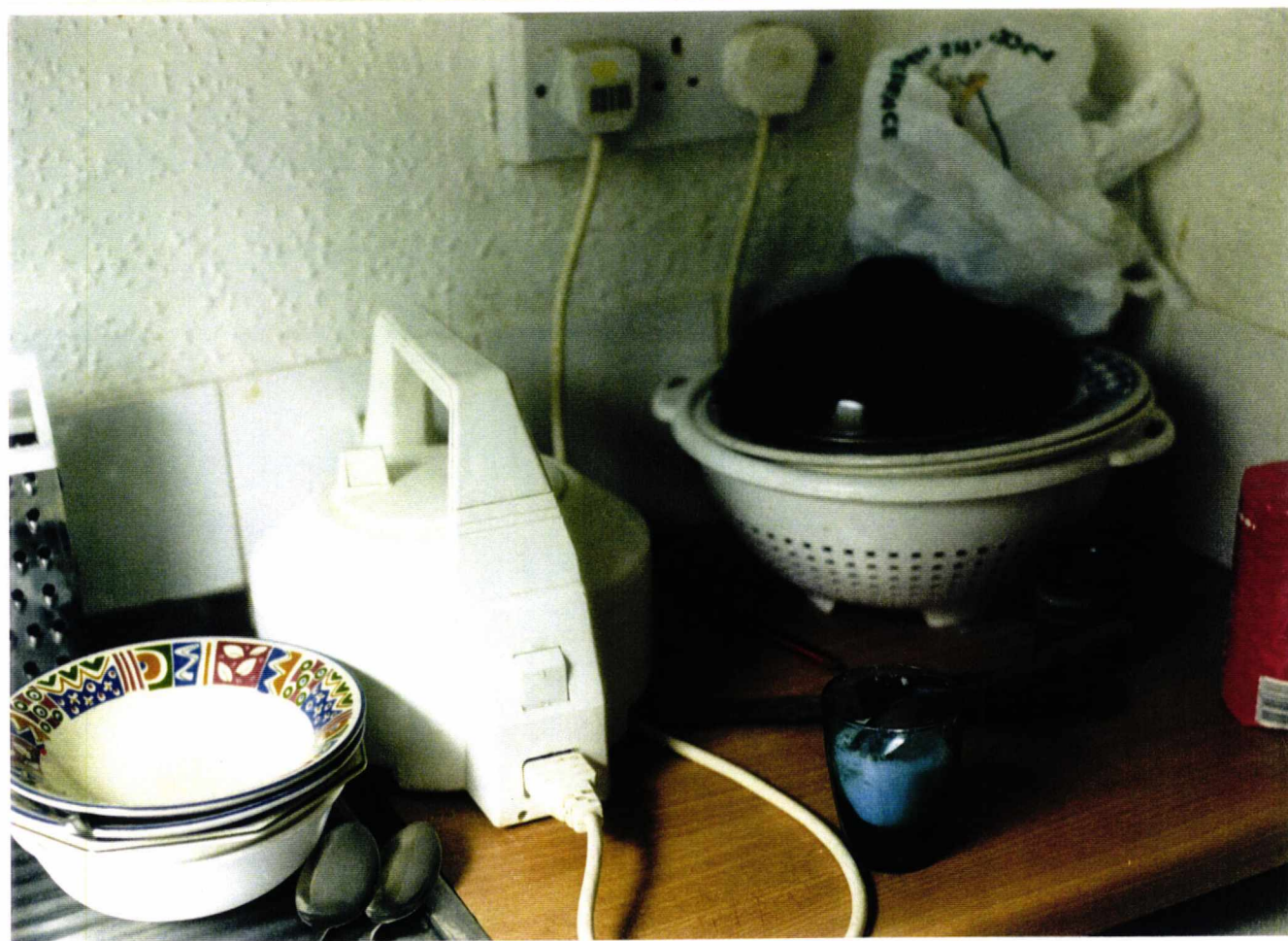Osman Ali was proud of his home. He had on a number of previous occasions mentioned to me that he was renting his own house, 'unlike other refugees who tended to live in groups'. The interior of his house can perhaps be described to be from the late modernist period, its décor traced to somewhere around the late 1950s or early 60s period. Nearly all the furniture in his home had not been chosen or purchased personally by him, having been left by previous occupants and initially furnished by its English owner. The setting seemed to be an interior of any English home. However, it had the sense of a place of 'in between' – a setting typical of rented accommodation. The living-room seemed incomplete, as if the decorating was half-finished. In this way, it resembled a transient, ambient space.

An Egyptian pouffe was laid out in front of a fake fireplace (a radiator which had the appearance of a traditional log fireplace). I was told he brought the pouffe from Egypt, on his way to England. I thought a comparison could be made in one particular photograph between the saturated hues of this Egyptian pouffe and the floral patterns of the other English cottage chair (Image #56). The fireplace, the hearth, has always been associated with the symbol of the home. Usually placed centrally in the living-room, the main feature of the room, it represents the site

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of warmth and family unity. It is then significant in symbolic terms that this particular log fireplace is a replica of an original, a superficial facade which stands in as a substitute for the 'real'. The mantelpiece, too, functions merely like an attachment, like a dashboard of a car, pieces that have been put together to resemble a whole.

Rather than presenting a perfectly 'hybridized' condition, it is the actual lack of integration that becomes significant (Image #55). This particular portrait of Osman Ali seated in his living room, against the backdrop of his fireplace and mantelpiece, reveals the experience of dislocation. What is noticeable are two distinct cultures – the man and his Egyptian pouffe, and the mantelpiece that is separate from him. The photograph, rather than represent a man proud of his home, reveals the symbolic 'emptiness' of this space. The subject within this image is like a sailor with a trunk full of his needs. His pose in this particular photograph seems almost like the consequence of the opening of this trunk and taking out its contents for display – marking the territory of his 'home'. But the magic of the trunk's contents being around no longer works and what becomes obvious is the lack of integration and the detachment of the subject in relation to his surroundings. As such, the man within the photograph becomes virtually dispensable.

Osman Ali invited me to have lunch with him. He said he had cooked a large quantity of meat the day before and could easily heat up the food. I did initially turn down his offer (he was distracted as he talked with me and therefore did not notice globules of soapsuds 'leaping' into his meat dish on the stove as

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he did his dishes at the kitchen sink). But I was reprimanded by my host who was quick to inform me that it was very rude for a guest in Sudan to refuse a meal at a friend's house: "you eat even if you're not hungry", he said. He told me the meat was preserved camel, but it tasted more like tough lamb in tomato and chili gravy.

He showed me a photo album of pictures he had brought with him from Sudan. He was, however, secretive about the identity of the people in these photographs. I discovered from another Sudanese, Mohammed Osman, that he had been previously married in Sudan and was therefore probably attempting to 'hide' the details. Osman Ali insisted on being in virtually every photograph I took inside his house, smiling and posing in almost every scene I chose to photograph. He chose to pose with the Guardian Guide in the first pictures I took. He said he enjoyed the arts and theatre – and he would be able to express this by holding the magazine. He also suggested that we should attend exhibitions together, and have drinks at 'The Paradise Bar' – a place in New Cross I was sad to say I was familiar with.

Some photographs were taken specifically with the thesis in mind, and the end-products presented purely as visual evidence in terms of its use. The photographs of the mantelpiece (Images #57 and #58) would fit into such a category. The mantelpiece in the living-room was decorated with objects, some bought from this country, and others from Sudan and Egypt. One of these was a wooden carving of the map of Sudan, with the word 'Watan', meaning 'my country' in Arabic carved in the middle and the word 'Sudan' (in English) at the bottom of the piece. I asked about the other

objects that lined his mantelpiece, and he said they meant nothing to him, and only served a decorative purpose.

I asked Osman Ali what his perceptions of England were before he arrived in this country:

> There are lots of people in my generation who perceive the West is very free - everything is perfect like in the cinema or TV.. the way the media presents them. The image of the West, even the women.. the TV woman.. it is a very ideal world. That's what I think my perception of the West is.

He also spoke openly about his experiences when he first arrived in this country, the problems he encountered as a result of his lack of knowledge of social/ cultural practices, particularly when meeting people of the opposite sex:

> Many times I embarrassed myself because I discovered that the way I approached girls was not acceptable to people. Sometimes I expect a certain response from my good intentions; and yet I get a negative response. Then I learned to neutralise myself, become more conservative. I became more accepted. It is the opposite in Sudan. People there would think you don't like them if you behaved that way. It is definitely more individualistic here, and more sense of community in Sudan.

Osman Ali commented on the fact that the move into a different physical and social context has resulted in a disruption of common practices in Sudan, and the Sudanese here have had, to a degree, to abandon former social distinctions in order to assimilate within their own group:

> Sudan is divided politically, socially and regionally. But in London, regardless of our social or political backgrounds, we stick together to compensate the feeling of being alienated in this society. Two people might never meet in Sudan - there is nothing in common. They are from different social classes, different

regions. But here, lots of people have to change their lifestyle.

Osman Ali allowed me free access into his kitchen and his bedroom. I photographed the contents of his kitchen shelves, and the utensils and kitchen equipment within this constricted space (Images #66 to #69). Unlike the relatively 'open' functions of the living room, where guests are normally entertained, kitchens and bedrooms are far more private, and generally kept unseen by visitors. These spaces may therefore reveal significant details that reflect the relationship between an occupant and his home.

In his bedroom (Image #73), I discovered another 1950s/60s radiator, similar to the one found in his living -room. Above this was a picture of a Western 'calendar' girl in a swim-suit in a tropical beach scene (Images #72 and #73). He had, however, created his own little montage by inserting on top of this European woman's face, the face of a young Sudanese girl. He did not know this girl personally, but had cropped her image out of a magazine and used it as a substitute for the white woman's face. I asked him about it; he only grinned and then took out a lottery ticket from his pocket and inserted it into the area of her crotch in the image, perhaps associating a white woman's vagina with the lottery. This image of the fireplace with the montage that he had created is crammed with cultural signs, and his response towards my queries reflected his views towards women in general:

> The domination of men over women is very strong in Sudan. Here, they try to challenge women's rights, especially when the control that they have over their women and children has become looser.. Men dominate women in Sudan. That's why even at public, political gatherings, men do most of the dancing; whereas at a

wedding, you might see women dancing.. The majority of Sudanese men here are obsessed about marrying a Sudanese woman. Some have even got their parents in Sudan to send them a wife here.. Sudanese men are allowed to stay with women before marriage. But not the women – she will be called a slag. (*How does that work? How can the man possibly stay with the woman if the woman mustn't be present?*) No, the woman must not be seen. For example, we are talking here and if someone knocks on the door and comes in, it is common in this culture. But if we were in Sudan, you will be called a slag and people will gossip about you.

A photograph I took in his bedroom – with several pairs of shoes lined on the floor, a pair of jeans hanging from the wall, and empty suitcases piled on top of his wardrobe, seemed for me to typify the migrant's transient experience (Image #70). The closet became a metaphor of the possibilities of identities; the luggage stored above a reminder of the repetitive experience of packing/ travel/ unpacking. The suitcase has come to signify mobility, displacement, and the uncertainty of identities. Irit Rogoff sees the function of luggage as a "signification of the 'degree zero' of displacement both temporally and symbolically, an originary moment after which all familiarity is lost while change and difference shape life."[4] The material possessions that one takes along in the form of luggage, and the travel away from the anchorings of these belongings are crucial to one's sense of belonging and rootedness.

I finally asked Osman Ali where he considered his 'home' to be:

Home is for me something in between... My personality consists of a combination of being born in Sudan with certain attitudes, cultures. I might have had bad attitudes towards gays or lesbians, but I don't have those prejudices anymore.

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[4] Irit Rogoff, <u>Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture</u>, New York and London: Routledge, 2000, p.36

Image #74 focuses on the aesthetic arrangement of lines on the bed and curtains illuminated by sunlight in the background. A photograph is either aesthetic, or symbolic. This particular photograph has to be approached aesthetically, as it offers few means for it to be symbolically interpreted within cultural terms. The aesthetic, in this sense, is perhaps found in the realm outside of language, revealing a world outside of this world, beyond what we normally look at or experience. This incomprehensibility as a characteristic of some photographic images, where visual information is provided or offered, and yet it cannot be read or understood establishes its nature as a 'cipher'.

I accompanied Osman Ali to his place of work in Clapham, where the 'Sudanese Victims of Torture Group' is based. He showed me drawings of methods of torture that the Sudanese in the South used on people. Here I met Baghi (Image #75), who was also from Sudan and worked for the agency – he had one wooden leg, a prosthetic limb to replace the loss of his leg through torture. He had been made to stand in a barrel of ice cold water. Baghi has three wives, and broke down in tears when I asked about his experiences; he also asked if I would be interested in marrying him.

76: Bayswater, London, 1997

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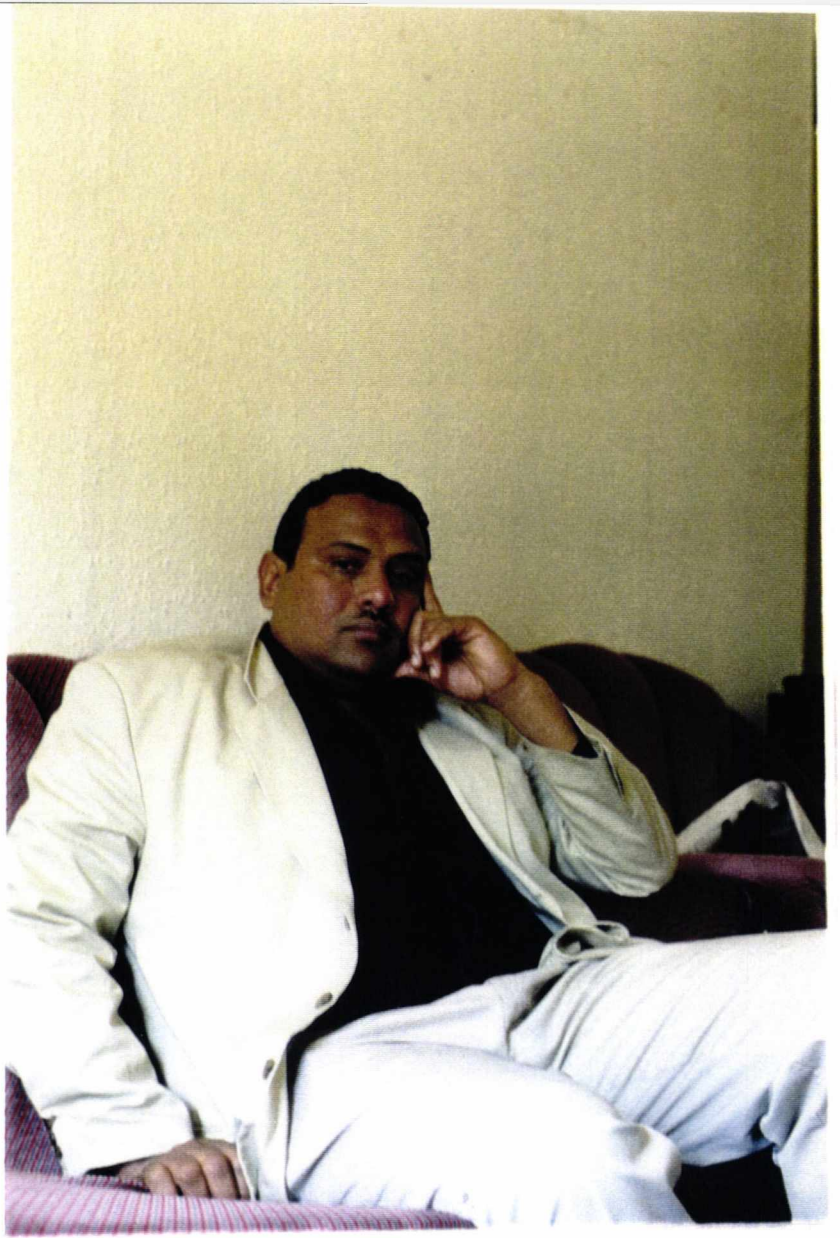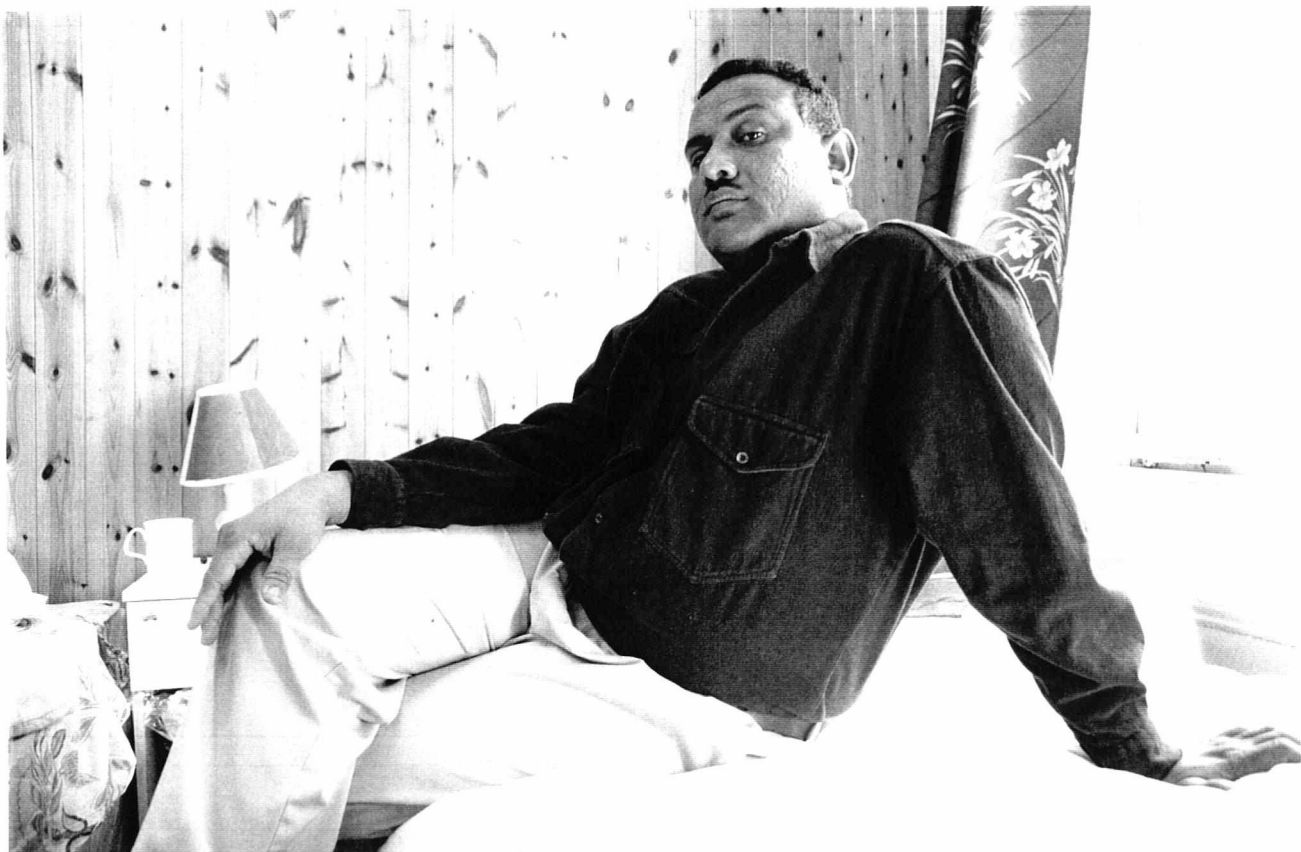
Mohammed Osman Eltahir is one of the four leaders of the Sudanese community in London. He was born and lived in Berber, North Sudan. He was a member of the Sudanese Communist Party, and in 1992, arrived in London seeking asylum. I first met him at a party for refugees organised by the Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum in Ladbroke Grove, and he agreed to help with my research. We arranged our first meeting in the Green Man pub along Edgware Road in February 1997, where I interviewed him.

I questioned Mohammed Osman, in his role as one of the leaders of the Sudanese community, about the experience of the Sudanese in Britain, and whether the community was a close-knit one. He replied as follows:

> Everything is totally different back in Sudan. We are a very close-knit community, and live in extended families. We like to be together. This way of life has followed us here; we are friendly to each other and keep similar life patterns. I think this is mainly because it is very difficult to fit into society here. The Sudanese people here feel lonely, and miss our home country. We stick to our own people and rarely interact with other cultures here.

I also asked him if he still kept in contact with his family in Sudan. His response was not purely with reference to his immediate family, but in relation to the people of his country. He also tried to describe the extent of his sense of alienation:

> I still keep strong relations with my country, and would not like to settle here permanently. I miss my family, my sisters and brothers, and the people in my country... I feel completely outside of British culture and way of life. I am still very, very much a Sudanese. When I meet another Sudanese on the bus or on the train, or wave to a fellow Sudanese on the street, I feel immediately close to my people.

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I asked Mohammed Osman to elaborate on his feeling of being an outsider in this country:

> For everyone, for all Sudanese here, it is difficult to find jobs. But the largest problem that Sudanese people encounter here is not having enough women. But the other night, I went out to a disco with my friend, and when we were leaving late at night, two young English girls with short skirts came to us. They were offering, you know... (*You said there weren't enough women. Do you mean Sudanese women especially? Would you only marry another Sudanese?*) No, I'm not fussy. Of course I prefer a Sudanese woman, but I am open to international races. Sometimes, Sudanese men here telephone their families in Sudan to ask them to send them a Sudanese woman here to get married.

I met Mohammed Osman Eltahir on a separate occasion at Bayswater where I photographed his 'temporary' home. He was sharing a rented flat with a friend, and planned to move into another flat along Edgware Road.[5] There were several people re-flooring his kitchen when we arrived at his flat, which was above a shop (an estate agency) along Bayswater High Street. Therefore, my photographs of this one-bedroom flat are centred on the sparsely furnished living-room and bedroom.

The first photograph depicts Mohammed Osman Eltahir's living-room (Image #76); its 'look' may be interpreted as a modern version of a tent, a temporary abode containing only the basic furnishings usually found in rented accommodation. The carpeted room contained a sofa set, coffee table, television, and a sealed-off fireplace with an electric radiator. The image captures the atmosphere of the flat as a space that was not personalized. In

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[5] They lived in an area well-known for its high concentration of the Arabic community in London who reside and own businesses (such as restaurants and estate agencies) in the surrounding area. Indeed, the Bayswater and Queensway area, like Edgware Road, is often referred to as 'Saudi Arabia'. Migrants from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates and others from a similar region frequently gather in places such as the large Whiteleys shopping and entertainment centre along Bayswater High Street.

fact, little effort had been made to transform the flat into a home. Although the least amount of energy or expense has been invested in the décor, human activity has left its traces.

This sense of emptiness suggests the sense of a waiting-room, a place in which a lost soul becomes nostalgic of broken connections. The natural, available light used in this photograph evokes a certain potent atmosphere within the room. There is a stillness to the image that evokes the time of waiting. The transit lounge at an airport, the waiting room at a train or bus station are classic spaces of waiting, of passive thoughts. Although human beings are absent from the scene, objects around the room (the telephone on the floor, the various remote controls for the television) sets up the possibility that this space is actually occupied. The implication of activity, not its transaction, is presented in the photographs. Rather than presenting the viewer with direct, literal representations of the activities that occur within these homes, such information (normally produced in anthropological fieldwork – where the camera is the observer) is withheld. The 'restraint' of these images produces an indirect comment and representation of the social interactions that transpire within these homes. In this way, my work is experiential, determined partly by my own interaction with the people I interview, and my experience of these spaces.

The use of potent spaces that are not yet 'filled' and the subsequent construction of narratives around the photograph echoes the loaded psychological spaces which Gaston Bachelard explored in

The Poetics of Space[6]. This approach to photography is reflected in Jean Baudrillard's recent series of photographs in which presence is signified by conspicuous absence.[7] Indeed, Keith Patrick[8] intensifies the viewer's role as participant in an interactive process, and states that narratives that are uncertain or open-ended creates a sense of voyeurism and trespass. In these domestic interiors, it is not the displacement of the familiar that gives meaning but the clear sense of a narrative withheld which generates a sense of trespass.

The photograph, containing details that refer to possible events and recollections, suggests a fragmented story and encourages the construction of narrative. Like Minimalism, the photograph works on the principle of having "almost nothing" in the frame: stripping away excess, or the elimination of distraction. Take for example a virtually anonymous image with few objects in it. When one is presented with an object, we are conditioned to respond as subjects. However, how does one respond to an image which defines and delineates virtually empty spaces, where the objects are ourselves? The absence, the virtual lack of objects is a challenge to the viewer to imagine the object, luring the viewer into a story-telling narrative. Like the sparks of illumination we find in memory, these extracts are like things left over. The photograph works through a kind of anticipatory inactivity, where the remembered past is 'called upon' to fill an empty space. Charged with potential, they signal events that lie elsewhere, outside of the frame, leaving it open to the viewer to

[6] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994
[7] Jean Baudrillard, Photographies, also in Nicholas Zurbrugg (ed.) Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact, London: Sage Publications, 1997
[8] Keith Patrick, 'Sites of Trespass' in Contemporary Visual Arts, Issue 33, p. 43

decipher its secrets.[9] The viewer possesses no knowledge of what is happening outside of the frame, and at the same time, cannot help but imagine an off-frame space, hallucinating his or her desires[10], filling and shaping this emptiness with dreams. The manifestation of dreams and the imagination all function to postpone the recognition of the reality of this "lacking" of coherency, the openness of this empty space. Fantasy, in this instance, works to reassure the viewer as subject, providing him or her with the illusion of a whole. As Octave Mannoni has remarked, the "I know very well, but..." was considered by Freud to be exemplary of the separation of knowledge and belief.[11] This "willing suspension of disbelief" is similarly accomplished in photographic representation itself, where the viewer knows that the photograph is only a representation of absence but, nevertheless, continues to believe in its reality. Both the fetish and the representation stand in for precisely that which is (perceived to be) absent. This self-consciousness is part of the process instigated by the poetic image.

The second image (#77) is a photograph of objects left on his mantelpiece and they speak about an 'economy' of needs – a white comb, several pens, a photograph of a man reclining into a sofa, a pair of nail-clippers, an instant single-use camera, and copper

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[9] The contained emptiness embodies what the phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas calls the *'there is'*: the elusive, blank moment, charged with potential, that marks the threshold between nothingness and existence. Meaning here is found partially in "non-sense", in the suspension between points in tension. This "between" is similar to what traditional Chinese art understood as the "Breath in the Intermediate Void", which "lives in the heart of all things, serving as the guide for the two Vital Breaths while keeping them in the relation they sustain with nothingness, consequently enabling them to achieve separation, transformation and unification." (Trin T. Minh-ha, Artforum, Summer 1990, p.132-33) When confronted with a partial whole, we re-invent our story, drawing scenes from different corners of our minds. Bachelard states that in inventing images which reveal and express the intimacy of the world, we are also remembering (The Poetics of Reverie). Memory here functions as an archive, and what was submerged is now illuminated.
[10] Roland Barthes, A Lover's Discourse, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978, p187

pennies. These objects could constitute part of the baggage of a traveler, or things that are emptied from one's pockets after a trip. As sparingly as they appear in the photograph, these objects perform the most basic and necessary of functions - indeed, for the refugee who flees, necessity is about economy, the excess would have been gradually stripped away. What one is then left with are remnants.

I took several portraits of Mohammed Osman. A particular image of him in his living-room (Image #79) reflects his boredom (he is leaning into his right fist against an arm-rest); the empty wall-space and the unoccupied seating around the main subject, and the blank television screen heighten the sense of his isolation within his own familiar, living-in environment. I asked him about the fresh red roses that were on the mantelpiece (as an outsider, I found it unusual for someone who seemed to make very little effort in transforming or personalizing one's private space to want to decorate it with fresh flowers). He simply replied that he occasionally buys flowers to make the flat look better, especially when a guest was expected. The pair of coloured photographs that show Mohammed Osman seated, and the other image below it showing a portion of his living-room, works in terms of the presence and absence of the main subject (Images #81 and 82). The colours of the carpet, sofa and curtain, and the use of light and shadow in the second image evoke a stillness and presence, which almost brings these inanimate objects to life.

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[11] This is cited by Christian Metz in his article "Photography and Fetish" in Carol Squiers (ed), The Critical Image, pp 155-164

In the bedroom that he shared with his friend were two single beds, a bedside cabinet with a table-lamp, a wardrobe, sets of drawers, an electric heater and a television. The walls in the bedroom were laminated in 'pine-effect', also known as 'pine veneer', which Mohammed Osman described as being 'ugly' and that he hated it. His portrait (Image #83) photographed in his bedroom captures his self-image as a dominant 'big' leader of a community. Two more photographs show other aspects of the room – its bareness, similar to the lack of filled-in space in the living-room, depict a dwelling that is unrecognizable as a personal space. Rather than being a stable site within which one re-shapes or re-constructs (whether in relation to ideas of the 'original home' that has been left behind, or fantasies of a coherent future), Mohammed Osman's home functioned merely as a temporary abode, and possessed the alienating atmosphere of a waiting-room. Indeed, the landlord of the property furnished the entire flat; its mismatched furniture is a typical characteristic of rented accommodation. A small album of photographs was all Mohammed Osman brought with him when he fled Sudan.

I particularly liked the blueness of the photograph taken from the bedroom of the main street (Image #86). Bayswater High Street is lined with shops that sold newspapers from the Arab nations, telephone cards for discounted overseas calls, moneychangers, cafes and restaurants selling food for 'local' tastes. Although the bustling life outside appears to function as a community 'support system' for the refugee, the separation between Mohammed Osman's interior world and the exterior environment was distinct.

87: Middlesex, London, 1999

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Sharaza Keshavji (or Shaz, as she is usually known) is a refugee from Uganda, and is currently working for the Hammersmith and Fulham Town Council in the resettlement of refugees in London. She is also a volunteer fosterer of refugee children who arrive unaccompanied in the United Kingdom. She is a single mother, and has two sons, one of whom was a student at the University of Kent. I interviewed Shaz in March 1999 at her house in Middlesex, London. When I arrived at her house, she offered me some Indian food usually eaten at teatime. She was explaining to me the contents of Bombay mix and other foods, when I interrupted her to explain that my mother is Indian and therefore I was familiar with what was on the table. She paused with disbelief for a moment, and then seemed to feel at ease which established an appropriate atmosphere for my visit.

I asked Shaz where she considered her 'home' to be, and what ideas constituted it:

> I've always considered Uganda to be my home. I never wanted to leave. I still remember the time I left Uganda. The other day, as part of the training for social workers, the teacher asked the students to describe certain memories. I talked about how you remember in your memories about 'goodbye'. Uganda is the only place I have ever known, the social life, the friends, the community.. We belonged somewhere. It was part of my community, of my life. I said goodbye not knowing that I'll never go back. I left in the middle of the night and did not even say goodbye to some of my closest friends. (*She began to cry and said*) I am one of these silly people who cry at the slightest thing... I remember crying on the day I left. (*she showed me a faded photograph of a blue Mercedes parked at the front gate of a house, with herself as a young girl in the front passenger seat*) You see this photograph of me in the car just before I left? This is my father in the car, and my uncle opening the door (of the car), and that's me crying. You know, I won so many prizes at school because I was in the Debating Society; I had beaded cups and other trophies which I kept above my window sill in my room. I packed nothing when I left. Now they are all gone. My family had to leave everything behind when they fled the country. I never

knew that I would never return. I always assumed that I would come back one day.

As she spoke, she showed me several photographs of herself as a teenager in Uganda - one of which was a group portrait taken at school of Shaz and her classmates. I asked her if she was in contact with them, and in reply, she highlighted aspects of her life that still connected her to her homeland, such as the food and the spoken language:

> Some of my school friends are in Canada, and I see them occasionally... It's not the same now. Even if I were to go back. The community is splintered and it can never be the same ... My people - no one is around - everyone has gone their own ways. Yet I have an affiliation with Africa, with Uganda. It is my motherland. I cook African food all the time. Sweet corn and peanut-butter sauce - it is a common dish and part of my culture, my heritage. I speak Swahili, an East African language.

Besides her job at the Town Council, Shaz also occasionally fostered refugee children who arrive in the country unaccompanied. I asked her about the process of assimilation into a foreign culture for a refugee:

> They usually have family connections here. What surprises me the most is that it is mainly young men who appear as asylum seekers. They always have telephone numbers and someone to call when they arrive here. In the 1970s and 80s, they had no information. Therefore, refugees like us from Uganda, Sri Lanka for example, had to live and work for seven days in order to exist. We were very proud and kept our dignity, and did not want to owe anything. Today, it is no longer the philosophy... I pay for my mortgage, my food. I am angry that they are abusing the whole system, and I can't fight it. The reason why I feel this way is because I know who the real refugees are: they are the victims of ethnic cleansing in Africa, the current Kosovo Albanians, the Pakistani women who are in prison on death row, and victims of domestic abuse. You know that's why I have to leave this country at every opportunity. These things make me so angry - that's why I travel so much, not only for my work.

I photographed the living room of her 4-bedroom house after

the interview – she was cooking a late lunch and invited me to stay. I asked Shaz about the large number of foreign objects that were displayed in her living-room. She described in detail where these objects were from. They consisted largely of souvenirs from the various countries to where she had travelled, and had settled.

Shaz's living-room was filled with objects from abroad. Indeed, half of her possessions were stored in boxes by her cleaner who complained about the difficulty she had in wiping all surfaces in the room. The first photograph (Image #87) shows the fireplace and mantelpiece in the living room. The batik painting on the wall was bought in South Africa, and the horse on the mantelpiece is from India. A wooden fish in the left of the image is from Costa Rica. There were several ornaments carved out of ivory from China and Hong Kong, which are believed to bring in prosperity. The metal sculpture on the left of the image is one of a set she had from Zaire.

Image #88 of the driveway, (with her son's car in view) was taken from the front door. This photograph presents a suburban, residential environment. Although accessible via the underground system, its location in Kenton, Northwest London required a half-hour journey from Baker Street station, and was therefore some distance from central London. The photograph below (Image #89) shows a shelf at the entrance to the house: the painting on the right of the image is one of a pair purchased from Santa Domingo where she lived for several years. The photograph also shows a wooden mask from South Africa, and a Kenyan copper piece with a pair of giraffes engraved.

The top of a cabinet next to the fireplace was lined with portraits of Shaz, her 2 sons and other relatives, including several pictures of herself as a graduate taken in studio settings. On another wall in the living room (Image #92) hangs a drawing of herself and charcoal drawings of her two sons on each side. Numerous dolls and souvenirs filled three entire shelves in a cabinet by the living-room window (Images #93 and #94). A miniature brass cable car from San Francisco, a furry white mobile mouse, and dolls from countries such as Greece, Thailand, and Holland were found in Shaz's treasure trove, this collection of her travels. She bought the porcelain piece in England, the ornamented jar behind it from Greece, and the small guitar in the foreground was a souvenir from a trip to Las Vegas. A close-up of the fireplace in Image #96 reveals it to be a fabricated log-effect fireplace that could be switched on electrically. It would glow with a red light when switched on, creating the effect or atmosphere of warmth. Standing in front of this are more souvenirs – a pair of terracotta warriors purchased in China. On the far right of the image sits the Laughing Buddha from Singapore's 'Tiger Balm Gardens', the brass storks on the left came from Pakistan, and the metal hat from Mexico. Several miniature statues of Mexican gods and a piece of moonstone from the Mountain of Gods lined the right edge of her fireplace. In the midst of these Mexican statuettes is displayed a statue of the Indian Lord Krishna. Terry, her Malaysian Chinese friend in New York gave her this statue as a present; he said it would bring her luck and happiness. The coffee table in her living room too, (Image #99) had a 'Prosperity tree' from Hong Kong on it, which she also believed would bring luck into the home.

100: Wembley, London, 1999

101, 102

103, 104

107, 108

111, 112

115
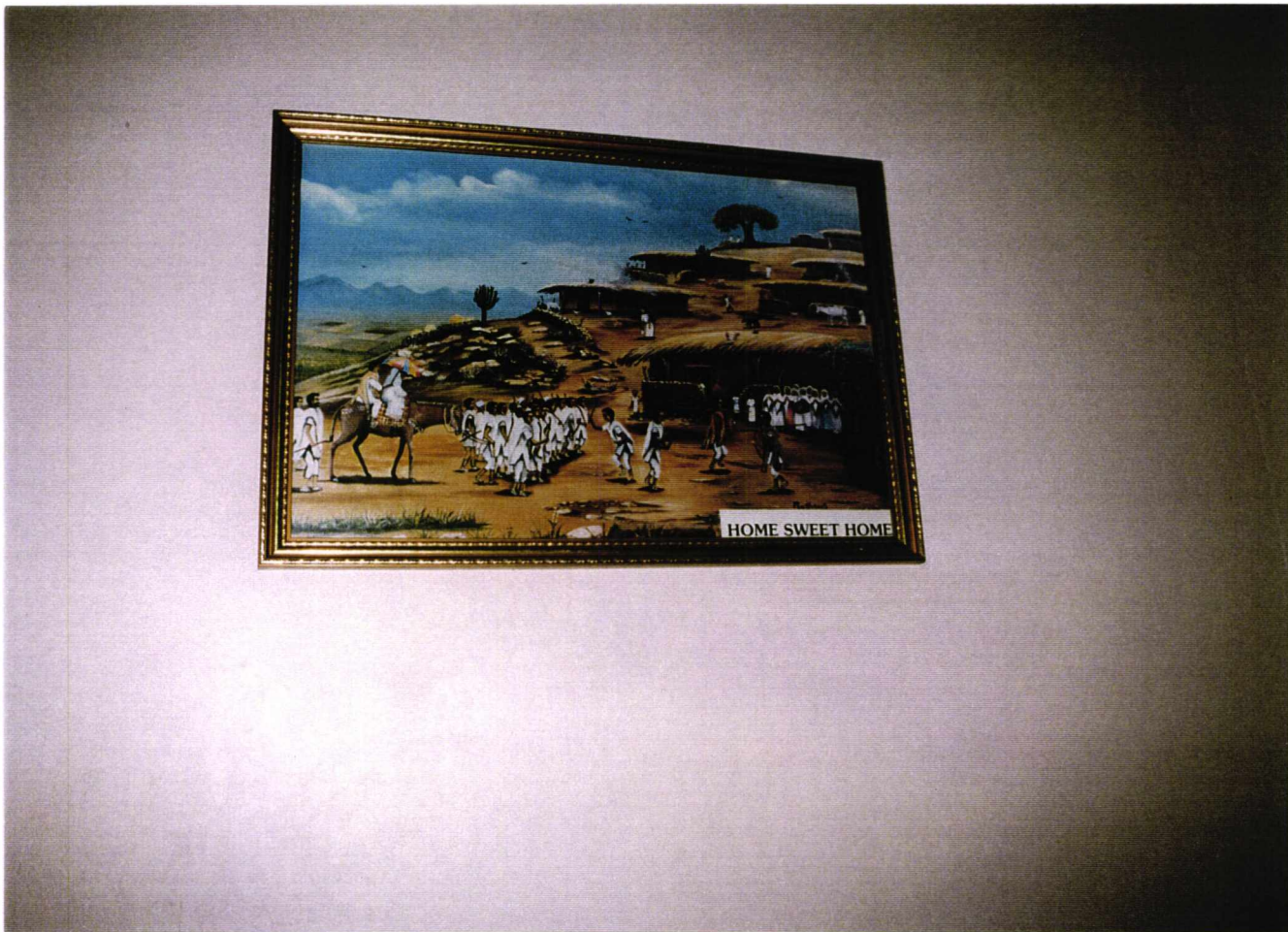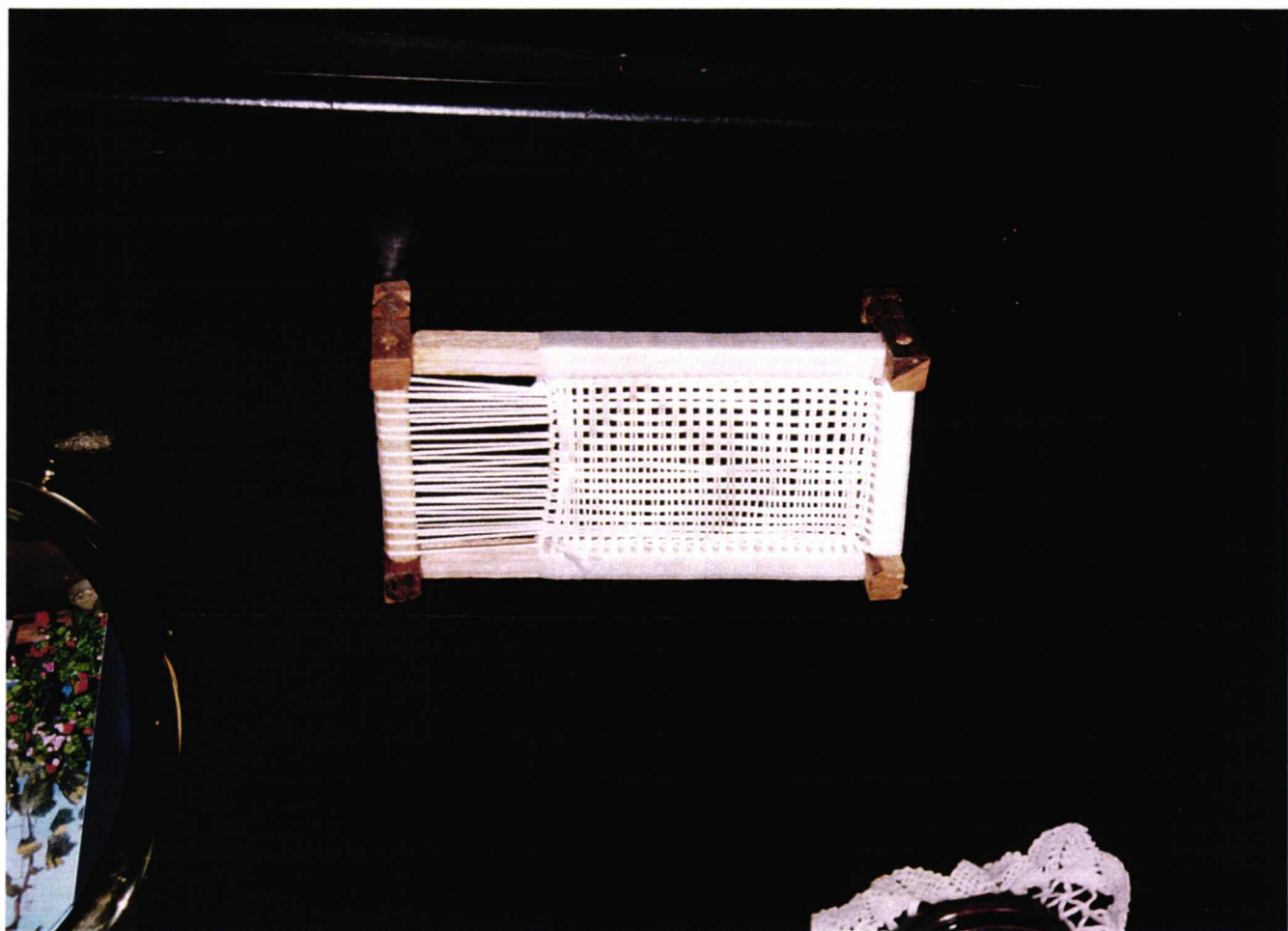
I interviewed Hiwet Abraha and her husband, Fecadu at their home in Wembley, Northwest London in March 1999. They are refugees from Eritrea and foster refugee children. Hiwet and Fecadu were introduced to me through Shaz. The couple were both members of the Eritrean freedom fighters, and due to the political situation in their country, they fled through Saudi Arabia and arrived in England in December 1989:

> We were living in the bush all our lives. We were fighting in the bush since 1974, 1975. The Ethiopian government was in control of most of the seats in our government. We were in the bush, you know, just hit and run. That's where we met.

When asked where he considered his home to be, and whether or not he was happy living in this country, Fecadu replied, "..Not me. I don't like it here." And Hiwet added, "We are stuck between two things. Our heart is always looking backwards. We are torn apart. Our children were all born here, and they don't want to go back. We don't want to destroy their future. It is an identity crisis for them."

> We were members of the Eritrean Liberation Front. I miss my past life so much, especially the way of life because back then, you never know when you are going to die. You don't owe anybody anything, you have no possessions, you have what your community has and keep a good relationship with others. You don't know when you are going to die, so you eat for today and you don't think of tomorrow. Here, nothing is the same or simple as my life in the bush.

I asked Hiwet to show me and describe more fully certain objects in her living room. I began by asking about the pieces of text which were pinned on her wall. She explained that these were bible verses written in Tigrina. There were also several other framed

religious texts in English. Fecadu had showed a gold cross they kept before he left the house for work.

I asked Hiwet what she had originally brought from Eritrea when she first came. She replied, "Nothing. We couldn't carry anything at all." I was later told that all they had brought along were their wedding portrait and a painting, both from Saudi Arabia, where they lived for a few months before travelling to the United Kingdom. It was also in Saudi Arabia where they got married and had the large wedding portrait taken. Because they could not carry much with them, they rolled up the pictures, and had them framed when they arrived here. The prints to the right and left of the wedding portrait were bought in England.

A famous Eritrean artist (now resident in Saudi) produced the painting they brought with them from a Saudi Arabia. She tried to recall his name, but could not, and said he painted many images of life in Eritrea. She said she had another of his paintings, of Eritrean children playing. The particular painting that was on display was framed and hung at the top of the stairs (Image #102). She had also inserted a sheet of paper containing text typed in English: 'Home Sweet Home' into the bottom-right corner of the painting. Hiwet explained that this particular painting depicted life in the highlands; she was born and lived in the highlands and then moved to the lowlands where her father had found a job. She then went on to explain various elements within the painting. It depicted a scene just before the wedding. The bride is seen on the left of the painting arriving on horseback; the groom was possibly one of the men in the crowd. The people on the right were performing a ceremonial dance to welcome the bride into the

village. She said they kept animals in the village, and the chicken on the roof and the black dog represented this. She pointed out the lowlands in the left middle of the image, and said they planted millet and other types of grain. Houses in the highlands were made of clay and stone and roofed with straw. She said it was significant that houses in the highlands had to have flat roofs like these, as opposed to the slanting roofs of houses in the lowlands, because it was very hot there and had to keep the temperatures low. A woman is painted into the far right corner, and shows her sitting on the ground outside her house grinding millet or beans. Hiwet explained that was the way to do it, and to carry water or crops, like the woman in the centre of the painting. The tree on top of the hill represented the place were the old people gathered to tell stories, or where the leaders of the village met to resolve problems. She said if anyone in the village had a disagreement with someone else, the entire village would congregate under that tree to resolve the problem. Hiwet said she admired this painter because what he had painted was so life-like and was a true reminder of what her past life was like.

I asked about the large print of a girl outside her living room (Image #116). She looked a little embarrassed and said her husband had bought it from the antiques or second -hand market in the Wembley Park area. why did he like it?, I asked. She said it was probably because the girl in the picture was reading a bible.

I also noticed she had several Chinese jars and paintings which she bought in London. She said she simply liked Chinese designs. Hiwet was keen to show me the 'traditional' objects from Eritrea that she still used in her home (Images # 103 and #104).

These ranged from clothing, to cooking ware, and baskets to store food. This basket, however, was on display and not often used. She showed me a few of her traditional dresses which she only wore on special occasions (Images #113 and #114). She said she only wore the blue and white dress at a friend's wedding the previous weekend, and braided her hair the traditional way, and if I had been there I would have seen it. She was very enthusiastic, however, about displaying these clothes for me to photograph. She laid them out one by one on her living-room sofa. Hiwet also showed me a photograph of her husband in a traditional Eritrean outfit; it was displayed on a shelf next to the sofa. Similarly, Images #111 and #112 depict a table in a corner of their living-room which displayed photographs of Hiwet's mother, and father-in-law when he was serving in the Italian army. Studio photographs of her children and other family photographs were also on display in the cabinet, and on these tables.

When I opened the display cabinet in her living room to photograph the objects inside, the creeping plant on top of it became tangled in the doors. She pushed its leaves aside for me, and told me the plant keeps growing but she cannot bear to throw it away because it had been with her since she arrived in this country 10 years ago. The cabinet contained dolls of people of different walks of life in Eritrea, adorned in traditional clothing (Images #107 and #108). Also displayed were a miniature mud hut, the kind that she lived in, and a bed that Eritreans in the bush slept in. These items were sent to her by relatives, and they function as tangible symbols of her homeland, representing her connection to a past way of life.

117, 118
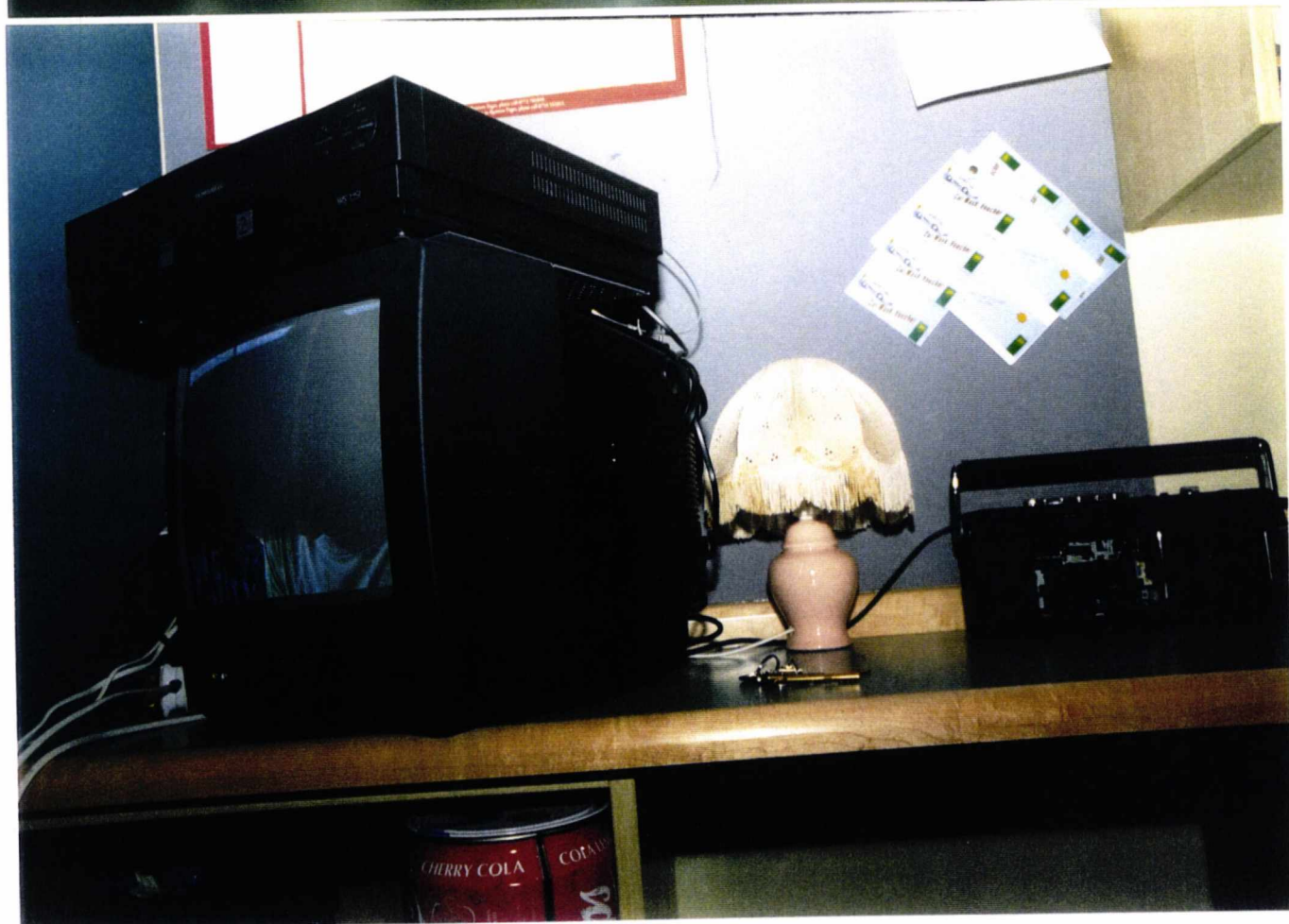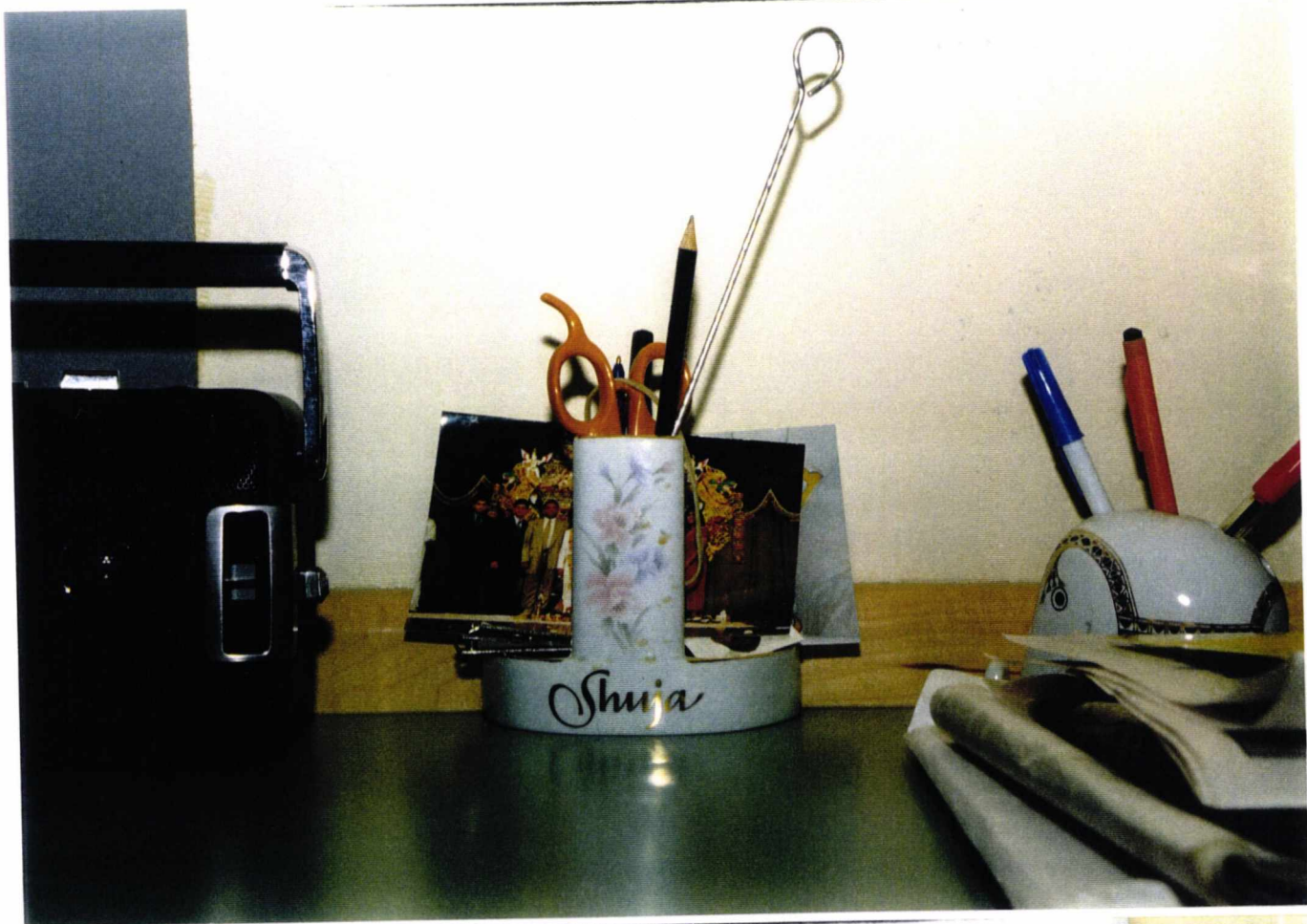
119, 120
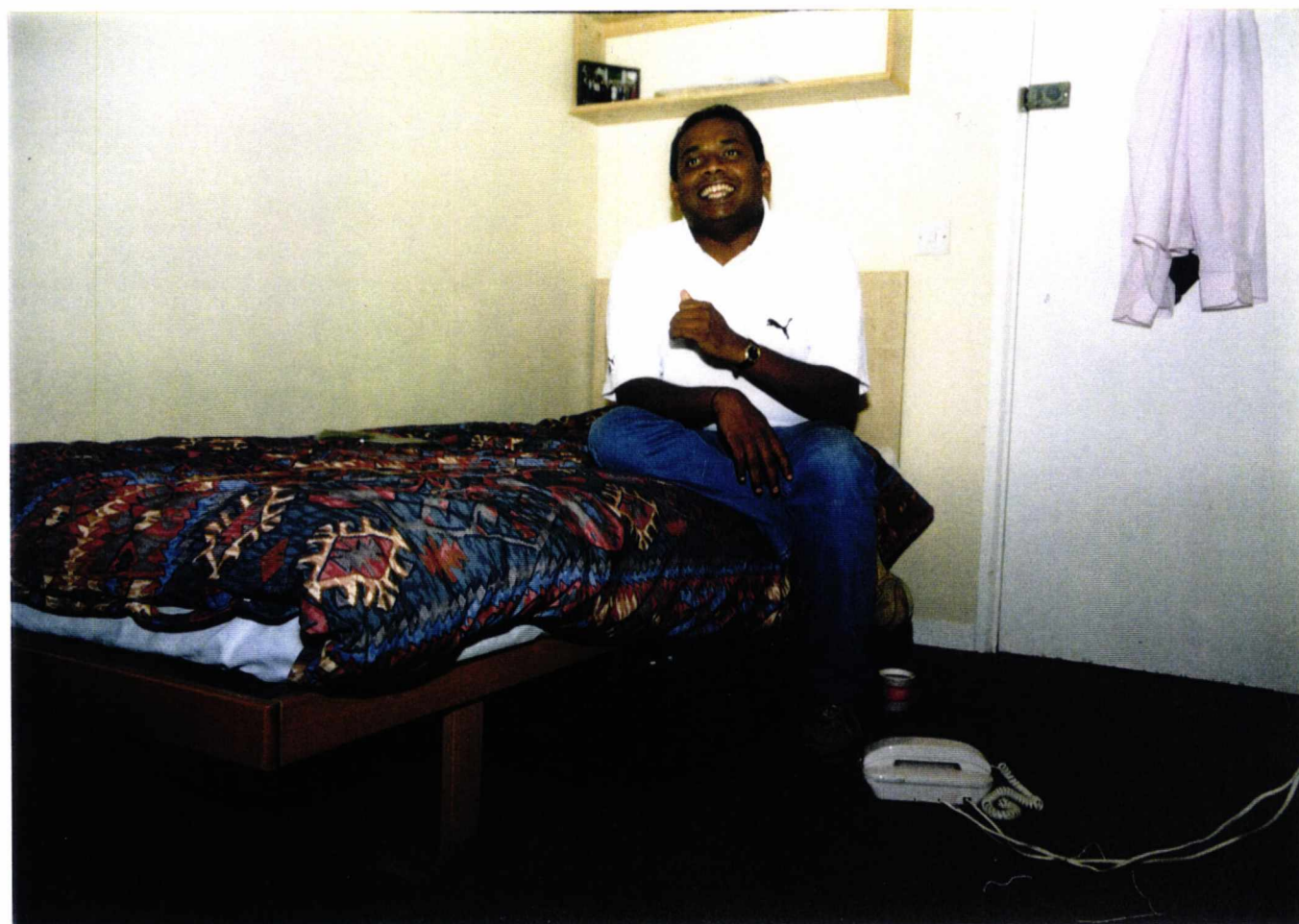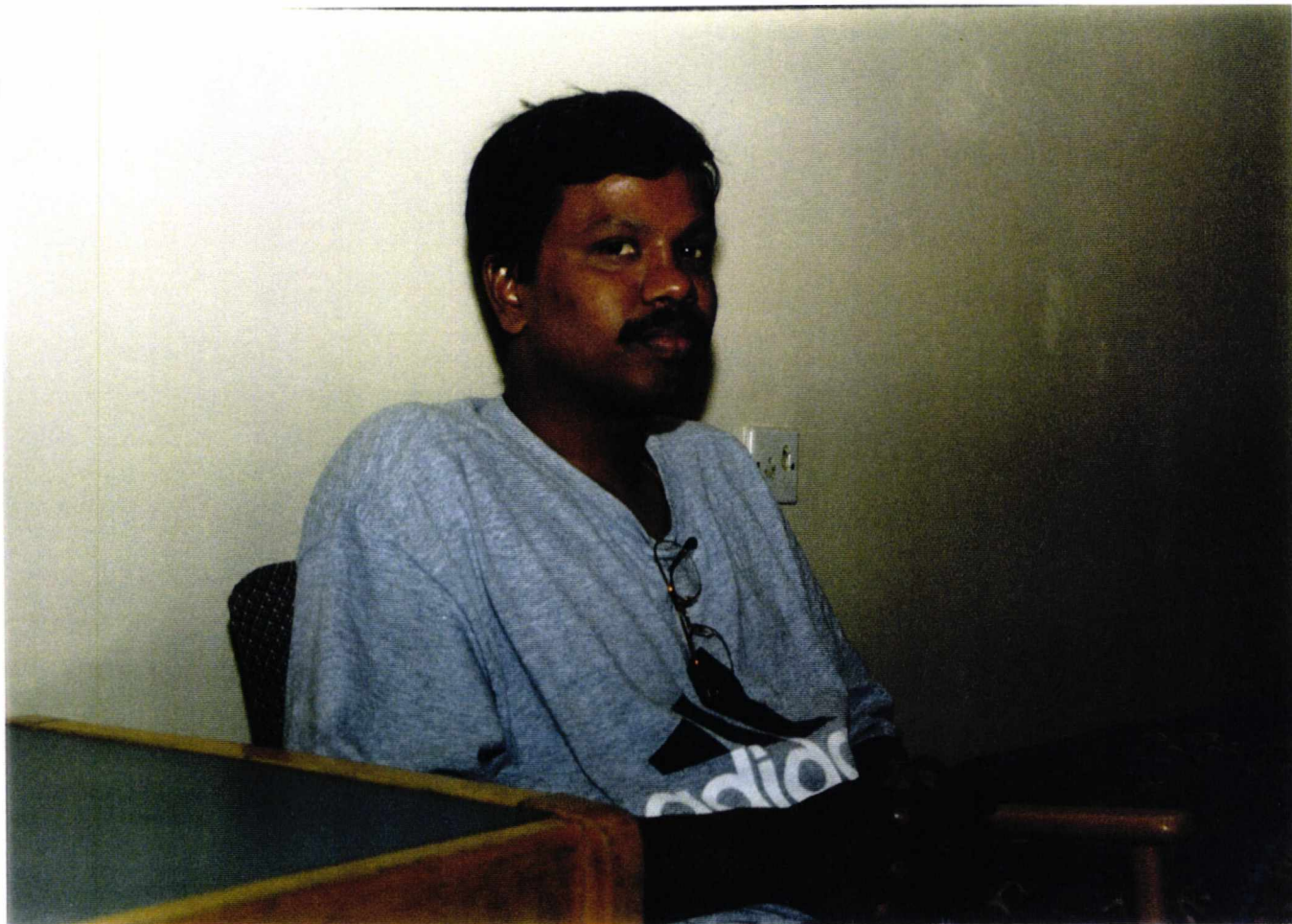
121,122

Shuja Anas was 27 years old and from Colombo, Sri Lanka (Image #117). He was living in a rented room in YMCA, Wimbledon when I interviewed him in September 1998. When I arrived, two of his friends from Sri Lanka (Nanthan and Visahan) were also present. Shuja is currently a senior accountant in Baker Street. He was granted exceptional leave to remain (ELR) in England, but has also applied for Canadian citizenship, and was hoping to get a passport in 2 months and move there. He plans to eventually move back to Sri Lanka: "My idea is to set up a proper business there. My home is in Sri Lanka; my family and friends are in Sri Lanka. My sister is in Dubai."

Shuja arrived in London in 1991. I asked him if he felt assimilated into British society since he had been here for a while. He simply replied: "I feel Sri Lankan - I was born one. I still keep in close contact with my family in Sri Lanka. I send them money every month to support them."

The room that Shuja lived in for £80 a week at the YMCA Wimbledon (breakfast and weekend dinners included) was sparsely filled with the bare essentials. Although he had occupied the room for over a year, it had the distinct characterless quality of most university student accommodation. Basics such as a pair of fire-resistant curtains, a single bed, a telephone, a wall-shelf, a desk and chair, and a fitted cabinet with sink and mirror were provided. Shuja had few belongings of his own in this room - a television set, video recorder, radio, pen holders and stationery, a yellow floral print towel (which was bought in China and a gift from his father), clothing, prayer rug, table lamp and a few photographs. In Image #120, Several BP vouchers were pinned on his

notice board – Shuja worked on the weekends as a cashier at a BP petrol station to supplement his £33,000 income as an accountant. I asked him if these possessions were all he had. He replied:

> I didn't bring much with me from Sri Lanka. What's the point of keeping anything, even books, when I have to move everything everywhere? This is my prayer rug, and that's my towel. My father bought it from China in 1986, and gave it to me in 1991 before I came here. See, I'm still keeping it.

He said he has had a reasonably good life in this country and that there was a large Sri Lankan community in London: "I have lots of friends in Harrow, about 100 of them. If you go into one house, you find about 30 people living there."

Thamsy-Panchadcharam Nanthakumar (or 'Nanthan' as he is known to his friends) was 32 years old, and is from Batticaloa, eastern Sri Lanka (Image #121). He lives in a shared house with Visahan and another friend in Wembley. He was working as a systems operator for Tesco, and plans to permanently settle down in England. However, he also said, "I still feel very much Sri Lankan. I like our culture. There is no change about this – I don't think there ever will be a change here. I just feel very Sri Lankan and close to the community. But we don't really celebrate Sri Lankan festivals, maybe just go to the temple on that day. I am a Hindu and still practice Hinduism." Visahan (Image #122), Shuja's other friend, was from Colombo, Sri Lanka, and arrived in London in 1987. When asked where he considered his home to be, he replied: "Physically, this has become my home. But at heart, there. Here, I play cricket and live for cricket."
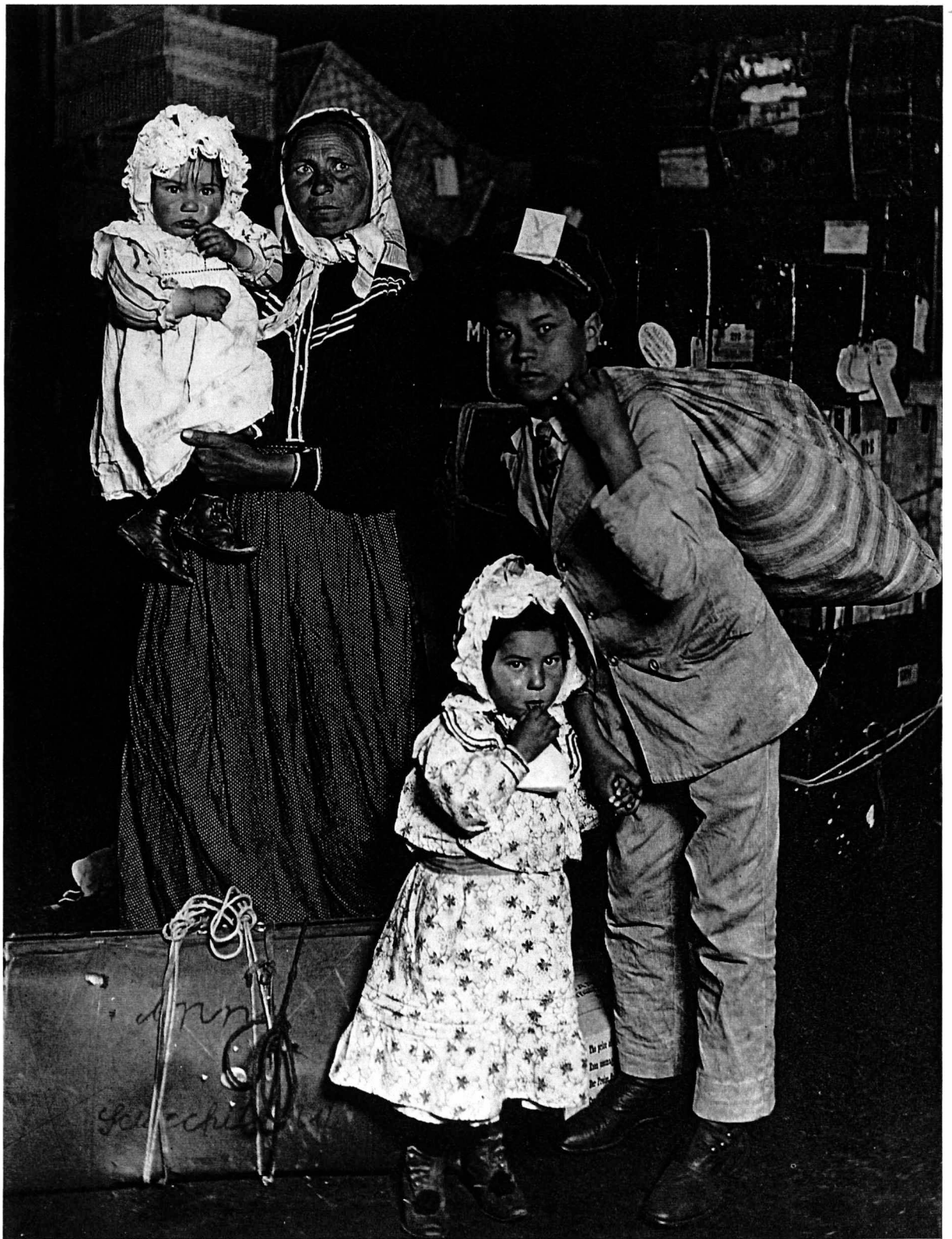
123: Lewis Hine, Looking for Lost Baggage, Ellis Island, 1905

Chapter Five: Photographs, Memory, and Re-constructions of 'home'

A particular photograph by Lewis Hine, who photographed thousands of migrants arriving in America at Ellis Island between the 1890s and 1900s, is a potent image of journeying and displacement. 'Looking for Lost Baggage' (1905), one of Hine's most well-known images, depicts a mother with three children appearing tired and disoriented at the port of their arrival. The title of the image tells us that they are searching for their belongings amidst the piles of bags and other personal items brought by other migrants like themselves. The young boy in the photograph in his crumpled suit is wearing a tie and cap, carrying a stripy cloth sack over his left shoulder, his right hand holding that of his little sister and he appears to have assumed the role of the dominant/ protective male figure in this family (in the absence of his father). Hine captures the alienating process of displacement in the disorientated expressions on his subjects' faces, and reminds the viewer of the significance of personal possessions, what its loss would mean. Like a shipwrecked sailor, the refugee salvages and retrieves what little remains of his 'baggage', and re-constructs a personal space with these remnants of a past life that he has physically left behind:

> In a postmodern age, memories are no longer Proustian madeleines, but photographs. The past has become a collection of photographic, filmic or televisual images. We like the replicants (of <u>Blade Runner</u>), are put in the position of reclaiming a history by means of its reproduction.[1]

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[1] Giuliana Bruno, 'Ramble City: Postmodernism and Blade Runner' in <u>Alien Zone</u>, Annette Kuhn (ed.), New York: Verso, p183 - 195

This chapter will provide an analysis of the interiors of refugees' homes I have photographed, and look at ways in which the refugee re-constructs their ideas of 'home' within domestic environments. If nostalgia is classically an intense homesickness for the past and the familiar, my work presents the viewer with an inquiry into the space of nostalgia, its trigger and effects, and its relationship to the space of belonging to the social.

Pictures of the family are significant pieces of our material culture. They are intimately connected to issues of identity and belonging, providing a kind of proof or evidence of one's existence, particularly in relation to the functions of memory. As such, most people mourn the loss of visual traces of the past:

> Photographic images of home preserve the after-effects of a dislocated experience, images that make the recalling of those experiences possible. To part with one's photographs is to forget, and forgetting is death for the exile.[2]

Photographs therefore often form part of the baggage of the migrant. The value attached to these images can be most clearly described particularly in situations where a refugee is forced to flee his or her homeland and brings little more than photographs with themselves. Mina Swara and her husband, Mohammed Osman Eltahir, and the Eritrean couple, Hiwet and Fecadu Abraha, are such examples. As Salman Rushdie notes, a characteristic of migrants is to live "more comfortably in images, in ideas, than in places."[3] Refugees, migrants

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[2] Ali Behdad, 'Reflections on the Family Photographs of Iranians in Los Angeles', http://www.suitcase.net/behdad.html

[3] Salman Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands, London and New York: Granta/ Penguin Books, 1992, p. 280

and exiles must hold in thought and mimesis the place they left behind, as with their loss or disappearance follows a disintegration of their sense of 'self'. With the loss of the physical place, the homeland, their identities are constantly called back into existence and re-established in the spaces of memory and nostalgia.

The photograph of the Kalashnikov rifles in Mina Swara's flat was taken in the mountains in Kurdistan where she had lived, and like most photographs of home, the image has become a poignant object of memory, a symbol of the past which has been left behind. The physical environment is an important link on the chain to the past, and constitutes the basis of identity for many people. The 'home' here functions as a nucleus, a haven to which they can return. For individuals who travel widely, or who have been exiled or displaced, there exists a deep urge to reclaim their past, to look back. However, we cannot reclaim what is irretrievably lost; we can only create these in our minds: 'imaginary homelands' as Salman Rushdie defines it. It is then perhaps a form of self-deception that particular moments of our lives, recalled from the past, come back to us in an enchanted light, usually quite different from that which we might have actually experienced. The native house, the house in which we spent out early years, now lost or decaying, remains the main site for our reveries toward childhood.[4] The recollection of such distant scenes appears now as a sort of 'lost paradise' in our minds. 'Home', then, quite easily becomes another name for "a

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[4] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994, p. 15, 16

receptacle of memories and a vehicle of dreams."[5] The image therefore, comes to stand in for the 'real' location. In a similar way to which a passport as an official document may provide an individual with a social identity, the photograph in this instance works as a fetish object. The viewer may be aware that what he or she sees is merely a representation of what is absent, but continues to believe in its reality.

How then, in this context, does a photographic image function, opening a passageway into memories, dreams and fantasies? John Berger, in his essay 'Ways of Remembering'[6], posits that it was the faculty of memory that served the function of photography before its invention, since the photograph is not a re-constitution of an event but a *trace* of that event. Both Berger and Barthes (<u>Camera Lucida</u>) are concerned with the gap between the moment of the recording of the picture and that of its viewing. According to Evans[7], this gap can be understood in Berger's work as a metaphor for the dislocating processes of capitalist modernity and, in particular, the historical process during which time and space become increasingly separated and independent of one another. She cites the work of Anthony Giddens[8] who points out that in pre-modern settings, time and space are connected through the reliable borders and the boundaries of place, and an affiliation of place with kinship relations.

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[5] Max Kozloff, 'Photos within Photographs', in <u>Photography and Fascination</u>, Danbury, New Hampshire: Addison House, 1979, p. 93

[6] John Berger, 'Ways of Remembering', in J. Evans (ed.) <u>The Camerawork Essays</u>, London: Rivers Oram Press, 1997, p.41- 51

[7] Jessica Evans, ibid., p. 39

[8] Anthony Giddens, <u>The Consequences of Modernity</u>, Oxford: Polity Press, 1990; and <u>Modernity and Self-Identity</u>, Oxford: Polity Press, 1991

Modernity, however, is characterised by a process of "disembedding" – the "lifting out of social relations from local contexts"[9] and their "recombination" across time and space. What is important here is how much photography is seen as a constituent part of this process. In the photograph's inherent separation of meaning from an original context (and therefore from their meaning), they can quite easily be used and interpreted in a variety of ways. Berger argues that in everyday experience, meaning is discovered in what connects, for it is only borne out of a narrative, through the existence of a development and process.[10] To interpret a picture is to lend it a past and a future, to insert it into a narrative. In modernity, "the timeless has been abolished, and history itself has become ephemerality."[11] In his essay[12] on the decline of the 'aura' of the photograph through its mechanical reproduction, Walter Benjamin sees this process as significant to a cultural decline in the quality of experience, particularly given the loss of the inter-subjective face-to-face experience.

Memory, as part of the unconscious, does not follow a linear concept of time. There may be no coherent beginning, middle and end to every story. We are only presented with fragments. Photographs are often used in a linear way (an image which illustrates an argument; a caption supporting the image or vice-versa); however, Berger's radial method[13] is concerned with their re-contextualisation

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[9] Anthony Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity, Oxford: Polity Press, 1991, p. 147
[10] John Berger and Jean Mohr, Another Way of Telling, London: Writers and Readers, 1982, p. 89
[11] John Berger, ibid., p. 107
[12] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in Illuminations, London: Fontana Press, 1992
[13] John Berger, About Looking, New York: Vintage International, 1991, p.64

and re-assembly within a person's day-to-day life, producing a continuity to each photo-narrative. This lies in the way it re-assembles the variable contexts of its subject's experience, drawing upon a number of associations leading to the same event. The photograph therefore becomes a site for imaginative possibilities. As Berger puts it:

> ..any photograph may become such a 'Now' if an adequate context is created for it. Such a context replaces the photograph in time – not its original time for that is impossible – but in narrated time. Narrated time becomes historic time when its is assumed by social memory and social action.[14]

Rather than depending on a single approach to remembering something, various approaches or 'stimuli' lead to it: "Words, comparisons, signs need to create a context for a printed photograph in a comparable way; they must mark and leave open diverse approaches. A radial system has to be constructed around the photograph so that it may be seen in terms which are simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic."[15] Experience, as Benjamin suggests, is "indeed a matter of tradition. In collective experience as well as private life. It is less the product of facts firmly anchored in memory than of a convergence in memory of accumulated and frequently unconscious data."[16]

Memory itself is a fragmentary trace of any collective event. Indeed, perception itself is partial, an incomplete 'recording'

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[14] John Berger, op. Cit., p.65
[15] John Berger, op. Cit., p.67

influenced and constructed by unconscious processes.[17] Freud, for example, an enthusiastic collector of objects, recognised their capacity for embodying meanings. Indeed, he draws a significant connection between archaeology and psychoanalysis in that both the archaeologist and psychoanalyst reconstructs a past through the excavation of fragments. Although he proposes that the psychoanalyst will discover truths more profound (since the mind never loses memories), the 'retrieval' of memories is itself an uncertain and ambiguous process, influenced in the first place by how one imagines or perceives an event. Therefore memories, like any narration, could be regarded as a series of fictions. We have a choice amongst these histories and fictions as to what is significant, and what we choose to remember and how it is narrated. The idea that memory results from a translation, or a development from actual experience is a recurring concept in psychology and in the arts, as is the notion of narrativity in memory as a device for the creation of personal and collective stories which constitute our identities. Memory may be thought of as a creative process, whereby significant elements from the past that one recalls determines the way one would choose to live.

Its powers of immobility and silence, in part, give the photograph its authority. It cuts off a piece of the referent, is only a fragment of it. Each 'take' is immediate; hence, the taking of a photograph is often associated with the 'shooting' of a gun, snipping off a fraction of 'reality' with each 'click' of the

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[16] Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in Illuminations, London: Fontana Press, 1992, p.153
[17] Rudolf Arnheim, Visual Thinking, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1969

shutter. The photograph, like death, is an instantaneous abduction of the object out of the world into another world, into another kind of time. From these fragments, the dream experience becomes infinitely endless. It is precisely the partial nature of these memories that the photograph holds that makes them so evocative. Such extracts of the memory acquire greater significance because they are remains of events or experiences, and the relating of this present felt experience to another similar experience in the past brings to the surface with it, when it is recalled, a complex series of related sensations and emotions. Memory brings sudden and intense significance to ordinary things in the outside world. The fragmentation of experience, of memory, transforms the most trivial of things into symbols, which seem to resonate deeply. Memory is followed up with all the associated feelings, the recollections of the past, dragged up to the surface of the mind. The visual recollection which has flooded in is far more than a 'snapshot', far more than a single picture, it captures an exact emotion and constitutes, in itself, a complete knowledge of the past.

The ease with which the viewer is drawn into dreams could also be accounted for by the nature of the photographic image itself. The silence of the poetic image, the assumed timelessness of photography is often likened to the relationship of photography with death, loss, and nostalgia[18]. Even if the person who has been photographed is still living, that precise moment when he or she *was* has forever

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[18] Barthes introduces time as the photographic punctum relating to a reality that is always already in the past. His formula 'That-has-been' expressing the characteristic nature of photography contains in it the idea of an absolute and ever deferred presence. (Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, p. 77)

vanished. Its timelessness can be likened to the timelessness of dreams, the unconscious and of memory.

The experience of recalling remains, in itself, mysterious and inexplicable. There are different kinds of memory. Perhaps the most basic of these is the learning of skills, or the acquiring of habits. For example, learning to read or taking along one's travel pass when catching the train every morning. At most, a person is able to recognize certain things as signals for a particular action. On another level, there is conscious memory, which enables human beings to reflect on their lives and past experiences. This kind of memory is experienced in each person's own private world, in one's mind. At the same time, it involves recognition that memory is being experienced; that one is aware of the act of remembering a past event. In this way, I am able to recall places or people when I am absent from them. However, not all experiences of memory can be classified under these categories. Being haunted by a memory does not simply mean the recollection of an event. Memory is not merely something which we evoke - being charged with emotion, it is not just an idea of something absent, but an *impression*[19] which can be likened to the vivid images brought to mind in our recollections of childhood.

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[19] David Hume, in his discussion of memory (Treatise of Human Nature, Book I, Part 1), uses the word "impression" to mean the experiences we have in sense-perception. Memories are experienced with different degrees of force or emotion.

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Henri Bergson[20] placed memory as the point of connection between the mind and the spirit. It functions as the bridge between the embodied, mechanical world of science and other logical or practical affairs; and the spiritual world, of which we are only intuitively aware, and which falls outside of language. Perhaps the basic function of an individual is practical; the main aim is that of survival. Therefore, the particular function of the brain is to receive and store experiences, and then to release into present perceptual experience memories which, when mixed with sensory stimuli received, will be of use – a process that can be thought of as a kind of retrieval system. The function of the brain, in these terms, then, is to inhibit those "irrelevant" memories, and allow into consciousness those that yield practical returns. Beyond the level of consciousness, however, there is *pure* memory constantly at work, of which we might suddenly, involuntarily or spontaneously become aware of when consciousness is inactive, or when the brain's defences are down, for example, as in dreams. *Pure* memory is differentiated from ordinary memory in that the former is spontaneous, while the latter is more practical, cultivated in a "habit". For example, there is a difference between memorising and reciting lines from a poem, and recalling falling head-first into a drain when I was a few months old. Habit memory is essential to our survival. It is essential both to ordinary perception and recognition, and therefore to the anticipation and the manipulation of things to our own advantage. Pure memory, on the other hand, gives us access to a 'spiritual' world and deals largely with our

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senses and emotions. Lying outside of language, it is difficult to express or share. It is this aspect of memory that I wish to explore, and which I suspect, bears particular significance for our recollections of childhood, and our nostalgic responses to photographic images.

Everyday life is often perceived of in linear time – one thing follows another. On the other hand, in the realm of the unconscious, we are freed from shared social time. It can be thought of as a space, a storehouse, a place outside of time. The spiritual self, the medium of *pure* memory, is therefore also fluid and indeterminate. It then makes sense to say that memory and consciousness are incompatible, because consciousness is so tied down to, and concerned with the concept of time. At the same time, the history of our childhood is not psychically dated. Dates are only involved when one is actively recounting, and establishing our memories as part of a narrative construction. Childhood is something that is uncorrupted by time, and therefore remains immutable, immobile. The *pure* memories of childhood, stored in the unconscious, engraves in the soul a permanent nucleus of childhood. Although disguised and blurred by history, or context, it comes into being in instants of illumination. Perhaps it is the reveries of childhood experienced in *solitude*, as Bachelard[21] proposes, that manifests a "permanent childhood". It is in such memories that we find the core of childhood, which remains at the centre of the human psyche and the older self. There, imagination and memory are most closely bound

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[20] Henri Bergson, <u>Matter and Memory</u>, London: Allen and Unwin, 1911, chapter 5

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together, where the "real" binds with the imaginary. This might contribute to our understanding of the vividness of childhood recollections.

According to Carl Jung, the human psychism is, in its primitive state, androgynous. The unconscious is not gendered; and the child remains in a relatively unadapted state in its earliest years, what Freud referred to as the narcissistic state. It is perhaps during this state, before the "mirror-phase"[22] replaces it, that sensory perceptions are differently, maybe more acutely experienced; there is also no clear distinction between the "real" and the imagined. The child in its earliest years lives in its own world, and is as yet unable to articulate himself and his surroundings within a social language, which accounts for the pre-dominance of his natural instincts and drives. Without language, the child possesses an inability to "talk about the 'real' in that external or objective way." Tied to social organization is a virtual shedding or burying of our intimate 'senses'. As Freud points out, 'civilisation consists in (this) progressive renunciation."[23] When the child reaches the 'age of reason', all kinds of restrictions are forced upon the child by the critical influence of the parents and later, by educators, or those that make up 'public opinion'. The individual is taught most of the memories of early childhood as he enters into

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[21] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Reverie, Boston: Beacon Press, 1960, p100

[22] Lacan introduced the concept of the "mirror phase", which took the child's mirror image as the model and basis for its future identifications. This is purely imaginary because it conceals the infant's lack of co-ordination and the fragmentation of its drives. However, it gives the child its first sense of a coherent identity in which it can recognize itself. What the child realizes here is that the image that it sees is separate from its bodily self; and also that it is *that* image which pleases the figures on whom the child depends. The image in the mirror allows the child to take up a position and at the same time, imagine its relationship with others.

the zone of the family, and the social world. One is eventually pushed into a state of repressed childhood as barriers are put up to the childhood which is waiting to be relived. For Jung, this childhood is the reign of the self. It is in reverie that we find ourselves on the edge or the border of memories; imperceptibly, we are drawn back into old reveries. Here, dreaming and remembering merge into each other and in this state, we recognize the psychological freedom that we once experienced in reverie as a child.[24] In order to live in this atmosphere of another time, we must desocialize our memory and, beyond memories told and recounted by others and even by ourselves, must find the unknowable elements that constitute the 'soul' of the child. The child, beyond family history, belongs to an anonymous, universal, and immobile childhood – what may be viewed as a pure, original threshold of life. The archetype remains, immutable beneath memory and dreams. Dreams bring us back to it, with memory triggering off, or opening the door to the dream. "True memory, considered from the philosophical point of view, consists only in an imagination which is very lively, easily moved, and consequently susceptible to evoking, with the help of each sensation, scenes from the past by giving them something like the enchantment of life."[25] Thus, childhood is not just a period in time; rather, it is a state of mind.

We all have a photographic memory – not a pristine archive of

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[23] Sigmund Freud, Civilisation and its Discontents, p257 as cited in Warner Muensterberger (ed), Man and His Culture, London: Rapp and Whiting, 1969, p11

[24] "Psychologically speaking, it is only in reverie that we are free beings." Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Reverie, p101

[25] Baudelaire, Curiosites esthetiques, p160, as quoted by G. Bachelard, ibid., p120

flash-frozen details, as mythologized in detective/ mystery stories, but in reality, probably a poorly filed mental catalogue of images. Memory works similarly to the photographic process, fuelled by the accidental, the incidental, the coincidental, influenced by style and will. The photographic recording system operates much like the mental one; there is a sense that memory is much more often a reconstruction than a duplication or a reproduction, more of a work in progress than an exact copy. Hence, it is often the case that the meaning and significance of one photograph can alter over time, and with every change in context, in terms of the way it is read, interpreted and appreciated.

The photograph, a trace of the 'real' in reduced physical dimensions, is a souvenir of the past made even more significant because of the narratives it is able to generate around and in it. The silence of the photograph is one of its most original qualities, distinguishing it from other media like television or cinema. Jean Baudrillard, for example, comments on the silence of the "photographic image which escapes all discourse, commentary in order to be perceived and read inwardly"[26], and also the silencing of the objects within the photographic frame. The photograph eliminates all sound and movement from the scene that it captures:[27]

> In the very centre of the city ... in the very centre of visual and auditory stress, it recreates emptiness – the equivalent also of a sense of isolation, of phenomenological isolation.[28]

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[26] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Art of Disappearance' in Art and Artefact, Nicholas Zurbrugg (ed.), London: Sage Publications, 1997, p.31

[27] The German photographer, Thomas Struth, uses this distinct quality of the photograph to 'still' the scenes in the cities that he photographs – in Chicago, Milan, Tokyo etc.

[28] Jean Baudrillard, ibid., p. 31

This silence of the photograph creates the potential for visual intimacy, and in turn encourages the eruption of narrative, and the telling of its story. As Susan Stewart notes, "the narration of the photograph will itself become an object of nostalgia. Without marking, all ancestors become abstractions ... all family trips become the same trip... and the undifferentiated sea become attributes of every country."[29]

In About Looking, John Berger discusses the function of the photograph in the private and public spheres and states that it is the narrative form of memory which photography employs that enables us as viewers, to be in a situation of intimacy to what is photographed, even in a public context. Because the photograph isolates, closes-in and frames a subject, we are drawn into an intimate relationship to what we look at. The photograph has the 'advantage' of drawing attention to itself regardless of how uninteresting its subject may be; the sheer fact that it has been selected and framed allows it to assume some importance, some credibility and status. The photograph encountered outside of the private context is detached from all first-hand experience, separated from personal experience, and yet we are able to read into it; and to Berger, it therefore represents "the memory of a total stranger", "the all-seeing eye", "the eye of the God of Nothingness".[30]

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[29] Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993, p.138

[30] John Berger, About Looking, New York: Vintage International, 1991, p.57
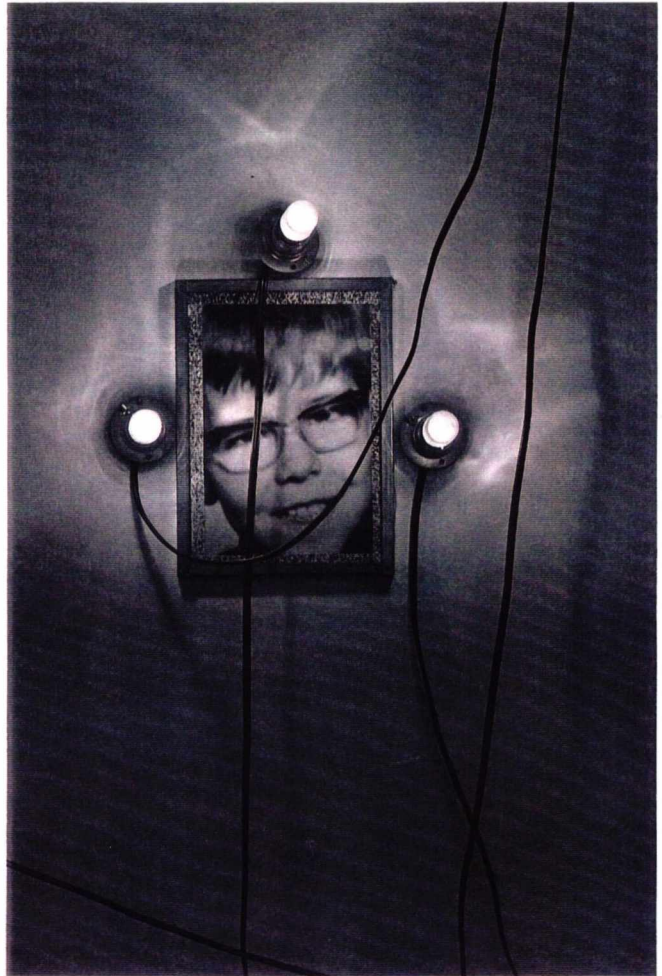
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124: Annelies Štrba, Samuel with Sonja, 1977
125: Annelies Štrba, Linda with Sushi, 1993

126: Annelies Štrba, Sonja with Samuel-Maria, 1995
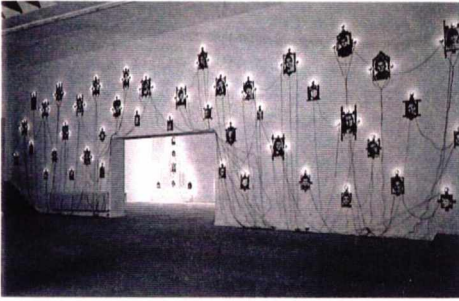
102. 103. *Monument: Les Enfants de Dijon* (Monument: The children of Dijon). Installation view and detail, Le Consortium, Dijon, France, 1985.

127, 128: Christian Boltanski, Monument: The Children of Dijon, 1985

William Eggleston's photographs, for example, hold a deep affinity to the way in which snapshots hold meaning, and although he employs a seemingly casual, random style in his photography, his work has an inherent structure. Perhaps the most ubiquitous of all photographs, snapshots are the most hermetic. To the insider or member of the family, snapshots are doorways to memory and feeling, lost to the outsider who does not recognise the faces or remember the stories or specific experiences. However, because we all have snapshots of our own, and thus have acquired the habit of understanding them, we are all equipped to imagine ourselves into the snapshots of others, and Eggleston uses this ready momentum of the imagination. His photographs thus make insiders of the viewer, and it is this aura of intimacy that perhaps lends emotional weight to his subjects. Through this process of 'universal recognition', he transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Contemporary photographers and artists, especially, such as Annelies Štrba, Mari Mahr, Jo Spence[31], Chohreh Fedzjou[32] and Christian Boltanski have, through their work in some form or another, engaged in an analysis or expression of the workings of the memory. Annelies Štrba's collection of photographs, for example, is the product of her everyday activity of taking and accumulating photographs of her and her family's daily life and their travels outside Switzerland. The scenes she captures feature the familiar

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[31] See Jo Spence, Putting Myself in the Picture, London: Camden Press, 1986, her political and photographic autobiography.

backdrop of domestic environments as seen in the snapshots of others – the kitchen, bathroom, family pets, children and other paraphernalia of domestic life (Images #124 to #126). In these photographs of her immediate family, there exists a contrast between the feeling of a fleeting moment in passing, and a recognition of the weight of time past. Thus a consciousness of unfolding history and of shared memory is built up through the succession of intimate pictures and through the inclusion of images of her own generation as children in her installations, as well as photographic portraits of her ancestors. As the viewer sees photographs that jump from one generation to the next, particularly when it is possible to trace the growth and development of an individual through time, we experience the fragility of time as embodied in the photograph. Štrba's continuing series of images in which she photographs buildings from a passing car or train depicts structures which have stood for many years but captured in the most fleeting of moments.

Her first exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London has been described as 'a chamber of memory'[33]. Rather than present her photographs as part of an archive (which implies a relationship to things that are dead), her photographs function as part of a visual reservoir, waiting to be looked at, and re-configured. Her work is not in conflict with or in opposition to time, but works within it. The irregularity with which her photographs were shown in her installation at the Photographers' Gallery (three projectors working

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[32] An Iranian Jewish woman in exile, Chohreh Feyzdjou 'recycled' her paintings and objects, transforming them into blackened 'relics' that signified her memories and the exilic experience. See Gavin Jantjes (ed.), A Fruitful Incoherence, London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1998

[33] Antechamber, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1997

simultaneously in a slide presentation) works in a similar way with the idea of 'retrieving' images from a past, where there is difficulty in predicting the pattern from before, thus reflecting the ever-evolving shape of the narrative with no pre-determined end.

In a similar way, Christian Boltanski uses the evocative potential of photographs to create intended responses from the viewer. His work, <u>Monuments: The Children of Dijon</u> (1985) (Images # 127 and #128), for example, supposedly consisted of portraits of children who were lost or dead, and yet the characters portrayed are largely fictional, found/collected photographs of any child. And yet the way in which they are displayed, particularly the setting of this installation in a crypt and the enigmatic quality of the lighting used, produces a variation of what one may understand or accept to be 'reality'. What Boltanski's work seeks then, is to evoke a charged emotional response, a sense of nostalgia and loss associated with any funeral rite. Berger's 'memory of a total stranger', 'the all-seeing eye' functions to 'interiorise' images encountered in a public context, or to make what is seen intimate and private.

The photograph has enjoyed a high degree of social recognition in the domain of the presumed real, particularly in the contexts of private and family life and is very often valued as a souvenir and keepsake. This function of the photograph is closely connected to the structure of the family in the modern world, with the family portrait (enlarged, framed and displayed in living-rooms) serving as one proof of family unity, and also serving as an instrument to effect that unity:

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> Photographs are relics of the past, traces of what has happened. If the living take that past upon themselves, if the past becomes an integral part of the process of people making their own history, then all photographs would require a living context, they would continue to exist in time.[34]

The urge to communicate our perceptions and experiences is inherent in human nature. The practice of using visual and verbal language to provide continuity to a past may symbolize a search for a kind of immortality. Human beings have therefore evolved complex methods of codifying and making permanent significant events in their life history. Kodak with their slogan, 'You press the button, we do the rest' in 1888 made it a possibility to live with a personal visual history, an activity, a practice, which is available to everyone. Family photographs are often meant to be shared, to promote interaction amongst the members of a family. One of the most important features of the still photographic print is its existence as a tangible artefact. The photograph as an object allows it to be held and passed around; it can be physically and mentally shared with other people. Photographs can also be duplicated and distributed to significant others. This practice of distributing, and sharing visual information is central to keeping connections to one another, to tie themselves together in symbolic and socially significant ways. Similarly, the story-telling that is often associated with the looking at of private photographs keeps the oral tradition alive. Photographs therefore contribute to and sustain the intricately woven fabric of social relations; personal pictures function as a mode of visual communication to integrate groups of

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[34] John Berger, About Looking, New York: Vintage International, 1991, p.61

people. At the same time, photographs and the narratives associated with them serve to sustain the process of making the past 'real':

> 'The past is a foreign country', goes the famous opening sentence of L.P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*, 'they do things differently there.' But the photograph tells me to invert this idea; it reminds me that it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time.[35]

I photographed Mina's husband and their son looking at photographs that the family brought with them from Kurdistan (Image #37). Her husband pointed out the symbol of the KDP, and also a portrait of his best friend Aso. I asked Mina whether she would bring up Shahin according to English or Kurdish values. She replied, "I think my son is free to choose. I think he must think for himself. If he wants to get married to an English girl, it is up to him. .. I will tell him about my past, what I was before, and how we came here, but he chooses his own way." In both traditional and modern societies, it is through story-telling, and the passing down of photographs through generations which function as evidence in support of these tales. However, it is very often the case that these shared stories are the subjective products of both memory and the imagination – which have somehow been made concrete through the passing of time.[36] It is also through language that we narrate our

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[35] Salman Rushdie, Imaginary Homelands, p. 9

[36] The central thesis of Paul Ricoeur's Time and Narrative (1984 – 88) is the existence of an assumed reciprocity between narrativity and temporality. The experience of 'human' time – a third time that stands in contrast to cosmic time and phenomenological time – appears to us through the narrative formation of discourse. Stories told or read articulate this third time, and configure it, giving it the form of human experience. Thus in the reception of each narrative, read or listened to, one is confronted with a range of alternatives of how experience is temporalised. According to Ricoeur, as (cosmic) time feeds narrativity, narrativity temporalises experience thereby thematising time as the central characteristic of the human condition. Each configuration of human time

experiences and observations, which is the repository and indicator of culture. A process of selection is involved in self-imaging; following the experience of dislocation and loss, the migrant may undergo a personal reconstruction of the 'self' through the retrieval of photographs. A new habitus is thus developed on the street which serves as a public reconstruction of the self as part of a distinct social group, a community of meaning.

The selection of photographic images and the associated memories that they evoke involves a break from the moment at which the photograph was taken, and also a separation from the present. Through framing and decontextualisation, a new environment is established. How often then are the same stories being told as images are being circulated? Roland Barthes, for example, in <u>Camera Lucida</u>, draws the relationship between photography and death – photography's assumed timelessness being closely linked to death. The most immediate and explicit link is that of the social practice of keeping photographs in memory of loved ones who are no longer alive. It is a bleak reminder of our own mortality. We therefore experience a strange temporal maelstrom every time we look at a photograph, especially when it is an image of ourselves from the past or people who are close to us. Even when the person who has been photographed is still living, that precise moment when he or she was has forever vanished. The photograph functions as a mirror for us to witness our own ageing. The snapshot, like death, is the instantaneous abduction of the object out of the world into another

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through narrative, therefore, is a prelude to the next refiguration in light of the experiences of the reader. (Paul Ricoeur, <u>Time and Narrative</u>, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984 – 88.

world, into another kind of time. Because photography presents only a fragment of time, the experience of looking at photographs can be likened to the picking up of an identification – what is outside finds its origins in an interior experience.

According to Susan Stewart, it is an assumption that lived experience is more 'real', possessing an authenticity which cannot be reproduced or transferred to mediated experience. Yet at the same time, it is also assumed that mediated experience known through language and the temporality of narrative can offer pattern and insight due to its capacity for transcendence, and it is the meeting of these two assumptions that evokes nostalgia. In the process of nostalgic reconstruction through the use of narrative, the present is denied and 'the past takes on an authenticity of being.'[37] Stewart describes nostalgia as a 'sadness without an object': "Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack."[38] Nostalgia can therefore be viewed as an on-going and impossible quest for a pure context of lived experience at a place of origin.

As David Lowenthal notes, the past is integral to our sense of identity. The ability to recall, and identify with one's past provides present lived experience with meaning, value and purpose.[39]

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[37] Susan Stewart, On Longing, p.23
[38] ibid.
[39] David Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993

Images of a familiar physical landscape convey a sense of stability and continuity. For the refugee or exile especially, who has broken physical links with his or her past and experiences dislocation, may develop exaggerated feelings towards an ideal, romanticized homeland, or assert a new connection to the adopted culture.

A photograph (Image #35) shows the interior of the flat with those porcelain statuettes displayed on a shelf to the right of the image, their wedding photograph on the adjacent wall, a box of tissues on the window sill, and the view from their living room window. The view of the cityscape through translucent curtains accentuates the family's displacement from a familiar physical environment of 'homeland', characterised by mountainous natural landscapes, into the heart of an urban city. This cultural shift is also reflected in the change in their dress codes – Mina's husband wore a jumper with trousers, and their son was dressed in a typically Westernised or rather, Americanised baseball outfit. Photographs #38 and #39 show the family photographed in their living-room, against the background of their open-plan kitchen. Refugees and exiles who search for answers to those quintessential questions of identity, location and their relationship to their environment refer to an evolutionary exchange and adaptations that are inherent in hybrid images and manifestations. On the surface, the objects within the Kurdish household reflect a process of fusion and amalgamation within their new home in the 'host country', however, it is also necessary to analyse more closely the role that obvious, familiar and stereotypical symbols play.

In the home of the Kurdish refugee family hung a print of John Constable's painting The Hay Wain, along with a photograph depicting a pair of Kalashnikov rifles which for the possessor of this object symbolized the identity of the Kurdish Democratic Party. These objects concurrently signify the fantasy of a future (in the traditional representation of the 'imagined' England), and a nostalgic image of the past that has been left behind. The Kurds do not belong to a single ethnic origin but to an amalgam, and are now the largest minority in the world without a state of their own.[40] Nevertheless, the Kurds, the vast majority of whom still live in a mountainous region,[41] claim that by race, language and lifestyle – and perhaps above all by geography – they form a distinct community. Mina Swara's photograph of the Kalashnikov rifles 'makes real' her relationship with the land of her origin, despite its ambiguous identity. Nostalgia connects this image with her glorified position as a peshmeghar, a guerrilla for the Kurdish Democratic Party. The longing of exiled people or refugees to return to their homeland, and the importance of the symbolic existence of that homeland suggest that the possibility of loss of a particular place instills greater attachment to that place.

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[40] 'Kurdistan' can be found on some thirteenth century maps, and by the sixteenth century, the term was in common usage. The Ottoman's defeat in the First World War resulted in the carving up of their former empire by the Allies and, with the signing of the Treaty of Sevres in 1920, the recognition of a Kurdish sovereign state. This concession, however, was usurped 3 years later by the Treaty of Lausanne, whereby Kurdistan was divided between Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Persia. (Migrant Refugee Group Report on Kurdistan)

[41] The inaccessible but habitable areas of the Middle East – the deserts, mountains and marshes, have been a refuge for those whose way of life was different from those who populated the cultivable plains. Attaturk labelled the Kurds "mountain Turks"; he claimed their Turkish ethnicity had been deformed by their mountain habitat, and brutally suppressed any notions of Kurdish independence.

Constable's painting, together with the porcelain statuettes of milkmaids, which lined her shelves, stand out as significant motifs of the image of 'traditional' England. These may be symbolic of the need for assimilation and adaptation. The choice of imagery for their home may indicate or reflect a need to grasp what at first appears to be an 'alien' culture, often feeding into the illusion of an 'old' traditional England. The perceived idea of England may be visually reflected in the interior décor of these refugees' homes. Similarly, the Sudanese refugee Osman Ali speaks in his interview about his pre-conceived idea of the 'Western T.V. woman' who for him epitomises England as being 'very free'.

When The Hay Wain (1824) was first put on display in London, it was regarded as 'most extraordinary and original'; however, its 'naturalness bordering on the obvious' is now regarded as familiar and ordinary.[42] Constable's works are frequently reproduced in a number of ways: as framed prints and tapestries, calendars, greeting cards, table mats, mugs, chocolate boxes. The reproductions of his paintings are used as publicity images as they embody the twin virtues of nation and nature. "The Haywain carries more weight than any single photograph of the countryside. Its double authenticity is what makes it unique: it is a sign of Constable (which means English genius) and a sign of England (which means unspoilt and unconquered)."[43] The past, or what is lost, is always a source of nostalgia: the signs of the countryside in Constable's painting,

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[42] Kenneth Clark, in his introduction to John Constable, The Hay Wain, Gallery Books, Number 5, London: Percy Lund Humphries and Co., p.15

[43] John Taylor, A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist's Imagination, Manchester University Press, 1994, p.252

wooded and rural, is reminiscent of pre-industrial England. It functions to represent a unified idea of nationhood. Raymond Williams[44] and John Turner[45] have both described how, within the English homeland itself, landscape poetry, landscape painting, and the popularization of the old agrarian landscape images diverted attention from the economic changes that were transforming these landscapes. The place of Constable in English culture seems secure and stable, like the rural scenes he painted – a reassurance of pre-industrial England.[46] Take for example the depiction of Willy Lott's house in The Haywain as a sturdy and plain farmhouse, or pretty cottage, focussing on the creeping foliage, the puff of hearth-smoke, and the woman washing or drawing water from the stream. The Old English Cottage was the most typical thing in England. Indeed, Kenneth Clark found Willy Lott's cottage the 'subject' of the picture, as it was for Constable 'a symbol of rustic peace'. These elements within Constable's paintings represent the allure of pastoral England as a refuge. As Clark says, the painting takes on a "character of calm and happiness."[47] Indeed, the influence of contemporary media and historical images influence our own present perceptions of particular places. The Suffolk in Constable's paintings has 'become the countryside... of all of us, even if we have quite a different landscape outside our windows. We feel that we have grown up not only with jigsaws and illustrated biscuit tins

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[44] Raymond Williams, The Country and the City, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973

[45] John Turner, The Politics of Landscape, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979

[46] "The Hay-Wain was sufficiently typical in 1916 to illustrate a piece in *Country Life* on the love that makes men die for 'England's Green and Pleasant Land' "(Sylvanus, 'England's Green and Pleasant Land', *Country Life*, 9 December 1916). Quoted in Stephen Daniels, Fields of Vision – Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993, p. 213.

[47] Kenneth Clark, op. Cit., p.9

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showing that little boy on a pony beside the river with the mill in the distance, but with the reality represented... England was like that, we feel sure and we convince ourselves that his country is still surviving today.'[48]

And yet, the whereabouts and character of 'Constable Country' have been constantly disputed. Such disputes are not merely local or documentary. They reflect the shifting views of the 'country' at large, and the nation. Rather than accept the authenticating function of the souvenir, oppositional photographers use it as a familiar reference which they can disrupt, for example, Peter Kennard's 'The Haywain, Constable (1821), Cruise Missiles USA (1983)'. Kennard collages photographs of missiles onto a reproduction of Constable's painting -- a picture which now has wide popular appeal as a memory of 'old England' and the riches of the countryside. The photographer adopts the cliché that The Haywain stands for an idyllic, pastoral England, and an age of innocence before the advent of industry. He uses Constable to establish the tranquillity of the English countryside so that he can underscore the hostility of foreign bodies - indeed, there are several American army bases in the Suffolk area. In his photomontage, he presents jarring discontinuities in the idea of England. The success of Kennard's intervention depends on the widespread acceptance of the painting as emblematic of 'England'.[49]

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[48] Nicholas Penny, 'Constable: an English Heritage Abroad', in Sunday Times, 11 Nov 1984, p.43
[49] Stephen Daniels, op. Cit., p.200 - 242

When referring to Stanley Kubrick's <u>Full Metal Jacket</u>, the North Vietnamese refugee, Son, used a second-order representation to tease his South Vietnamese friend, a description that is mirrored repeatedly in Hollywood movies about Vietnam, reflecting Western stereotypical perceptions of Vietnamese people – South Vietnamese women as prostitutes who flirt with American soldiers for money and hopes of a better life abroad (an image epitomised in the popular musical <u>Miss Saigon</u>), and North Vietnamese as the faceless mass of villagers fighting in jungles. Homi Bhabha, in 'The Other Question'[50] emphasizes the basic ambivalence at the heart of colonial discourse which both fixes and assigns its place to the (non-Western) Other, yet strives to capture an otherness it conceptualizes as wild and unknowable. In marking out a 'subject nation', the coloniser appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activity. Therefore, colonial discourse produces the colonised as a fixed reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable. It resembles a process or form of narrative whereby the circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognisable totality. Furthermore, Nigel Rapport, in his essay on the relations between the conventions of stereotyping and the construction of the migrant self,[51] postulates that the processes of migration have resulted in a 'heightened emphasis on the stereotyped, on the clichéd and proverbial' in order for displaced individuals to

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[50] Homi Bhabha, 'The Other Question' in <u>Screen</u>, Vol. 24, No. 6, 1983, p. 18-36
[51] Nigel Rapport, 'Migrant Selves and Stereotypes', in Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (eds.), <u>Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation</u>, London: Routledge, 1995, p.267

maintain a stable sense of identity.[52] The stereotype represents a convenient source of consistent and expectable ways of knowing the social world, and a shortcut to generalities. The individual therefore 'personalises' or internalises stereotyped discourse (by adopting or adapting them) in his interactions with others, and interprets its implications within the context of his own life.

For migrants, perhaps more so for refugees, 'home' comes to be found usually in a routine set of practices, and through the repetition of habitual interactions. Based partly on personal recollections of a past experience, a story or sets of significant narratives are carried around in one's head. These beliefs can be made more concrete, more tangible through the ownership or display of physical objects around the home. The hallmarks of nationhood (such as a map on a wall, or a family portrait taken in one's homeland) provide constancy and recognition, through which a familiar social order can be 'secured' and stable collective rhythms maintained. But how 'real' are stereotypes as symbols of a culture? We need to examine the processes involved in the forming of such identifications, and the means through which they are communicated, as these are likely to be constructed by the foreign culture into which one has relocated. The refugee's temporary loss of 'self' may trigger off the need for the re-invention or reconstruction of a past, an identity.

The living spaces of refugees usually resemble temporary abodes rather than settled, constructed places that one can call 'home'.

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[52] Nigel Rapport, op. Cit., p.269

Communities, such as the Vietnamese, who have been in England for a longer time, have had greater opportunity for assimilation. Yet, their home spaces are set up with clichés, stereotypes of what is connected to, or represents their 'original' culture. However, these are very often second-order representations, objects which have perhaps lost their functional value, but in a separate context, function as symbols of the 'homeland'. Thus, the interiors of the two Vietnamese homes that I photographed are filled with distinct links with Vietnam.

In this way, portable emblems of the past can provide continuity for the refugee in their new homes; therefore those who have left their homelands tend to furnish new environments with replicas of scenes left behind. Keepsakes substitute for abandoned homelands, and photographs function as surrogates for roots, as the possession of a piece of the past contributes to a 'lived' connection with it. Rather than providing immediate functions, old things in the home are treasured for the 'pastness' inherent in them – like family heirlooms, they reflect ancestral inheritance, and provide continuity between the past and future generations.[53]

There are several ways through which possessions can become a part of the self. Objects may be perceived as part of someone when he or she masters or controls it, for example, a musical instrument or a camera, or when it is created or 'owned' by someone. People also develop relationships with objects through habituation; an

[53] Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, The Meaning of Things, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981

example would be a piece of furniture that may form part of one's identity through its continued presence in one's life, like the tatty armchair that Frasier's father, Martin Crane in the television series is so closely associated with. Here, the bonding mechanism is shared history or experience with the object, and often knowledge through familiarity is involved. Collections on display are an important focus for the analysis of one's relationship to their immediate environment because items in one's collection would have entered one's life deliberately, usually kept out of choice. Freud, for example, described his need for collecting as 'an addiction second in intensity only to his nicotine addiction.'[54] He observed: "The core of paranoia is the detachment of the libido from objects. A reverse course is taken by the collector who directs his surplus libido onto an inanimate object: a love of things."[55]

The home of Sheraza Keshavji, for example, was filled with souvenirs and objects from her travels abroad. On display in her living room were dolls that typify traditional attires of the cultures in the places she visited, such as the pair from Thailand, and another from Greece. Objects in one's domestic environment stand in a metonymic relationship to everyday life. Rather than frame another world, they penetrate the world of the individual and immediate experience in the display of consumable objects. Claire

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[54] Gay, P, 'Introduction, Freud: For the marble tablet', in E Engelman (ed.), Berggasse 19: Sigmund Freud's Home and Offices, Vienna, 1938, New York: Basic Books, p.18, as cited by Russell Belk, 'Attachment to Possessions' in Place Attachment, Low and Irwin (eds.), New York and London: Plenum Press, 1992, p.41
[55] Gamwell, L. and Wells, R., personal correspondence quoting Sigmund Freud's comments on 19 Feb 1908, Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, in Sigmund Freud and Art: his personal collection of antiquities, Binghamton: State University of New York, 1989, as cited by Belk, ibid.

Cumberlidge and Virginia Nimakoh[56] speak of the endemic wanderlust, the perpetual need to be somewhere else. To travel is to decontextualise one's life, and it signifies the need to move and not be tied down to one place, time or sense of self. Shaz collects the after-image of her travels in the form of souvenirs, and what makes her collection interesting is that these objects are not souvenirs from her homeland, but of other sites of displacement. The formation of 'nomad identities' in post-modernity suggests that one is forever living on the margins; even for the displaced person, no real or authentic identities existed for them in the first place to be taken away, and there is no stable space to return to. Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses (1992) opens with a scene involving an important marker of the late twentieth century – an air-flight which dissolves the spaces between places, symbolic of a state where land, home and belonging have been broken up, and where people struggle to find themselves and to fix an identity. The song that the character Gibreel sings reveals the individual to be a mutant, a hybrid: 'O, my shoes are Japanese; these trousers English, if you please. On my head, red Russian hat; my heart's Indian for all that.'[57] Despite Shaz's emotional ties to Uganda, her homeland, her sense of self has been re-constructed around her travels, as reflected in the display of the objects she has collected in her home.

According to Susan Stewart, the souvenir is always incomplete: it is only a sample or replica of the original. The material object itself is not simply connected to the 'real' original object, but

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[56] Clare Cumberlidge and Virginia Nimarkoh, 'Wanderlust' in Exotic Excursions, London: INIVA, 1995
[57] Salman Rushdie, The Satanic Verses, Delaware: The Consortium Inc., 1992, p. 5

draws an intimate relationship to the event or experience. Indeed, despite its capacity to evoke and resonate to an experience, the power of the souvenir lies in its inability to entirely re-create the original experience. At the same time, the souvenir must remain 'impoverished' so that it can be supplemented by a narrative discourse which attaches it to its origins and creates a myth with regard to those origins. Rather than being a narrative of the object, that is, value attached to its materiality, it is a narrative of the possessor of the souvenir. As Stewart points out, the souvenir is often attached to locations and experiences that are not for sale.[58] As experience is to an imagined original point of authenticity, so narrative is to the souvenir. The souvenir substitutes or displaces the point of authenticity as it itself becomes the point of origin for narrative. This narrative is subjective and can only relate to the experience of the possessor of a souvenir, as seen, for example, in Sheraza Keshavji's description of the statuette of Lord Krishna (a gift from her Chinese friend in New York) as a conveyor of 'good luck', or the pair of terracotta warriors from China which she displays in front of her fireplace.

The souvenir exists to transform an exterior into the interior – they reduce the public and monumental into a miniaturized version, or into a two-dimensional representation (as with postcards and photographs), whose dimensions can quite easily be 'contained' and consumed in the private view of the individual subject. Stewart cites the example of the calendar as the absolute appropriateness of

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[58] Susan Stewart, On Longing, p.136

the souvenir,[59] as it moves history into private time. There is also a distinction to be drawn between souvenirs of public sights (mass-produced representations that can be bought) and the collections of individual, private experience, which are not generally available or used as consumer goods. The second kind of souvenir is often mapped against the life history of the individual, and relates to rites of passage. They are often personally poignant momentoes, and may not necessarily possess much monetary value:

> The miniature does not attach itself to lived historical time... The reduction in scale which the miniature presents skews the time and space relations of the everyday lifeworld, and as an object consumed, the miniature finds its 'use value' transformed into the infinite time of reverie.[60]

The Eritrean couple, Hiwet and Fecadu Abraha, displayed in their glass cabinet miniature versions of Eritrean people from different walks of life, together with a straw-roofed mud hut, and a bed. As Stewart observes, the miniature has its role both as an experience of interiority, and an influence over the process through which that interior is constructed. It possesses the capacity to transcend time that negates change and the flux of lived reality. Collected and displayed, the miniature is viewed from a transcendent position, within the standpoint of the present lived reality, and which therefore always nostalgically distances the object. In a similar way, the painting by the Eritrean artist which depicts life in an Eritrean village, complete with Hiwet's 'Home Sweet Home' inserted into the edge of the picture frame, stands in for a

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[59] op. Cit., p.138

familiar 'homeland' that has been left behind. Indeed, home is often identified as the archetypal 'ideal' place, and the search for the idea of home matches what seem to be our instincts, but these instincts may at the same time be conditioned by second-hand experiences which also influence our perceptions, through culture and even cliché. As Madan Sarup observes in 'Home and Identity'[61], many of the connotations of home are often condensed in the sentimentality of the expression: Home is where the heart is. Often associated with pleasant memories, and intimate situations, it signifies a place of warmth and security.

The souvenir or memento often achieves sacred significance in one's life. The object in this case is connected to a special time, place or event. Similar to the ways in which one selects associated memories and narratives within photographs, our attachments to souvenirs and mementos therefore actually help to construct rather than simply preserve an identity. The 'national souvenirs' that refugees keep and put on display are a part of their national mythologies and histories, whether they are the miniatures of items from the 'village at home' or 'Sudan: My Country' carved in wood. They allow their owners to find or to create in the past features felt to be lacking in the present environment or lifestyle. When dissatisfaction with the present lived experience takes place, one's fantasies are displaced to another time and place.

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[60] op. cit, p.65

[61] Madan Sarup, 'Home and Identity' in George Robertson, Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird, Barry Curtis and Tim Putnam (eds.), Traveller's Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p.93

According to David Lloyd[62], the production and consumption of nationalist goods is deeply embedded in the nationalist project. The aim of this 'cultural nationalism' is to retrieve or re-establish for the people an authentic, original tradition, that in such continuity, differentiates the nation culturally and racially from those that surround or occupy it. Although every refugee knows he can never return – that even if he does physically set foot to his homeland, the return is superficial – he would have changed from his experience of exile or emigration. The ubiquity of objects (of souvenirs produced in one's homeland) in the domestic space is a recognition and reminder of the dysfunction between desire and its objects. Particularly for cultures whose histories have been determined by colonization, and individuals experience displacement and immigration, these 'souvenirs' are not merely figurative indices of living dislocation. Whether the object on display is a photograph from home, or a religious or national icon, these objects are central to the articulation of 'the simultaneous desire for and impossibility of restoring and maintaining connection' with one's homeland.

The migrant's experience is often strongly tied to the past; thus mementos and memorabilia take on increased significance. Such things have the capacity to evoke now 'pleasant' memories, and therefore reinforce a treasured mythology of the self. Sister Nicole also points out the role that ancestor worship plays in re-

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[62] David Lloyd, 'The Recovery of Kitsch', in Trisha Ziff (ed.), <u>Distant Relations</u>, New York: Smart Art Press, 1996

establishing one's sense of identity. Possessions provide a real sense of stability in people's lives. As McCracken observes:

> Surrounded by our things, we are constantly instructed in who we are and what we aspire to. Surrounded by our things, we are rooted in and visually continuous with our pasts. Surrounded by our things, we are sheltered from the many forces that would deflect us into new concepts, practices, and experiences... things are our ballast. They stabilize us by reminding us of our past, by making this past a virtual, substantial part of our present.[63]

The use of family photographs in the private sphere, in particular for the migrant or refugee, (for example in the home of the Eritrean couple) takes on a heightened significance as this intimate connection to these particular possessions is symbolic of a strong attachment to the people they represent in their homelands. By prominently displaying objects that represent the extended family that is absent in England, these possessions act as a surrogate extended family that sustains and complete the individual's sense of selfhood. Therefore, photographs from home, particularly of one's ancestors or family, function as stable and all-enduring markers of the state of one's 'natural' belonging against the physical existence or (temporary) belonging to a host country. Shuja Anas's reply to my question regarding his sense of 'home', "I am Sri Lankan. I was born one", reinforces this notion that one's national identity is innate, an idea that is crucial to making any system of categories appear natural.[64] One's state of origin, the country of one's birth, is therefore often described as 'motherland' or

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[63] McCracken, G., <u>Culture and Consumption: New approaches to the symbolic character of consumer goods and activities</u>, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, p.124

'fatherland', establishing the significance of blood ties to one's homeland. This idea of national origins will be developed in the following chapter where I will analyse the ways in which a sense of 'community' influences one's sense of belonging in a foreign environment.

John Berger[65] describes migration as 'the quintessential experience' of our age, with economic and ideological forces uprooting and displacing a great number of individuals. As a result of such movement of peoples, the idea of home itself has undergone a dramatic change. Those individuals who are displaced and dislocated re-construct temporary abodes, and home itself is usually found in a routine set of practices rather than a stable, physical place. Therefore, as Berger notes, the repetition of customs, everyday habits, and interactions with one's community, even one's name, or stories that one carries around in one's memories re-establish the security of what it means to be 'at home':

> By turning in circles, the displaced preserve their identity and improvise a shelter. Built of habits, the raw material of repetition, turned into a shelter. The habits imply jokes, gestures, actions, even the way one wears a hat. Physical places and objects supply the scene, the site of the habit, yet it is not they but the habit that protects. The mortar which holds the improvised 'home' together is memory. Within it, visible, tangible momentoes are arranged – photographs, souvenirs – but the roof and four walls which safeguard the lives within, these are invisible, intangible and biographical.[66]

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[64] The ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina points to the fact that the 'purification' of the nation also creates the nation. Notions of purity and contamination, of blood as a carrier of culture, or of pollution, are therefore fundamental to the projects of nation-making.

[65] John Berger, And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos, 1984, p.55

[66] ibid., p. 64

'Space' has often been used to articulate subjectivity, providing the medium to articulate interconnection and difference, which are important markers in articulating boundaries (in theories such as national origin, and ideological formations of belonging and exclusion). However, it is the notion of 'place' that seems to actually assume set boundaries that one fills to achieve a solid identity. It perpetuates the fixed parameters of categories, in relation to which one is either inside or out of. While place can be thought of as organic and stable, space on the other hand, is malleable, a fabric of continually shifting sites and boundaries. Therefore, place refers to a space that has been given meaning through personal, social, or cultural processes, including ritual practices that play an important role in establishing and maintaining one's connections to a particular place, community, or nation, as it is often through ritual performance and repetitive practice that places attain meaning.

Places may vary in size, may be physical/ tangible or symbolic, real or imaginary. Whether a place is defined by a community, or exists on a relatively smaller scale in a home or room, it is the meanings associated with a particular location that provide an individual or a group with a sense of belonging to a certain environment. A distinction can be drawn here between tangible, physically locatable places (for example, a specific meeting place), and intangible symbolic items which are associated with places (for

example, a flag or a souvenir) that stands in to connect an individual to their homeland, or other communities of meaning. In the previous chapter I discussed the relationships between individuals to photographs and particular objects in their domestic spaces. By presenting the social framework within which groups establish themselves, I will develop in this chapter, an analysis of the nature and dynamics of one's connection to a specific place, and how a sense of 'community' influences the formation of new 'homelands' away from 'home', and the construction of migrant identities in London. Through my own photographs of 'public' spaces, and supported by an analysis of the work of such photographers as Dorothy Bohm and Thomas Struth, I also seek to question the ways in which a community, an abstract social construct, can be visually represented.

'Community' is a word that evokes feelings of belonging, and at the same time it eludes a clear definition of what it actually means. From geographical definitions of a particular community by local councils and the existence of community centres, to being a member or part of a group whether it is the Asian Society or European Community, the same term is made to mean different things in a range of contexts. However, in each case, 'community' has the ability to invoke an imagined or ideal state of belonging, and it produces a feeling of 'being connected' that is more often dreamed of than materially attained. As Benedict Anderson points out, modern societies construct a sense of community across a broad social space (beyond face-to-face relations). The characteristic form of unity in the modern nation is not defined by the 'vertical' development of a

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local and intimate relation but is an imaginary horizontal association with other members:

> It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.[1]

Anderson also suggests that print media and the utilisation of symbols and traditions are means through which a sense of communion is transmitted in order to consolidate these abstract forms of social bonding, what he regards as the origins of nationalism.

A community is often seen as a homogeneous mass, a unified group with no differences. This closed definition of the term 'community' is often taken for granted, forsaking the complexities inherent within groups in favour of an idealised 'melting pot'. Indeed, it is the realisation of the lack of actual 'belonging' that instills desire to be identified as part of a group – often it may be the envisioning of it that makes it 'real'. Traditionally, 'community' did not simply refer to the sharing of interests of a group of people, but a 'universal' framework within which the lives of these individuals are embedded and connected. Such a view on the question of belonging is now shifting to accommodate the consequences of global migration – the development of hybrid cultural formations. Anthony Giddens has argued that one of the characteristic features of modernity is the destruction of fixed attachments to place:

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[1] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, London: Verso, 1983, p.15

> In traditional societies, the past is honoured and symbols
> are valued because they contain and perpetuate the
> experience of generations. Tradition is a means of
> handling time and space, which inserts any particular
> activity or experience within the continuity of past,
> present and future, these in turn being structured by
> recurrent social practices.[2]

The diaspora of migrant groups that are dislocated from their homelands into alien environments in which they have to learn a new language and a different way of life creates hybrid communities. Often, migrants lay claim to a heritage, and at the same time, attempt to adopt or adapt to a new one, and identities are therefore transformed into particular seemingly fluid forms, as individuals exist between two cultures. They become hybrid expressions of the loss and subsequent reconstruction of their histories. Homi Bhabha makes reference to T.S. Eliot's writings on the 'problematic of colonial migration':

> The migrations of modern times ... have transplanted
> themselves according to some social, religious, economic
> or political determination... The people have taken with
> them only a part of the total culture... The culture which
> develops on the new soil must therefore be bafflingly
> alike and different from the parent culture: it will be
> complicated sometimes by whatever relations are
> established with some native race and further by
> immigration from other than the original source. In this
> way, peculiar types of culture-sympathy and culture-clash
> appear.[3]

The translation of cultures is therefore a complex act that generates borderline identifications (through the adoption or rejection of particular cultural traits or values), a condition Bhabha describes as 'unhomely, migratory, partial'. It is in the

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[2] Anthony Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity, Oxford: Polity Press, 1990, p.37

postmodern notion of the border, the nomad, cultures that are struggling with diasporia that a new conception of place and identity will be found. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson talk about a 'postcolonial simulacra' in which cultures can no longer identify a clear pattern of origin and place: 'familiar lines between here and there, centre and periphery, colony and metropole become blurred.'[4]

J. B. Jackson proposes a way of looking at the environment and cultural attitudes through the definition of the environment as a cultural artifact, a given base transformed or moulded by a particular group's technology and culture:

> Landscape is the place where we establish our own human organization of space and time. It is where the slow, natural processes of growth and maturity and decay are deliberately set aside and history is substituted. A landscape is where we speed up or retard or divert the cosmic programme and impose our own.[5]

This suggests that a community creates the landscape into a cultural form, with continuity and values, which develops familiarity with one's immediate environment. Therefore, over a period of time, an attachment to a specific place fosters and sustains group, community, and cultural identity. It is usually the case that particular immigrant groups congregate in defined locations; for example, the Jewish community settled in the Whitechapel area in the

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[3] T.S. Eliot, Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1949, p.62 as cited by Homi Bhabha, 'Culture's In Between', Artforum, September 1993, p.167

[4] Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, 'Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference', in Cultural Anthropology 7.I, 1992, p.7

[5] J.B. Jackson, 'Concluding with Landscapes', in Discovering the Vernacular Landscape, Yale, New Haven and London, 1984, p.157, as cited by Robert Riley in Setha Low and Irwin Altman (eds.), Place Attachment, New York and London: Plenum Press, 1992, p.16

East End of London in the nineteenth century; the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities now occupy the area. Arab migrants live around Bayswater and Edgware Road in West London.

The ways in which people develop and interact within a particular geographical location is reflective of the larger structures which influence identity and its representation. Therefore, the link between particular migrant cultures and their immediate physical surroundings is crucial to an understanding of collective human activity and identities. Having established its 'imaginary' nature, I intend to explore the means through which one can define the space of the community. How does a community exist, and how do we begin to visually represent it? In this instance, street photography may be used as a perspective to approach the ways in which public spaces may be understood, examples of which are Victor Burgin's work in his book Some Cities (1996), or Thomas Struth's depopulated cityscapes. At the same time, I intend to examine the various ways in which London as a city has been depicted, and how such photographers as Dorothy Bohm and Bill Brandt have sought to visually express their visions of it. Similar to the way in which a community is an imaginary construct, the ways of representing or documenting the space surrounding it is open to subjective experiences and interpretations.

Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz[6] describe most street photographers as detached observers who go about their work

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[6] Joel Meyerowitz, who is himself a photographer, is well-known for his colour work, including his street photography in New York.

generally unseen by their subjects: "They have taken pictures of people who are going about their business unaware of the photographer's presence. They have made candid pictures of everyday life in the street. That, at its core, is what street photography is."[7] For them, street photography typifies the nature of the medium, its 'instantaneity and multiplicity'[8] – a unique combination of the tool (the camera) and its subject matter (the street). Most street photographers worked in natural light, outside the studio setting where chance and opportunism become central to their way of working and to the resulting images. Avoiding classification in their work, they prefer to spontaneously reveal unseen or unnoticed aspects of the modern environment. It is therefore not unusual that many street photographers use the streets and city spaces in their work because of its abundant and continuous source of visual material – the wide range of subjects and possibilities that can be visually captured on city streets. Indeed, many images including street photographs have as their subject some aspect of social behaviour. The street is central to the way people inhabit a modern urban environment, both as an architectural phenomenon, and as spaces which people occupy and interact with others. They depict social situations, dealing with people and their relationships to their environment. In this sense, as new cultures and identities are in formation in the city, such photographs present a visual anthropology of the street.

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[7] Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz, Bystander: A History of Street Photography, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994, p.34

[8] ibid., p.34

The period after the Second World War saw the emergence of new breeds of documentary photographers who began to present highly personal views of the world that were less idealistic or unified in their approach than that pictured in the mainstream media. Photographers like Bruce Davidson and Lee Friedlander, for example, began to include in their images or in their ways of working, implied or explicit questions about the relationship of the photographer to those being photographed. Similarly, in the work of photographers such as Robert Frank and Raghubir Singh, the street photographer is not simply a detached or innocent bystander. Frank, a Swiss photographer best known for his book The Americans (1958) retains the realism of photojournalism but operated as a subjective observer presenting a lonely, alienating view of American society, far from the optimistic stereotypical visions of the 'American dream'. Frank's images were taken on the move, often 'from the hip' without looking through the viewfinder, sometimes blurred and indistinct like fleeting glances of the world. Raghubir Singh's work too, may be placed in the documentary tradition as he positions himself and his work in a direct relationship with ideas of what Indian life and 'community' means. He worked mostly in colour and used stark contrasts of light and shadow in his photographs, documenting the detailed aspects of the lives of everyday people on the streets in India through a combination of both portraits of people and their activities (often captured in their everyday lives) and landscapes, presenting an investigation of the substance of public life and the meanings attached to Indian communities. For example, animals, which are significant to Indian society in

relation to its culture and religion, feature prominently in Singh's photographs.

His photographs are often saturated in colour, which in the context of Singh's work is inseparable from the content of each image. Indeed, colour is a theme he addressed in the introduction to the retrospective selection of his photographs in his book, River of Colour: The India of Raghubir Singh[9] (1998). He traces his origins in the art history of Indian colourists, noting that: "It was as if the camera, the western mould, made a drawing into which the colours of India had to catch fire... In the artistic continuum of 'filling in' colours, some 19th Century Indian photographers hand-coloured their photographs ... using a rich palette." Black, a colour he considered alien to Indian culture, was perhaps more appropriate in expressing the 'angst and alienation' inherent in the work of Western photographers such as Brassai, Frank and Arbus.

Thomas Struth, a German photographer, uses a different approach in his photographs of social spaces in his large-format photographs of street scenes. His work is often characterised by the 'stillness' of his images in contrast to the noise and movement of the metropolis that he photographs. He works early in the morning, placing his camera horizontally in the middle of the road at eye level or slightly higher, capturing views of largely depopulated places with little traffic through a distinct linear perspective. His intention is 'to make the process appear scientific, a sort of

[9] Raghubir Singh, River of Colour: The India of Raghubir Singh, London: Phaidon, 1998

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129: Thomas Struth, Corso Vittorio Emanuele, Naples, 1989

130: Dorothy Bohm, Billingsgate, from Sixties London (1996)

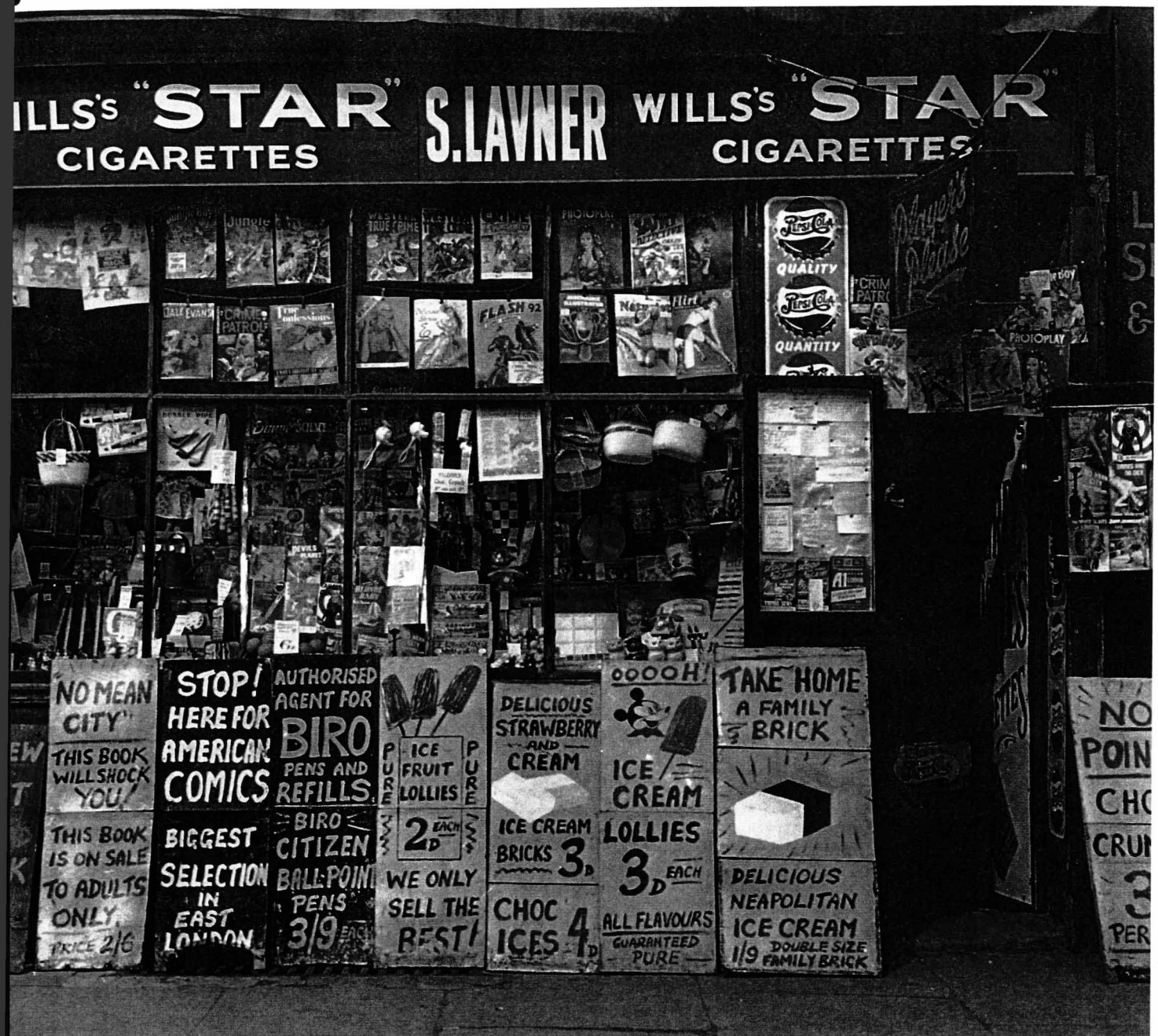131: Dorothy Bohm, Camden Town, from <u>Sixties London</u> (1996)

Plate 19 Camden Town

132: Dorothy Bohm, Post Office Tower from Tottenham Court Road

133: Bill Brandt, Dinner is Served, 1935

134: Nigel Henderson, Shop front, East London, 1949 - 52

systematised neutral position.'[10] Struth's chosen perspective situates both the photographer and the viewer of the image in a distanced position of alienation to the spaces that he photographs. But his clinical approach, which Ulrich Loock describes as 'a kind of near-scientific stock taking and analysis of urban architecture'[11], at the same time presents the viewer with possibilities of access. The degree of detail possible in large format photography provides him with the means of presenting within his photographs, presence and narrative on a larger scale relative to conventional 35mm photography. Indeed, his streets are presented as opportunities for visual revelations, seeking active responses from his viewers. When looking at, or rather, examining each of Struth's images, we pick out individual details that interest us, that we recognise or relate to, drawing us into the frame. The stillness of the scenes and the centralised perspective transform these images into places where activities have happened or are about to happen (Image #129). In this way, he does not only offer an objective view of constructed worlds complete with their contingencies, his photographs also allow the viewer to position themselves within these spaces, to construct their own internal visions of it.

Amanda Hopkinson, in her introduction to Dorothy Bohm's series of photographs of London in the 1960s, notes that 'between the tourist guides and literary memoirs there is remarkably little of

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[10] Thomas Struth, in 'Struth', an interview with Mark Gisbourne, Art Monthly, # 176, May 1994, p.3

[11] Ulrich Loock, 'Photos of the Metropolis', in Thomas Struth: Unconscious Places, Münster: Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe, 1987, p.77

serious record about our capital city'.[12] Photographers in other capital cities such as New York and Paris have, on the other hand, meticulously documented their immediate social environment. Take Paris, for example, with Atget's alleys, parks, staircases and door-knockers in the 1900's, Brassai's The Secret Life of Paris, the work of Andre Kertesz and Cartier-Bresson's street photographs. London, with the exception of various visual documentations of the Blitz by photographers such as George Rodger and Bill Brandt, the city produced comparably fewer photographic responses. Erwin Fieger's anthology of city sights in his book of large-format colour photographs London: City of Any Dream[13] (1968) and Dorothy Bohm's collection of black and white photographs in her book Sixties London (1996) attempt to capture a range of people and scenes to express the atmosphere of the city. Bohm produces in her personal portrait of the city, images which are complex in their content, yet familiar enough for the viewer to relate. These publications could be seen as distinct from the various tourist guides published, or series of photographs that depict Haunted London[14] (1993) or architectural studies of the city, which provide the viewer with detached observations of touristic public 'sights' rather than an insight into the experience of the city. Indeed, as Bohm reveals, "I tried hard not to be content with just the facade or the outward appearance of things. I hoped to penetrate just beyond that, to portray a living London: the people who pursued their daily

[12] Amanda Hopkinson, Sixties London: Photographs by Dorothy Bohm, London: Lund Humphries Publishers in association with The Photographers' Gallery, 1996, p.11

[13] Erwin Fieger and Colin MacInnes, London: City of Any Dream, London: Thames and Hudson, 1968

[14] Rupert Matthews, Haunted London, Andover: Pitkin, 1993

occupations, walked, talked, ate or relaxed and were dressed in the fashions of the time."[15]

Bohm's photographs of London are not 'grabbed' street shots. She is stimulated by a real interest in what her subjects happen to be doing, such as the fishmonger at Billingsgate with his catch of lobsters and crabs, or the woman pondering what to buy from a selection of second-hand goods placed on a table in a Camden market stall (Images #130 and #131). Posters too, are immediately attractive, and like the clothes and fashions of the day, serve as characteristic reflections of particular periods, such as those advertising Sovereign cigarettes and Harp beer in the billboards foregrounding the Post Office Tower with its rotating restaurant, a building now owned by British Telecom (Image #132). Although economic and class divisions were not a pre-determined point of focus for Bohm, she presents the viewer with a whole array of individuals from all walks of life. We see a group of youngsters on a decrepit Paddington street, and a housekeeper with her handbag about to leave a home in Knightsbridge. Others are immersed in their everyday pursuits – a girl reads her book during her 'lunch break in the City of London'; and a man feeds the swans at St. James' Park.

In a similar way, the introduction to Bill Brandt's collection of photographs in the book London in the Thirties[16] (1983) defines his work in terms of his intimate relationship with the city: "We are shown not the cliché London of 'sights' and public buildings but

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[15] Dorothy Bohm, ibid., p.7
[16] Bill Brandt, London in the Thirties, London and Bedford: The Gordon Fraser Gallery Ltd, 1983

an intimate view of the city as experienced by its inhabitants." The emphasis here is not on the popular images of the city as experienced by visiting tourists, but an 'inside view' of familiar and detailed scenes that the inhabitant of the city encounters.

Bill Brandt's photographs of English life in the 1930s and 40s offer seemingly objective proof of familiar social stereotypes. He documented the rituals of class, complete with distinctive uniforms (such as the white aprons of household servants in 'Dinner is Served', 1935, Image #133), and within specific social settings, from drawing rooms to pubs. The photographs in London in the Thirties are presented in three sections – opening with London as experienced by the poor with scenes of children playing on streets and the interiors of doss-houses. From here, he presents middle-class life with views of suburban homes and the leisure pursuits of the middle-class; and in the final section, Brandt focuses his photography on the rich, particularly on details such as clothing, the arrangement of interiors, and the roles of servants within these households. Brandt's photographs, published in magazines like the Picture Post, and collected in books such as The English at Home (1936), and A Night in London (1938) became established as a true record of England. Brandt's work finds its basis in the theatrical, in psychologically charged scenes, the melodramatic and stereotypical, qualities that can be recognised in most documentary photographs. Because the people that Brandt photographs all appear to be fully absorbed in what they are doing, they 'permit us to see them more closely, and to find a more intimate view of London than interminable, anonymous street scenes could ever offer... Here we
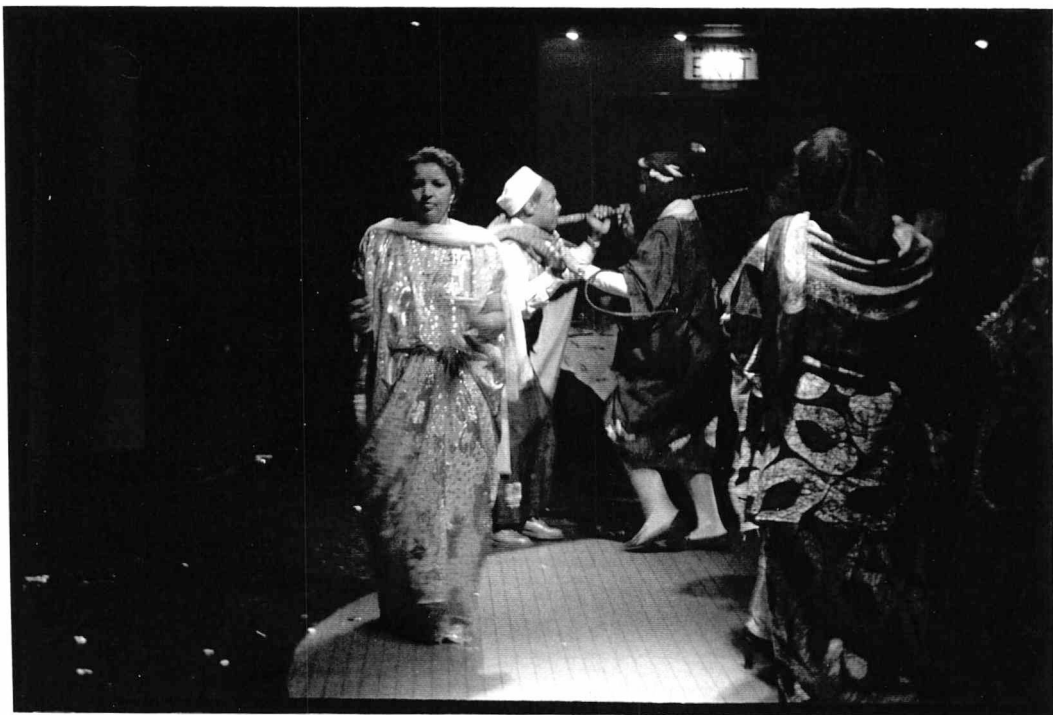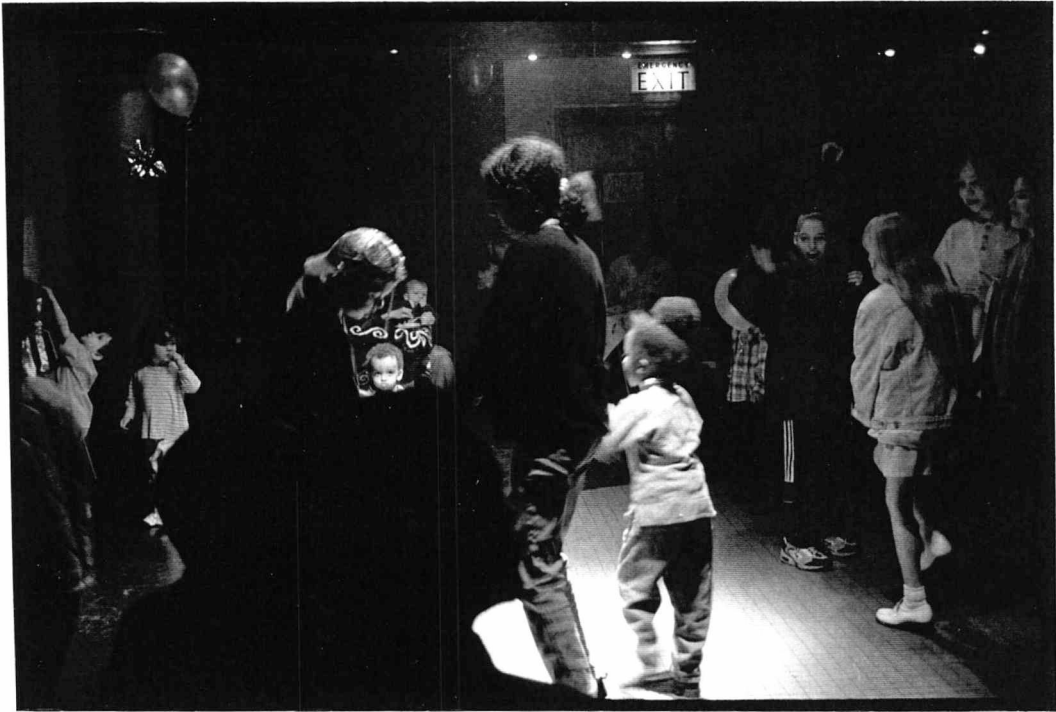
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have a taste of how real life was in the thirties... photographs which are unmatched in their strength of form and mood.'[17] Although many of these photographs were staged[18], posed by members of his household (his family, relatives and servants) and fulfilling a range of stereotypes, Brandt's version of England, perhaps even generated by his own memories of media stereotypes and shaped by his own fantasies, satisfied the idea of 'England' held by the general public during that period.

Despite the few bodies of work that have been produced where the main focus is the experience of London as a city, photographers such as Dorothy Bohm, Bill Brandt, and Nigel Henderson all share in their work a strong interest in the community and the methods of visually investigating it. Henderson employed a distinctly anthropological approach in his photographs of Bethnal Green in the 1950s, and at the same time, empathised with the working-class people that he photographed. The physicality and presence of the street itself also fascinated him, expressed through photographs of shop fronts advertising various things such as American comics, ice-lollies and Pepsi-Cola (Image #134).[19]

[17] op. Cit., Introduction

[18] Mark Haworth-Booth, Bill Brandt: Behind the Camera, as cited by Nigel Warburton, Bill Brandt, World Photographers Reference Series Vol. 5, Oxford: Clio Press, 1993, p.10

[19] Russell Ferguson, 'Open City: Possibilities of the Street', in Open City: Street Photographs since 1950, Oxford and Germany: Museum of Modern Art Oxford/ Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2001, p.19

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The road for a refugee
is as long
as you make it.

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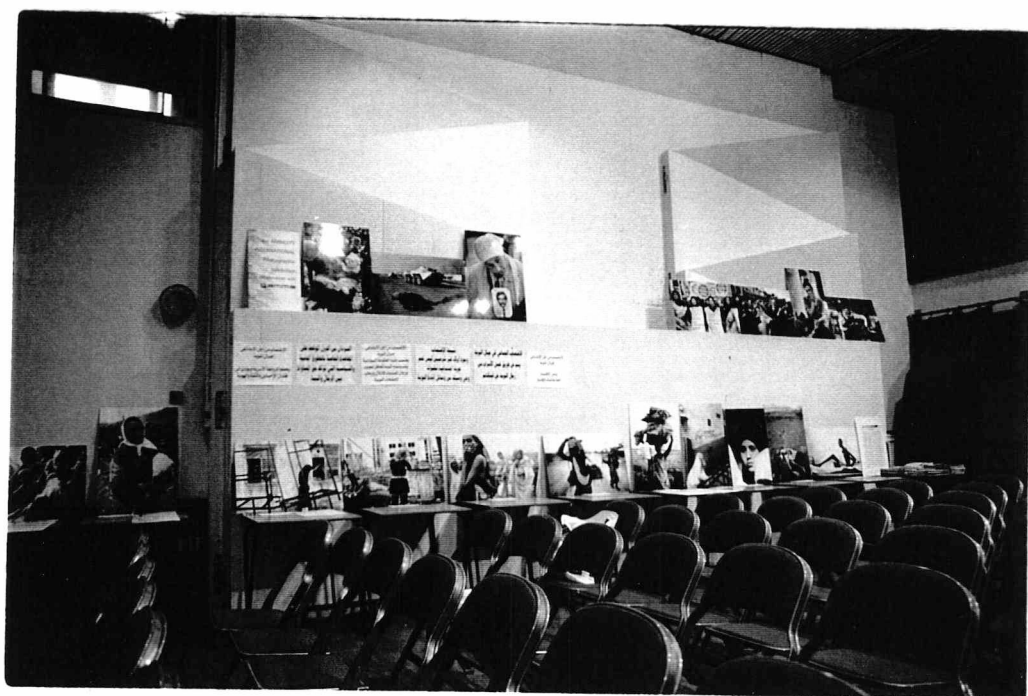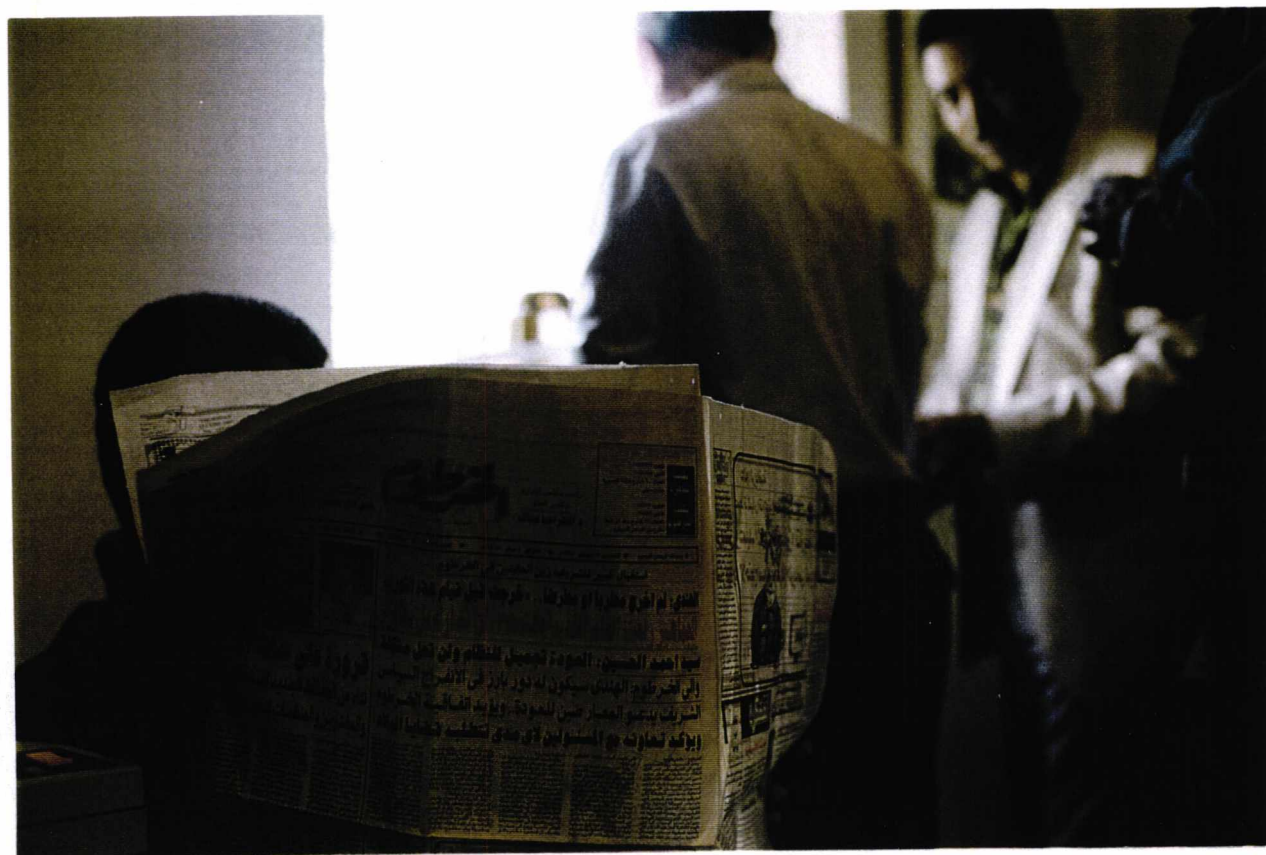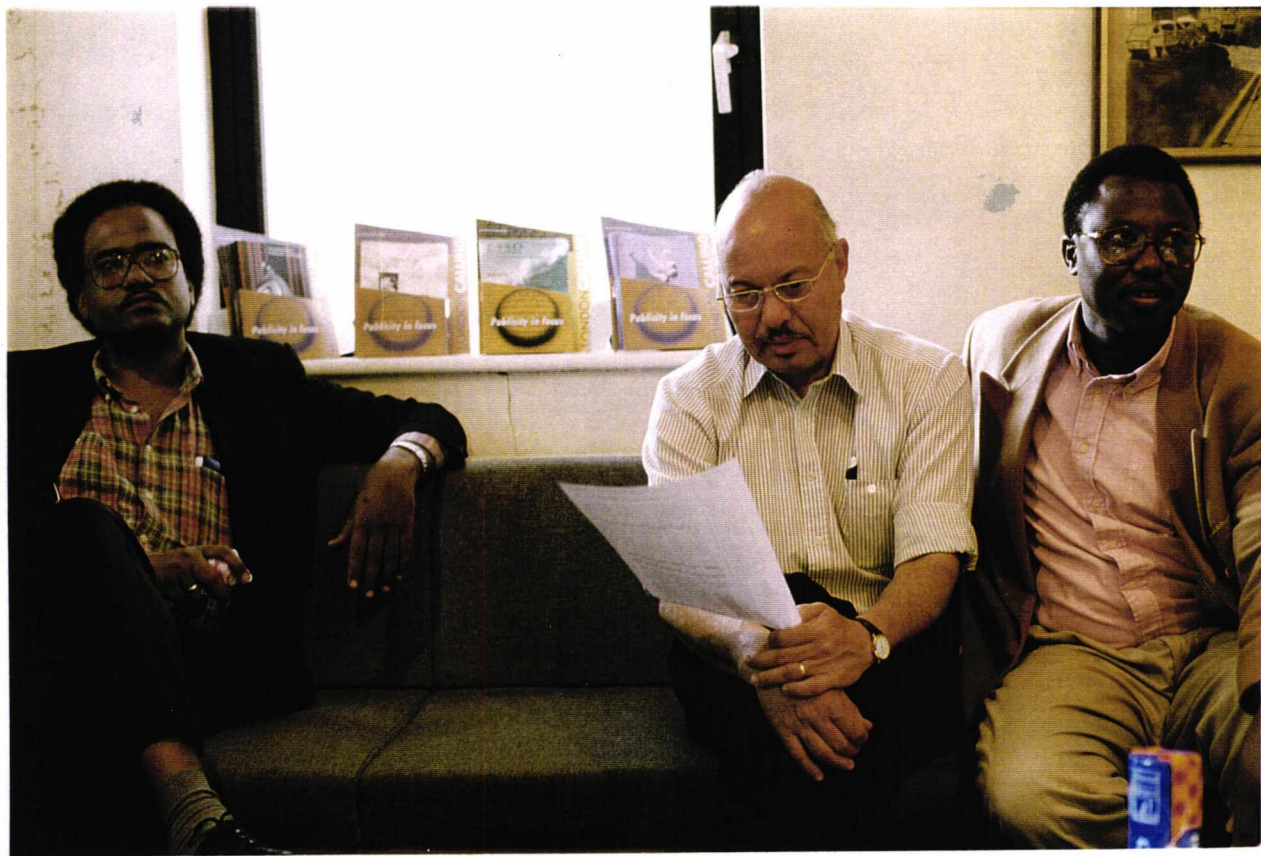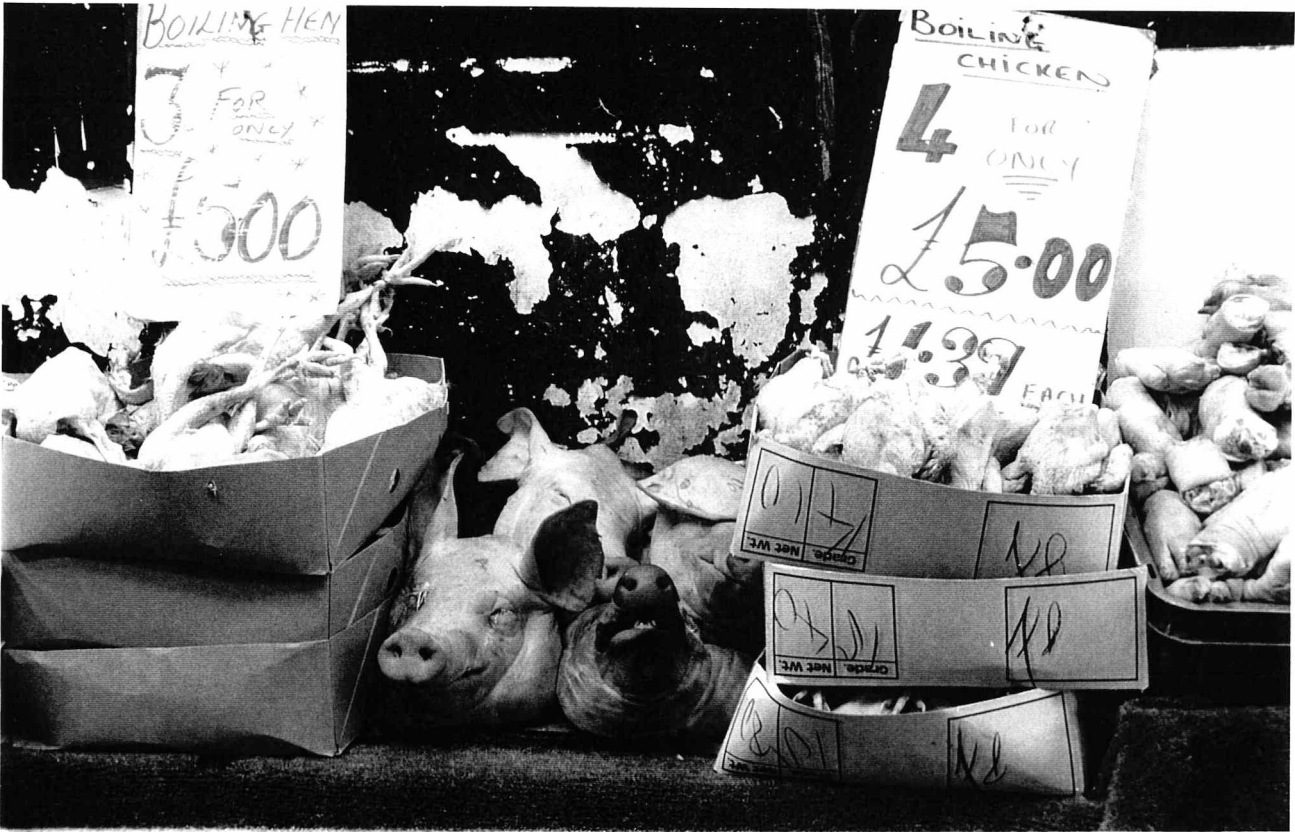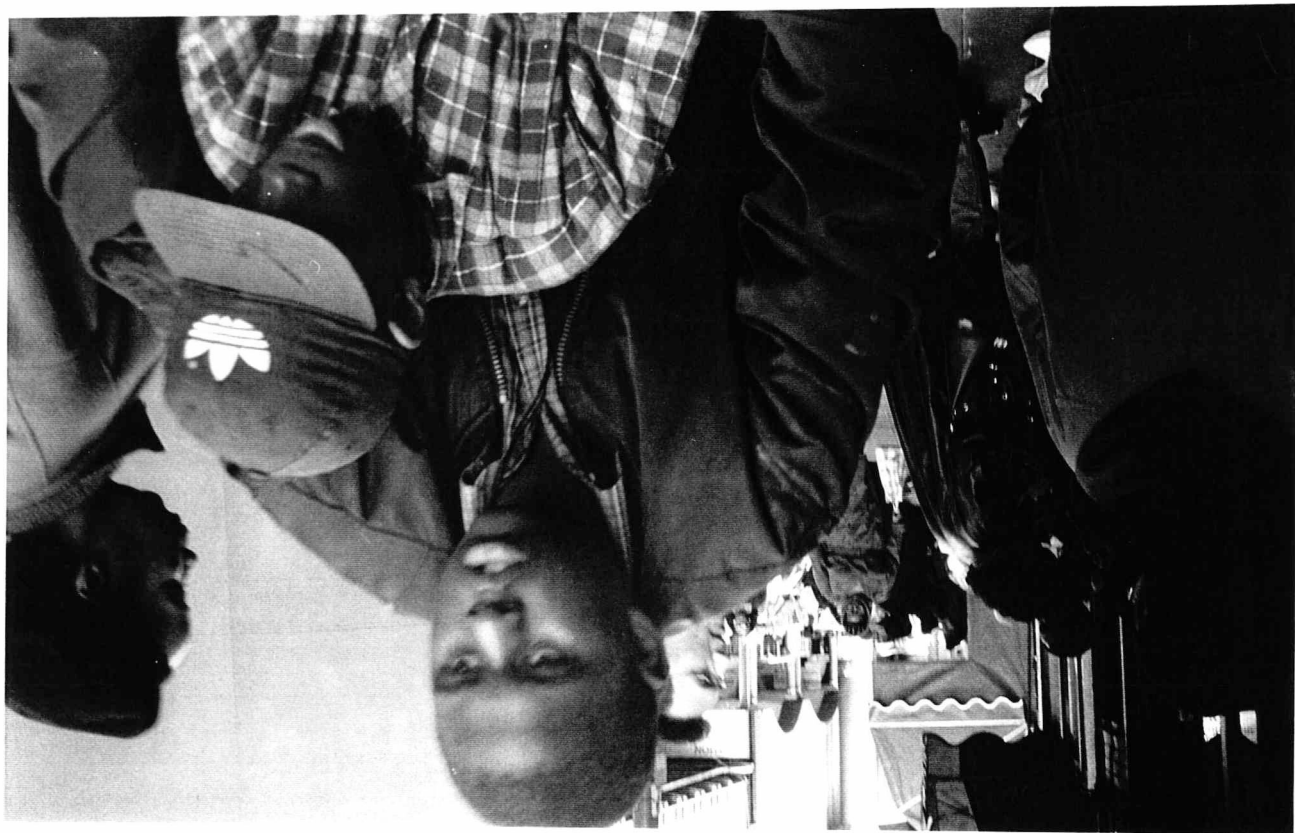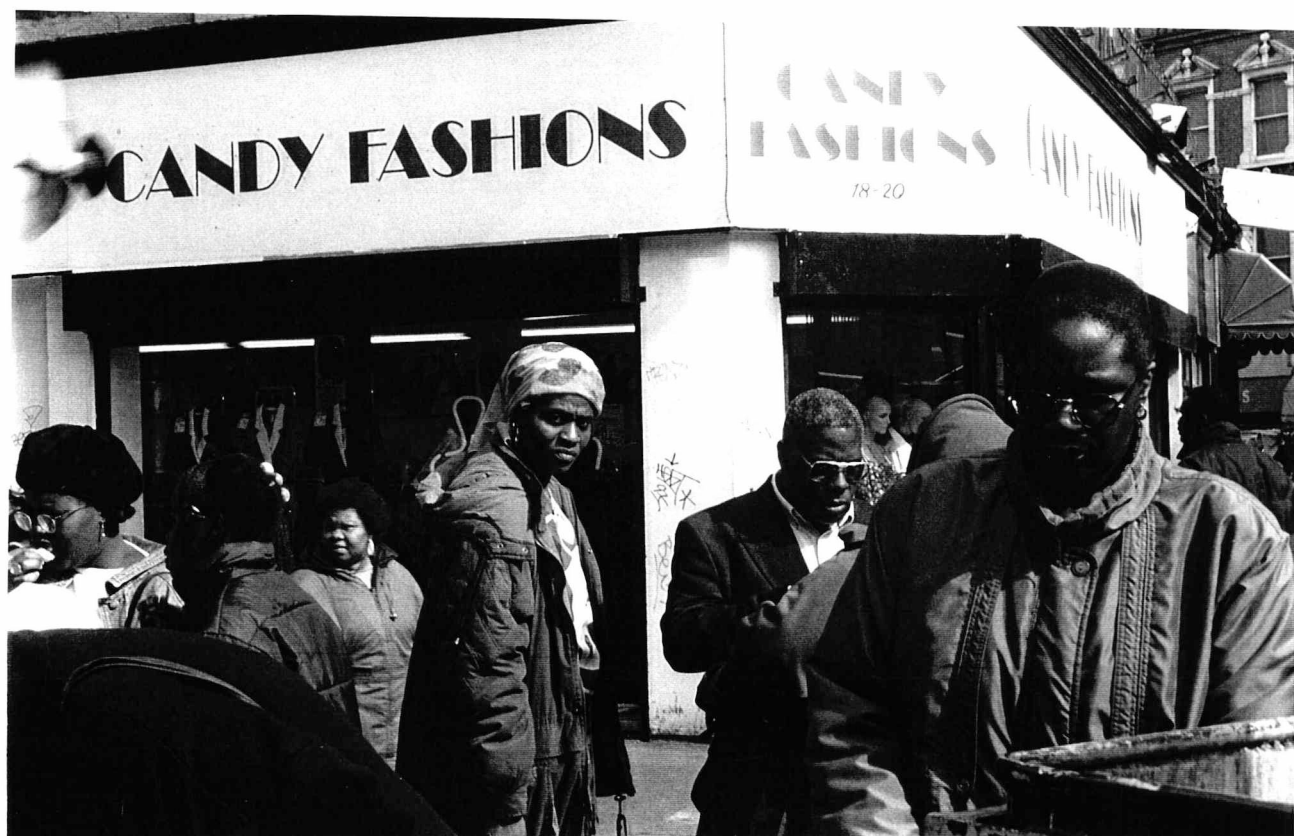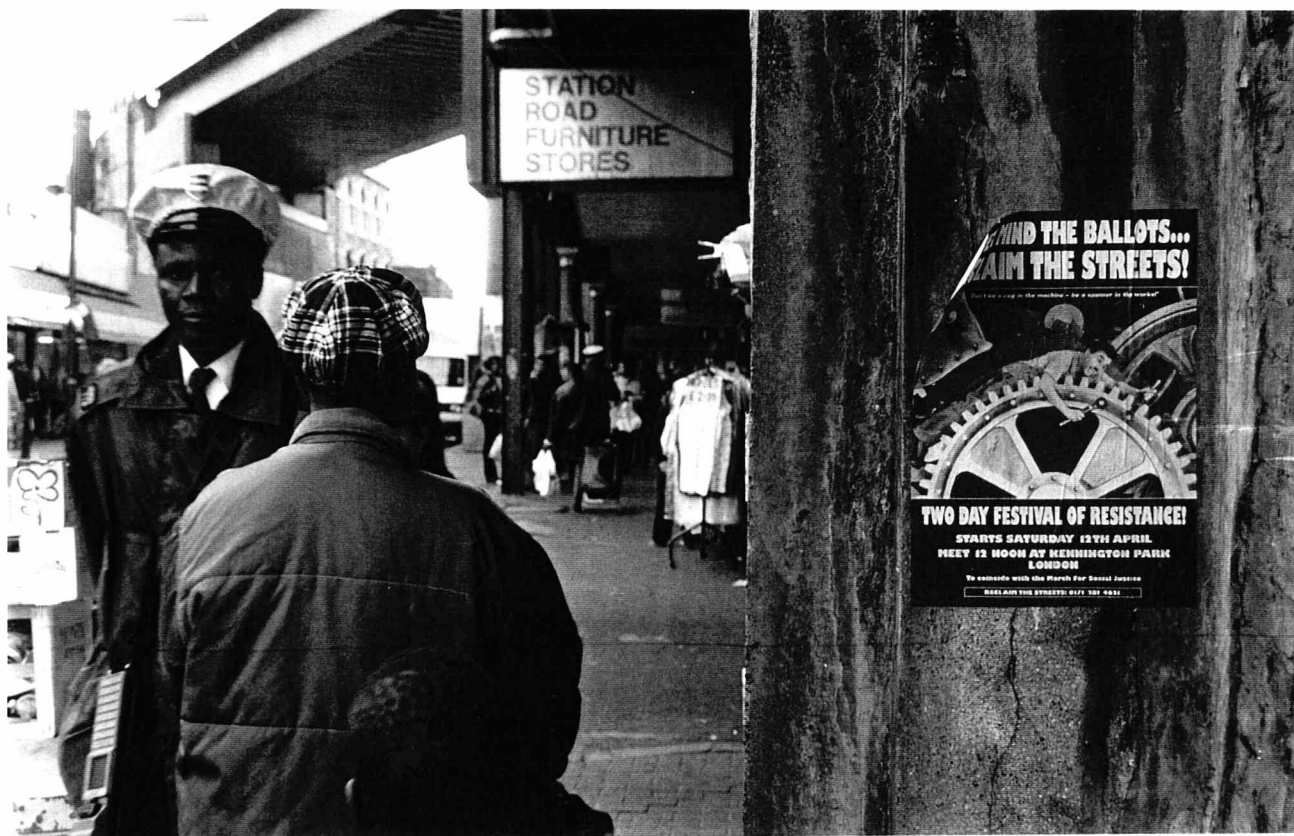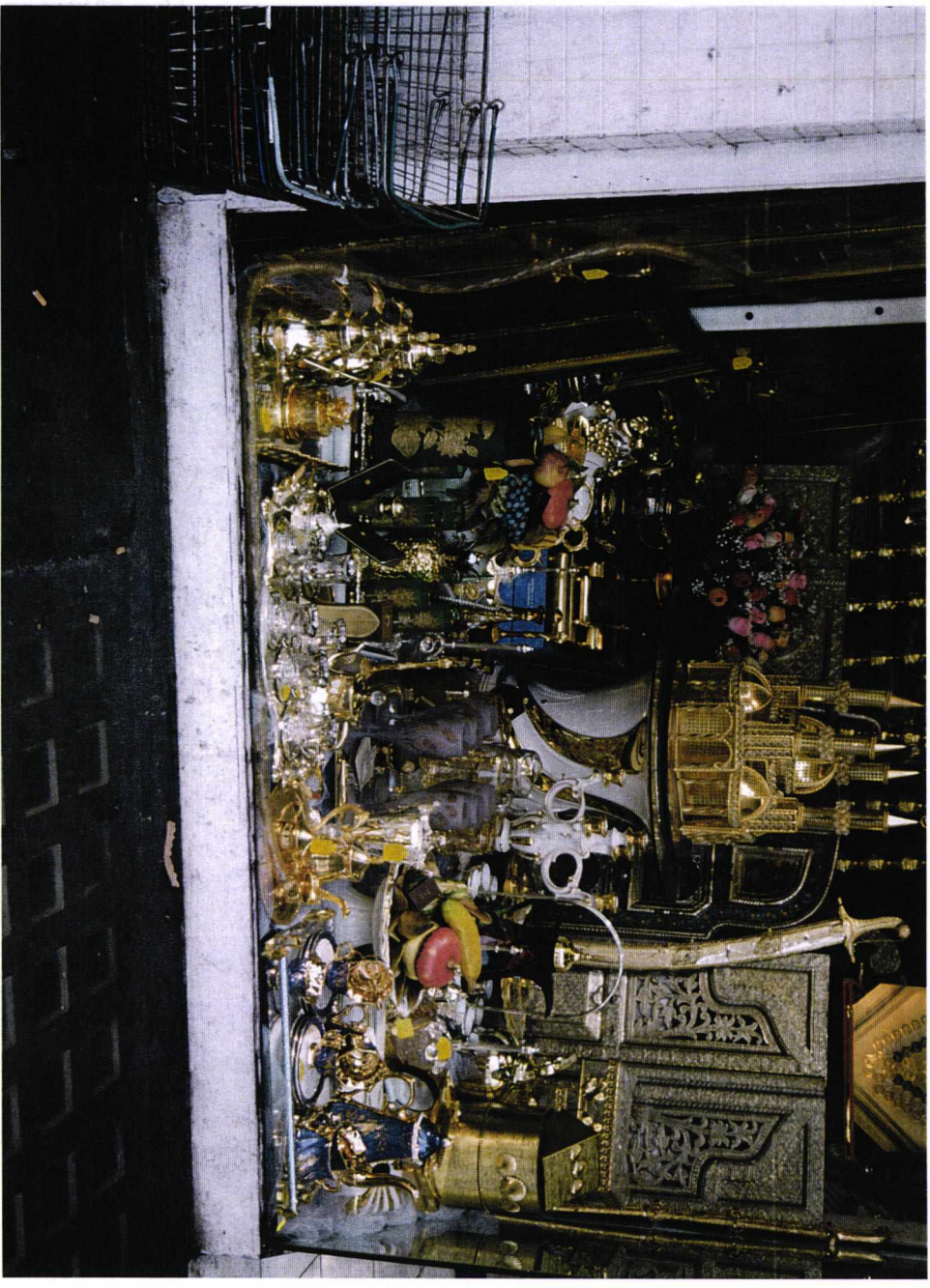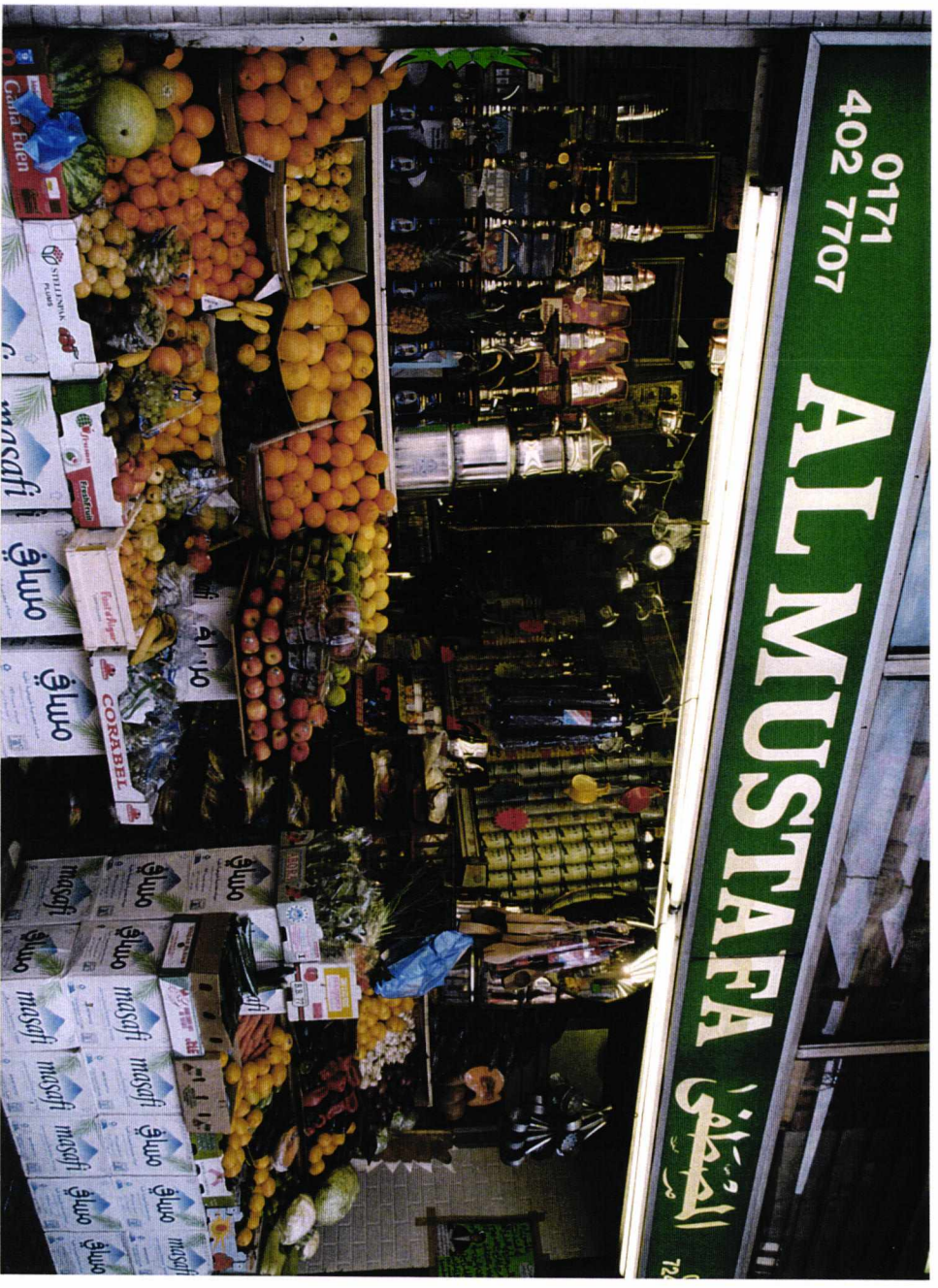
In addition to photographs taken of the interiors of refugee homes, I photographed a series of events and locations in London depicting shared public spaces of specific communities. These photographs should not be read as conclusive evidence of a place or community. They are best approached as fragmentary images of communities and their activities, people and places, vignettes of London's social landscape. Images #135 and #136 were taken at a party organised for refugees in Ladbroke Grove, West London, by the Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum. At this event, both traditional African (Ethiopian, Somalian, etc.) music and modern Western popular music was played. The older generation, dressed in their traditional clothing was significantly distinct from the younger generation which was only interested when Western pop music (such as by the Spice Girls - indeed one girl was dressed as 'Sporty Spice') was played. The second series (Images #137 to #142) depicting large numbers o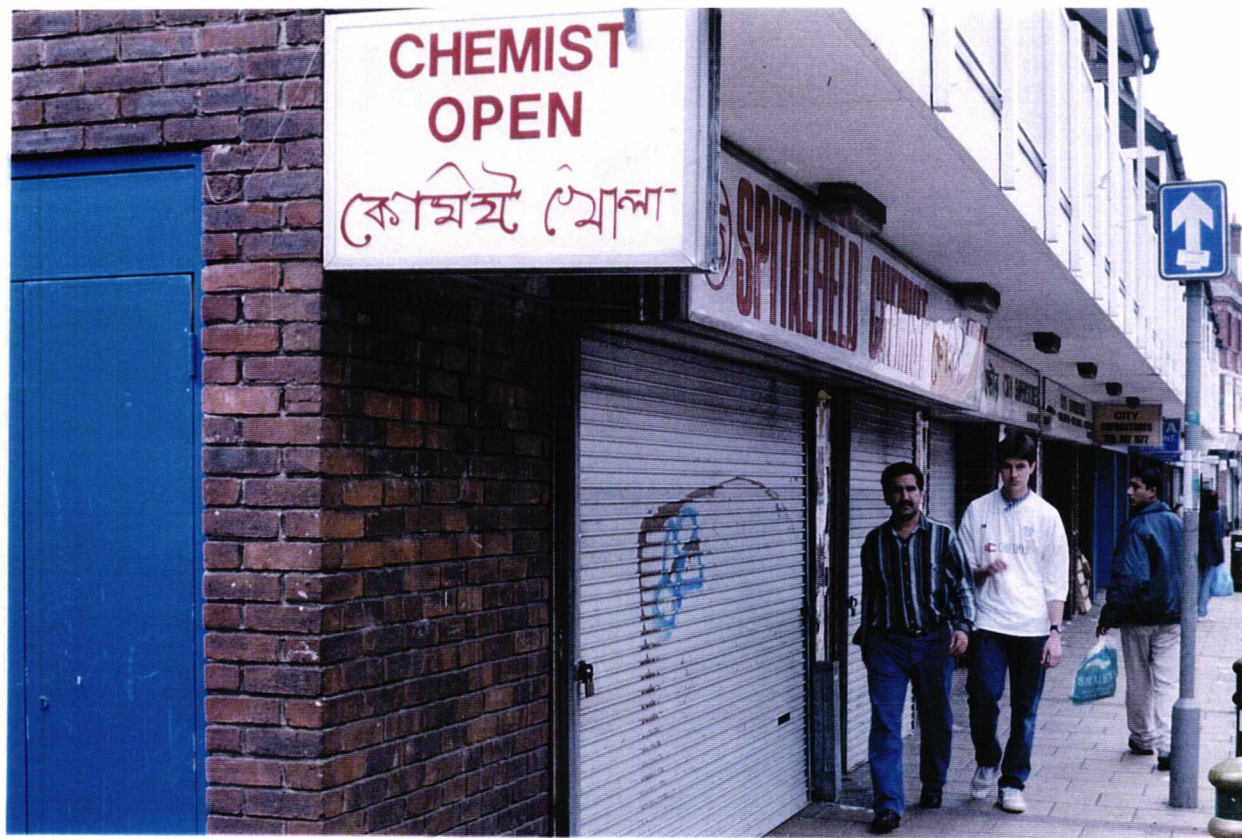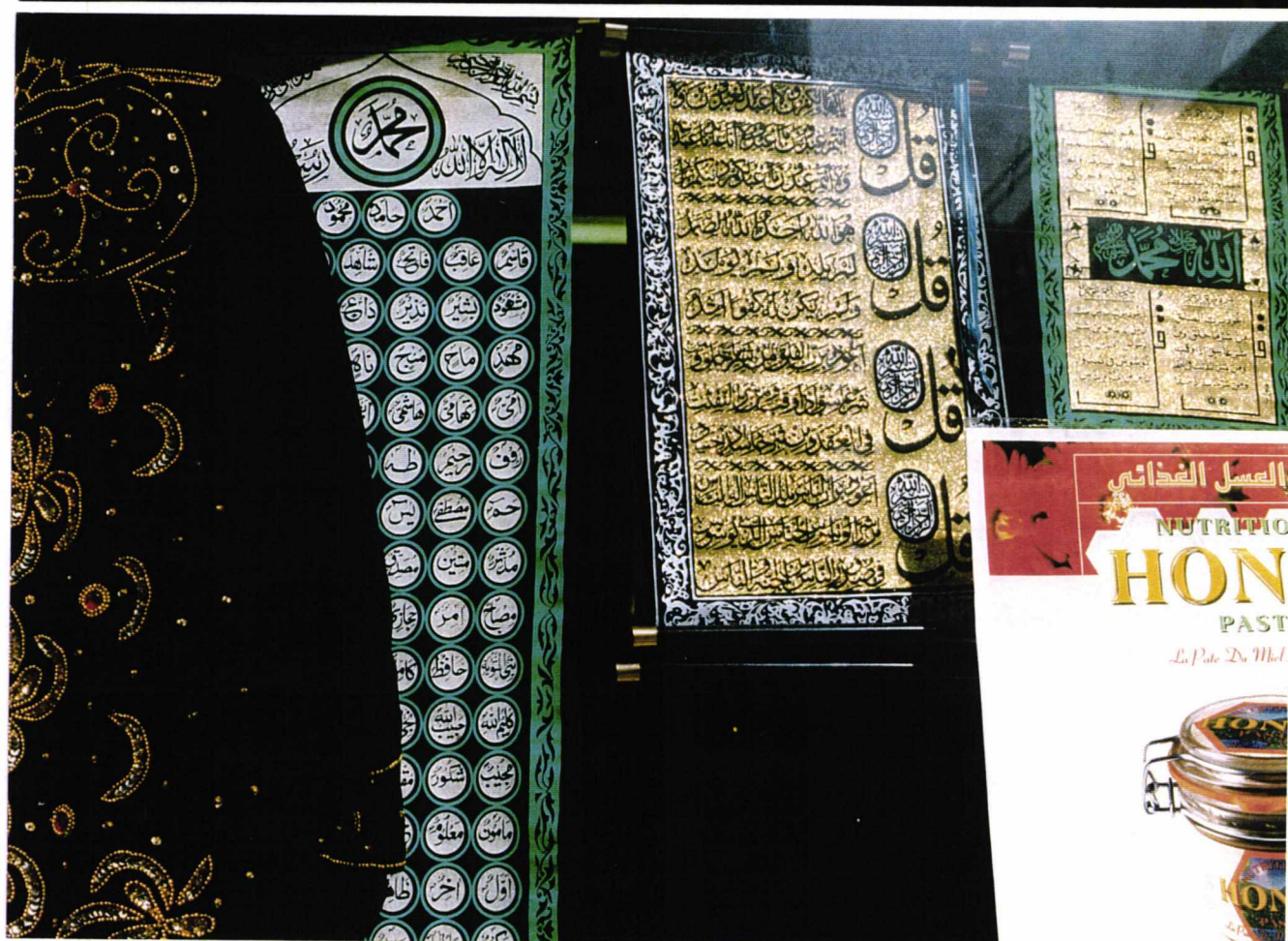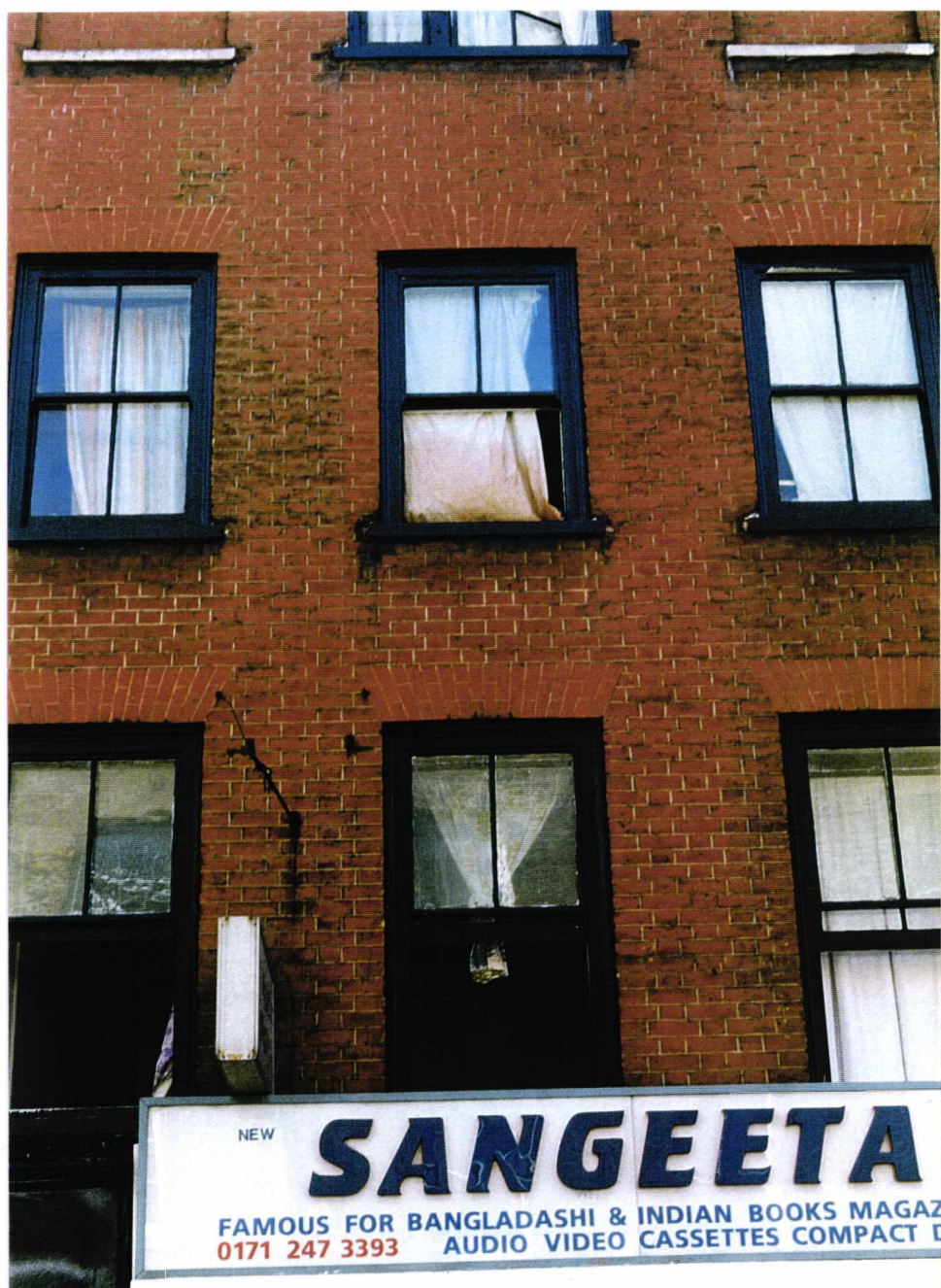f the male Sudanese community, ironically, was taken at a conference for the rights of Sudanese women in London. The walls of this meeting hall were lined with images from Amnesty International. The photographs I have taken feature groups of Sudanese men dancing at the edge of a stage where musicians are performing live - their national anthem is played too, and the men sing and dance along. Most of these photographs taken at the party in Ladbroke Grove or the Sudanese human rights conference are presented in a rhetorical mode, where little more can be said about their content than what actually appears in the images. Being part of a community is inherent in human nature; perhaps it provides individuals with a sense of immortality, a desire to belong to something that exists beyond their life span. National anthems are

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especially effective in creating an imagined community through music, by using rhythm and harmony, and lyrics play a significant role in invoking a transcendent feeling of unification and patriotism. The photographs taken at such public ceremonies simply provide a visual statement about the individuals who attend these functions and the re-enactment of customized social rituals. They do not resonate metaphorically and there is little more that one can actually unpack from them. Photographs taken by anthropologists in the field very often resemble such images where their subject matter (and content) serves as evidence, often in order to substantiate a written text. Those images of dancing men at the conference represent a rehearsed act, as part of a ritual, or symbolic practice.

The series of photographs taken in the Arabic School in Edgware Road, however, may be more interesting in terms of their content and meaning (Images #143 to #149). For example, some images depict the predominance of males (fathers) in the parents' waiting area; the reading of Sudanese newspapers implies a close connection to and the public sharing of information from their homeland. This image is reminiscent of Benedict Anderson's suggestion that newspapers, like an extreme form of a book, play an important role in assimilating the individual into an imaginary social bond, and in generating a sense of communion.[20] The development of print capitalism meant the circulation of forms of texts and journals throughout a national area. In this process, a particular body of information addresses a particular audience, and one identifies like the rest of the nation

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does to a particular set of narratives. Therefore, each group constitutes the news of the world in its own terms, and what is deemed important is shared within the community.

The photographs also illustrate the fact that Sudanese teenagers are uninterested in learning to speak their mother tongue (Image #146 captures six miscreants). In addition, the 'Western' attire of the school children, and the awkwardness of one particular child (seen in Image #147 eating her sandwich lunch) in relation to her surroundings portrays a group of youngsters experiencing an 'in-between culture', a process of renegotiating their placement within two distinct worlds.

Image #149, of a classroom devoid of human beings, is more evocative. The poster on the back wall shows an image of a path through a mountainous landscape; the text reads: 'The road for a refugee is as long as you make it.' The poster, which addresses the viewer (it is directed at the refugee children who attend Arabic classes at this school) as 'you', initiates an immediate identification into the space and experience of the refugee, highlighting the process of travel to a foreign land from home, the journey that it entailed. The empty chairs, the open book on the desk and the school bag left behind suggest the evidence of human presence. Provided with the paraphernalia of a classroom within a school for refugee children, the viewer is simply left to speculate on the identities of the people who occupy or pass through this space.

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[20] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, London: Verso, 1983

Other photographs I have taken visually document the public spaces within which particular communities exist, such as Brick Lane and Aldgate in the East End, Brixton market, Southall, Edgware Road, and Bayswater in London. These areas are perhaps best known for the specific racial and cultural identities of their inhabitants, and are therefore obvious locations for their migrant communities. Perhaps less obvious are those places that have been historically transformed – the photographs I have taken in the London Docklands, for example, point to aspects of the environment that are less visible or noticeable in relation to the history of the area.

The architecture and physical structures within an environment are reflective of the communities that inhabit it. As Salman Rushdie notes, 'Landscape is the inscape of national identity'. The identity of a community or nation is deeply embedded in the physical environment that supports and sustains it. The building (Image #166) at the intersection of Fournier Street and Brick Lane, for example, was in the 1850s a synagogue for Jewish immigrants, which then became the Masjid or the London Jamme Mosque in the 1950s. The building and its history stands as a symbol, a direct reflection of the changing dominant immigrant groups within the area. The sign on the front of the building names the mosque in English, Arabic and Urdu.

A large number of the photographs I took in London are devoid of human beings, however, their presence is suggested through the available signs within the physical environment. By not showing

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people, I reveal the urban environment as a place where a community expresses its identity. These details that I observe of the streets and cityscape reveal traces of human activity over time, even in the absence of actual figures. In this sense, I choose to offer a range of possibilities to the viewer of the image rather than to provide 'evidence' through photographs with limited closed narratives. Although several photographs may at once appear explicitly anthropological, such as the photographs of hats for Hajis, or religious scrolls displayed in shop windows in Brick Lane, East London, these should be read in relation to the series of photographs as a whole. It is my intention to investigate the spatial framework and the social relations that are fostered in particular locations, in order to provide an insight into the environment in which communities are established, shaped and sustained. These photographs offer fleeting, highly selective glimpses which aim to leave the viewer to imagine the wider panoramas of the environment to which these images belong.

There has recently been increasing demand for single-person housing in the area for the second-generation immigrants. There is now a preference for single or nuclear family accommodation, but still in close proximity to one's relatives. At the same time, the last six years or so saw a surge in property prices in East London, as old warehouses were converted into loft apartments, and it became a popular trend for young professionals to move into so-called 'up and coming' areas occupied by artists (where blackness or other so-called 'exotic' races have been commodified) such as Spitalfields, Hoxton and Brixton, places traditionally occupied largely by

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closely-knit immigrant and refugee groups.[21] Real estate agents, known as 'city fringe specialists' began buying out 18th century buildings, converting them, and promoting 'loft-living', catered for the rich middle class. Indeed, Spitalfields's central location at the very edge of the City of London raises questions about the identity and positioning of its inhabitants, people who are socially marginal, but living right in the centre of the city, in turn producing further implications about race and national identity.

The kinds of objects that are for sale (i.e. in demand) within a particular area are often a good reflection of the needs and lifestyle of the people who consume these goods. Along Brick Lane in East London, for example, the prayer rugs and other religious goods lining the shop windows (Image #156 to #158) suggest that there is an established Islamic community in the area. This notion is supported by the street images of shop fronts selling traditional Islamic clothing, and prayer beads. A poster advertising religious classes ('Understanding the Schools of Fiqh') was photographed along Fashion Street (Image #168). Image #160 shows a framed religious scripture in Arabic characters placed in the window of a restaurant, alongside another larger framed photograph of Prince Charles meeting an Indian man, presumably the owner of the restaurant. Indeed, more than 60% of the population in Spitalfields are Bangladeshi, most of whom are British citizens. They arrived in England in the 1960s, and were mainly males and Sunni Muslim, a religion which the younger generation are reconsidering. Spitalfields also has a significant Pakistani population. Possessing more power and money, they are

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[21] For example, the British artists, Gilbert and George, have lived on Fournier Street for a long time, when

usually the landlords and wholesalers rather than the producers. In the same area, there exists a small population of Somali and Chinese immigrants, and also a small Jewish population, remnants of the immigrants from Russia and Poland in the nineteenth century.

As seen in Image #159, graffiti on a wall along Chicksand Street, Spitalfields in East London conveys moral and religious messages against drugs and to encourage young people in the area to follow Islam: "Islam: Enjoin the Good & Forbid the Evil". These messages are targeted at the young people who frequent the sports and recreation area (with basketball courts etc.) nearby. It is significant that these traditional social and religious messages are conveyed through a medium that is conventionally associated with 'rebellious youth' promoting an 'alternative' lifestyle. In addition, the style of the writing used mirrors the regular form of street graffiti. Both bold and confrontational, it conveys a distinct message that has its assumed appeal in youth groups who have perhaps adopted clearly Westernised attitudes through their assimilation within British culture, and whose 'authentic' racial and religious identities may now be considered to be under threat. The graffiti also reflects the exposure to particular styles and ways of life influenced by music and youth culture.

I photographed the outside of a video shop along Brick Lane bearing multiple posters of Bollywood films (Image #164). The foreground of the photograph shows several posters pasted on a lamppost, one of which advertises a "Rally for Islam II" at

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accommodation in the area was relatively cheap.

Trafalgar Square.[22] A film poster on the shop-front (Image #163), advertising a film called "Major Saab: In Defence of Love" bears a resemblance to the advertising style and format of the Hollywood film poster, as opposed to the distinct format of traditional Indian film posters, such as the one pasted above 'Major Saab'. The lighting of the central figure wearing a uniform that is not recognisably officially Indian is reflective of the various methods through which other cultures appropriate the styles of a dominant American visual culture. Indeed, the Hindi film is advertised in the English language. Similarly, a shop called 'Planet Bollywood' on the High Street in Southall sells Hindi music (Image #187), another appropriation of Western culture.

Photographs #165 and #167 show the exteriors of living spaces in Spitalfields. They compare the red-brick private apartments above the shops along Brick Lane, and the larger block of council flats on Chicksand Street. What is visible in the first picture is a range of curtains and patterns – the interiors are in complete darkness and therefore remain unseen and unknown. The viewer can only speculate on the identity of its occupants. Similarly, the second photograph of the council flats is devoid of human beings. Apart from the regular patterning of doors and windows, the image captures the lines of clothes hanging up to dry, presenting a reflection of the everyday lives of the people who live there.

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[22] Trafalgar Square is symbolically the 'most public' of places. To the residents of London, it may simply function as a living-route; at the same time, it may represent the 'heart' of London, a symbolic location for staging demonstrations.

In the early 1990s, the government referred to the Brick Lane area as 'Banglatown', which angered the Pakistani population inhabiting the area, and at the same time, this commodifying of race generally raised doubts amongst the local people. However, they eventually reaped the economic benefits as the area's new exoticised status attracted more tourists. Still, these groups are able to retain their identity through their claim of representation within the dominant structure.

Images #161 and #162 depict the Aldgate Street market, presenting a depopulated space towards closing time, except for the silhouette of a man, with the end of a row of puffer jackets at the edge of the frame, complete with a mobile kebab and burger stall hint at the activities that take place within this place. The market itself is significant to the history of the area. Indeed, Spitalfields was the major shopping and manufacturing area in the East End of London from the 18th Century. Although Spitalfields market no longer exists, the area is still popular for the Aldgate Street market, the Petticoat Lane clothing market and Brick Lane.

When photographing public places, it may be useful to examine what shopping areas actually reveal in relation to other social areas, or relative to the interiors of private living spaces. The excitement of the marketplace, with its associated sounds and bustling activity, its bazaar atmosphere draws individuals within a community to its centre. Mark Holborn, in his introduction to the

work of Marketa Luskacova[23], states that it is understandable that an immigrant (Luskacova arrived in London from Prague in 1975) should 'gravitate' to the street markets of the city, especially Brick Lane. Originally functioning as a central point of survival, the market sells food, clothing and other items necessary for the local population. Indeed, the populations of the areas surrounding markets all over the city are largely immigrant communities, 'locals' setting up shops or market stalls selling goods catered for the needs of the community. Examples would include the markets on Deptford High Street, Brixton, and the famous East Street market along Walworth Road (Lambeth) in the south and southeast of London; and Portobello Road market, and the Church Street Market along Edgware Road to the west of the city. Holborn describes the immigrants and their relationship to the market as a continued existence 'outside the closed world of English society.'[24] Indeed, for an outsider to the bazaar experience, it is also the promise of the 'exotic' it offers that attracts people to its centre. For example, the ceiling of the enclosed Brixton market is decorated with colourful pictures of African youths, and various kinds of staple foods such as maize and wheat, probably proposed by the local council to set up an exoticised environment of origins. The city is experienced as a living route at the same time that it is valued for its bustling life, functioning as a theatre of spectacle.

These photographs taken in Brixton, South London, centred around the market and its surrounding area. Similar to the

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[23] Mark Holborn, Marketa Luskacova: Photographs of Spitalfields, London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1991, p.20
[24] Mark Holborn, ibid., p.20

photographs of shop fronts along Brick Lane, the goods that are on display could function as obvious symbols of a particular culture's culinary preferences, clothing, and choices of style. Image #169, for example, show a series of de-feathered chickens hanging upside-down at a market stall. There are red chilli peppers in a cardboard box in the foreground, sitting alongside a tray of pig's trotters. An outsider with little experience of various Afro-Caribbean cultures or knowledge of particular uses of such foods would invariably be unfamiliar with the tastes or 'end-products' of these foodstuffs on sale. As with the 'boiling hens', 'boiling chickens', and pigs' heads on sale (Image #169), salted preserved fish, yam, and plantains will appear 'alien' to a person from another cultural background. Although the photographs show visual details of what is actually bought and consumed, they remain like ciphers, and the viewer may come no closer to identifying with the cultural tastes being described. Unlike the 'Foreign Foods' category at Sainsbury's stores, these foods are presented 'raw', unprocessed, unpackaged, with no English text providing 'how to cook' details. Stall No. 83 (Image #171) sums up this experience with their shop name "Back Home Foods". The foods that are made available to immigrants in a foreign land enable them to eat the same foods, maintain eating habits and routines that 'connect' them to their homelands. In addition to providing these foods, the locals of Brixton are reminded of a 'home' that is 'back there', somehow seemingly always 'there' to return to.

In London, it is common to come across hair salons that specifically offer Afro hair-dos, particularly within areas in the

Southeast such as Peckham, Camberwell and Lewisham. These shops outwardly construct and state their terms of reference, that is, they provide very specific kinds of services to a particular racial group. Immigrant groups concentrated in specific locations set up shops and businesses for the communities that inhabit the area. This enables individuals to maintain a sense of continuity in terms of their lifestyles and preferences. Images #173 and #174 show wigs made mainly for the African women for sale in Brixton market. Another photograph shows a dress and pairs of shoes on display. Like the wigs, these images offer possibilities, presenting objects that can be utilised and consumed.

Images #177 to #182 follow a more traditional street photography style, revealing various scenes and individuals that move through this public place. Like all street photographs, the characters within the images are transient figures, offering little more to the viewer than a fleeting depiction of their selves, whether it is a man in a checked suit and hat or the two boys riding a bicycle down the street, one wearing an Adidas cap. Image #179 captures a father and son in a white van, smiling at the camera. The traffic and parking wardens in front of 'Bonnies Specialist Babywear and Teenage Fashions', and the people 'caught' in the frame contribute to the busy atmosphere of streets, effectively communicating a sense of the place.

A woman in front of 'Candy Fashions' noticed my presence as an outsider with a camera, and draws attention to it in the image. Indeed, it is often crucial for a photographer to negotiate the

degree of access possible to him or her. Street photographers have traditionally eluded this need, seemingly able to blend in with busy crowds, getting by unnoticed. However, I was immediately identified by some as an outsider in an area with a predominantly black community to which I did not belong.

A pub in Southall, outer West London, had modified the external appearance of what is accepted to be a traditionally 'English' social space (drinking being one of the most popular past-times of the average English person) to cater to the local Sikh population. The exterior of the 'Glassy Junction' pub (Image #183) is fitted with cutouts of musicians and performers dressed in traditional Sikh clothing. A window on the side of the building advertises Budweiser beer and Labatt's Canadian lager alongside an advert for 'Diamonds from India', an Indian music band.

Southall is dotted with many clothes shops selling traditional Indian clothing, from saris to other designs worn by Sikh or Northern Indian women. Indeed, women on the street were largely dressed in their traditional attires. Restaurants and wholesalers provide the local community with 'authentic' goods and foodstuffs and a shop called 'Little India' (Image #186) advertises the wide range of items for sale: 'Stainless steel utensils, brass handicrafts, Asian ornaments, household goods, kitchenware and religious articles'. At the shop front hangs a series of flags for sale, Pakistani, the Union Jack, and those bearing the symbols of Islam (with a crescent moon and star). If culture in modernity became associated with the survival of groups, with acquiring

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autonomy and gaining acceptance, this has not changed today but has been accentuated more in our inter-dependent world. The decline of objective markers differentiating and identifying groups has been counter-balanced by an increase in 'ethnic' phenomena: festivals, cuisine, interest in ethnic origins etc. Therefore, with the disappearance of institutional sites for the experience of one's cultural roots, identity is becoming increasingly personal and symbolic.

The areas of Limehouse and Westferry within the Docklands in East London have seen the growth and movement of communities influenced by industry and development which alters the physical cityscape. In Image #188, Canary Wharf lies in the background of an area that in the past was known as 'Chinatown' and the centre of the Chinese community in London. Chinese sailors employed by the East India Company made their homes in the Docklands area. By the end of the nineteenth century, there was a small community of Chinese in Limehouse, although evidence of the Chinatown there remains only in some street names in the area such as Ming Street, Canton Street, and Peking Street. The dragon, another symbol and remnant of the past is found within this transformed physical landscape. Indeed, the East End and the Docklands were the first home of many ethnic groups in the city. As the docks closed, these communities dispersed and migrated to other areas, such as the area around Heathrow Airport in the west of the city. Communities develop in size as new immigrants often live with friends or relatives already resident in London; and shops, mosques, temples, and social clubs open to cater for the needs of specific communities.

A group of young Indian women dressed in striking blue saris gather below the Westferry Docklands Light Railway station – likely residents of the many council estates that surround the area. In 1986, the House of Commons Select Committee calculated that a fifth of all British Bengalis lived in 'heavy concentration' in Tower Hamlets.[25] Indeed, the Docklands has a historical connection to Bengal through the East India Company who financed the construction of the first enclosed docks in 1802. Image #190 is separated into two distinct spaces, reflecting a layering of different 'worlds' that co-exist in the area.

A photograph (Image #191) taken in an underpass at Marble Arch in central London shows the faint remains of a message that had been written on the wall outside a public toilet: "Illegal Immigrants Sleep and Work in This Toilet." Found in the heart of the city, this image forms part of the fabric of London, hinting at underlying tensions that disrupt the comfortable idea of the city as a 'melting pot'. Nearby, Edgware Road, famous for its concentration of the Arab community in London, and within walking distance to Oxford Circus, is lined with shops selling imported Arab foodstuffs, kitchenware and utensils such as tea-sets, and the hubble-bubble[26] used for smoking, and decorative ornaments plated in gold. Further west of central London is Bayswater and Queensway, areas where the Arab community extends. The streets here are dotted with shops offering goods and services specifically tailored for visitors and an

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[25] David Widgery, 'Ripe Bananas and Stolen Bicycles' in <u>Marketa Luskacova</u>, London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1991, p.12

immigrant population: travel agencies promoting tours in both English and Arabic, money changers, shops offering overseas telephone calls at discounted rates or cheap calling cards, and newsagents offering a whole array of newspapers from many Arabic-speaking nations. These images reflect the structures that frame the day-to-day experiences of communities in this area.

Photographed along Edgware Road, Image #200 depicts a Chinese couple crossing a street opposite a billboard advertising Virgin Atlantic flights to China. It shows the famous terracotta warriors holding up red Virgin flags, and reads: Shanghai Direct, May 22nd. It is of little importance that these statues are not actually in Shanghai, as their image immediately creates iconic associations. In this sense, nations and their cultures are 'simplified' for the foreigner, their identities often marked by the spectacles of tourism. 'Vivien Jay', a clothes shop along Edgware Road (Image #201) used dark brown mannequins in their window display, perhaps performing an identification with the customers or population in the local area. Distinctively, these mannequins are adorned in Western wear such as suits, ties, and dresses. Window displays, like theatre sets, form an important part of the spectacle of the city, and this particular image can be visually compared with another taken in Southall (Image #184) where a white mannequin in a shop window is dressed in a golden-yellow sari.

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[26] The Oxford English dictionary defines this as a simple form of a hookah, which is an 'oriental tobacco-pipe with a long tube passing through water for cooling smoke as it is drawn through.'

202: Alvin Langdon Coburn, Hyde Park Corner, 1909

203: Charles Wilson, Picadilly Circus, 1890

204: Izis Bidermanas, Tired Sailor, 1953

Rather than photograph recognisable famous sites of London, the everyday streets are better witnesses to the everyday life of the people. At the same time that these images are culturally coded, these scenes also reflect my own motivations, expressing the psychological, emotional, and intellectual frameworks that I saw in the environment. Several street photographs taken along Bayswater High Street depict its everyday human traffic, and like the people who appear in most street photographs, they are distant and remain anonymous. However, when seen in the context of the other photographs, these images tell us that public space is coloured and changed by the communities that inhabit it. These images are therefore representative of how humans live together, and reflective of human collectivity.

It is quite different to walk through a street or an area in everyday life than to visually encounter an image of this same place. Looking at a photograph of it, we might notice intricate details which were previously unnoticed; the photograph may also evoke associated feelings we have towards this place. Photographers employ a variety of methods to visually express the atmosphere and mood of a place, from the use of light and shadow, blurred or sweeping imagery to convey a sense of constant movement, or colour to 'bring to life' the sensations of the city. Alvin Langdon Coburn, for example, used the atmospheric effects of smoke and steam in his pictorialist studies of urban scenes. Photographs such as 'Ludgate Hill' (1909) and 'Hyde Park Corner' (1909) (Image #202)[27] although

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[27] See Mike Seaborne, Photographers' London, London: Museum of London, 1995, p.95, 96

lacking in clear detail, were expressive of the photographer's intended representation of a romanticised world.

What, therefore, does the process of visually expressing a sense of community involve, when the definitions of identity and place remain fluid? At one level, this may entail the identification of the physical markers of identity which can in various ways be visualised. At the same time, places where communities are established are seen or experienced as a nexus of ideas and sensations – the city, under these terms, becomes more like a psychological state and not simply a documentary subject. James Donald sees the city both as a physical environment with its location, architecture, traffic etc., and as a state of mind, as an imagined environment.[28] He makes reference to Henri Lefebvre's conception of the transition between mental space, social space and physical space. According to him, the scientists, architects and urban planners map, calculate and control space to produce 'representations of space'. This is different from the 'representational spaces' in which people actually inhabit and directly 'lived through' its associated images and symbols. Representational space is 'the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects.'[29] In Some Cities (1996), for example, Victor Burgin explores the interaction between the fabric of the city, its representation and imagination in order to produce images of the

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[28] James Donald, Imagining the Modern City, p.8
[29] Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, p.38, as cited by Donald, ibid., p.13

imagined city which we inhabit. Our experience of the city is therefore influenced by other means through which we encounter it – for example, how it is narrated in novels from different periods, how it is photographed, imaged or advertised, and depictions of it in films:

> At the same time that the city is experienced as a physically factual built environment, it is also, in the perception of its inhabitants, a city in a novel, a film, a photograph, a television programme, a comic strip.[30]

Photographers' London[31], published by the Museum of London, for example, presents a large collection of images by a whole range of photographers who photographed the city (between 1839 – 1994), with varying approaches and points of focus. Adopting a chronological approach to visualizing London, the wide-ranging publication offers views of the city from Roger Fenton's early photographs of Buckingham Palace (c.1857) and Westminster Abbey and the Palace of Westminster (c.1857), to Tom Hunter and James Mackinnon's photographic project 'London Fields – The Ghetto' (1994) which documents the homes and lifestyles of a community in Hackney. The images not only function as historical 'documentary' records of London across time, where one can make visual connections and comparisons between for example, Charles Wilson's view of Picadilly Circus in 1890 (Image #203), Izis Bidermanas's 'Tired Sailor' sitting at the foot of the statue of Eros (1953) (Image #204), and Jim Friedman's 'Panorama of Picadilly Circus' (1988); at the same time, the chosen points of focus within each of these images reflect

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[30] Victor Burgin, Some Cities, London: Reaktion Books, 1996, p.175

[31] Photographers' London, 1839 – 1994, introduction by Mike Seaborne, London: Museum of London, 1995

the particular visions of individual photographers, offering the viewer thoroughly varied impressions of the city. As such, London as a city can be seen, understood and visually constructed by individual perceptions and representations of it. According to Colin Westerbeck too, the artists and photographers who worked on 'the street', like flâneurs, bore a split personality: they were 'both a euphoric participant and a cold observer',[32] not only 'walking' but also 'thinking', self-conscious streetwalkers that observed as well as reflected. Photography, in these terms, is by no means an indifferent medium of expression.

Identities are sometimes found in highly subjective notions of community, as the boundaries for the definition of what a community is are fluid and often inconsistent. In such a scenario, a group establishes amongst its members symbolic markers of a coherent identity, where the idea of a 'whole' or 'universal' is always present in the form of an imaginary community designed to uphold the notion that people share the same experiences. As such, one can only visually 'place' the community in terms of the visible symbols it offers and the signs of human activity and interaction that take place in the environment. Even so, the visual articulation and expression of particular environments remain personal and subjective as the borders defining identity and place are constantly moving. Ingo Hartman refers to the work of Günter Ammon who pointed out that 'the structuring of individual consciousness takes place through the dynamics of the surrounding groups, and thus, it becomes possible to

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[32] Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz, op. Cit., p.44

recognise the human unconscious through the human environment.'[33] Architectural sights, buildings, houses and streets surround individuals in the spaces outside their domestic environments, identifying them as 'public beings' and placing them in a social position as part of a community. Individuals are bound both to their personal histories and also their relationships within groups, bringing about a two-way process whereby their 'interactions' become manifest through the environment, and in turn form or influence the shaping of their surroundings. As Hartman notes, 'structure and substance of street fronts become part of the human inside if the living human being daily acts or has to act in these spaces.'[34] Therefore, public spaces, the spaces where communities develop, concern and impact the people who inhabit it, and cities, which are full of 'unconscious places', as Thomas Struth refers to them, await representation.

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[33] Ingo Hartman, <u>Thomas Struth: Unconscious Places</u>, Münster: Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe, 1987, p. 80
[34] Ingo Hartman, ibid., p.82

> Identity can be displaced; it can be hybrid or multiple. It can
> be constituted through community: family, religion, the nation
> state. One crosses frontiers and boundaries.[1]

Alfred Merhan[2] is a stateless citizen of Iranian and 'possibly
Scottish origin' who lived for eleven years in the legal no-man's-
land between the passport barrier and the gates at Terminal One of
the Charles de Gaulle airport to the north of Paris. He slept on a
bench and kept all his belongings on an airport trolley and spends
his time studying correspondence courses and keeping a journal of
his life. Without a passport or official papers, he lived in a space
where there was nothing to support his own sense of identity. Alfred
Merhan literally represents the experience of being out-of-place, a
stateless person living his life in a transit lounge. This sense of
alienation does not always manifest itself in such physical,
explicit ways. An asylum seeker waiting for the outcome of his or
her immigration application, despite the possibility of being
temporarily physically 'settled' in a home may nevertheless
experience psychological homelessness existing in an 'in-between
place'.

The word 'destination', used in the title of this chapter,
implies a direction or journey, and an arrival at a particular
place. The destination, the ideal location of 'home', is the place

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[1] Madan Sarup, 'Home and Identity' in George Robertson, Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird, Barry Curtis
and Tim Putnam (eds.), Traveller's Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement, London and New York:
Routledge, 1994, p.93

where it is believed that everything is 'in its place'. If 'home' is thought of as the quintessential place of belonging, my work and this thesis also explores the complexities of being out-of-place: the experience of setting up a home outside of one's homeland. The metaphor of the transit lounge, as a place of 'in-between', refers to the refugee experience as a continuing process, a dynamic, a non-place where movement and transformation take place.

The home can be seen as an extension of the self. It is regarded as an emotional centre that provides security, stability, privacy and belonging. It is also a means of expressing self-identity through decoration and personalisation. At the same time, the sense of 'home' goes beyond the physical bounds of the house, and is very much based on the recognition of the familiar; it can be extended to the social domain, where friends and family can influence one's definition or location of 'home'. Focussing on refugees and immigrant communities in London, my thesis has involved an investigation of the processes of identity formation and their representation. I have aimed to assess and visually express the various ways through which individuals who have been displaced and uprooted from a familiar and stable environment represent what they perceive and define as their cultural space, and their sense of what 'home' means.

The selection of homes photographed and their related interviews document a variety of modes of 'home-construction' as

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[2] David Gale, 'Nowhere Man' in The Telegraph Magazine. He is also known as Karim Nasser Miran or 'Sir Alfred' (John Lichfield, The Independent, 13 July 1999).

part of individual and associated life stories and experiences, in which memory and desire are integrated into everyday lives. The artifacts and images found within each space are therefore analysed in relation to the inhabitants of each home.

The refugee in such a situation may find it difficult to find an anchoring link due to an overpowering sense of absence. Indeed, exile is often thought of in melancholic terms, but for some writers like Edward Said[3] and Julia Kristeva[4], to lose is also to gain, in that loss is essential for growth. Photographs and mementos function as navigational tools for the refugee in his or her attempt to re-construct a familiar place. Indeed, any kind of symbolisation can be seen as a replacement or substitution for some form of loss where the lost object can be replaced by another associated representation, as reflected in the processes of identification, subjectivity, and symbolisation.

Those who lack historical or cultural links with a place must forge an identity through other pasts. Immigrants or refugees cut off from their roots remain dislocated, experiencing a discontinuity that impels many who have to set up homes in a foreign country to either exaggerate their attachment to a romanticized or idealised homeland and/ or to assert an adoptive belonging in their new place of living. Portable emblems of the past or markers of identities can provide continuity to newly-found homes. Forced to flee from their

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[3] Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile' in Granta 13, 1984, p. 163

[4] Julia Kristeva, Strangers to Ourselves, (translated by Leon Roudiez), New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, Chapter 1. In this book, Kristeva examines the history of foreigners in Europe, and deals with the idea of the stranger, as well as the idea of 'strangeness' within the self, an interior sense of one's being.

homelands, the refugees I met, whether Sudanese, Eritrean, or Vietnamese, all brought with them photographs and mementos to their new and alien destinations. Familiarity makes particular surroundings comfortable; hence the settings I have photographed were often filled with signifiers of 'home'. Photographs and keepsakes are used as stable footholds, serving as significant substitutes for abandoned homelands, and in the re-construction of new ones. Refugees or exiles, especially, need mementos and the memories and narratives associated with them to redeem the loss of familiar places they often are not able to even revisit. Indeed, remembering the past is crucial for one's sense of identity. The recalling of past experiences links one with earlier selves, however different one may have become. It is, in particular, when the past seems lost, that people re-evoke it by collecting and multiplying the paraphernalia about it, such as souvenirs, mementos, and old photographs. Appearing in tangible forms, these items serve to construct, rather than simply to preserve, an identity.

My photographs of domestic interiors as part of the everyday are integral to my analysis of the process of dislocation and identity and its representation. Rather than present 'objective evidence' of the scenes I have encountered, my approach is experiential, and based on my interaction with the people whose homes I photographed. This desire for deeper metaphorical resonance in my photographic work might be traced back to the work of William Eggleston, whose heightened investigations of everyday American life revealed the uncanny and, at times, startling visual facts of the

inherent mythical strangeness of everyday life that is often overlooked and taken for granted.

In this thesis, I have analysed the use of the photograph as an image and an object from both a photographer and refugees' points of view. I have looked at the ways in which photographs used in the private sphere take on a heightened role as part of a 'creative' memory process for displaced individuals in the context of their 'new' surroundings, and drawn upon the work of documentary photographers such as Bruce Davidson and William Eggleston in relation to my own position as an 'image-maker' attempting to visually analyse a series of refugee experiences. This separation in terms of the use and functions of the photograph creates a dialectic that highlights the way the photograph becomes part of a complex series of constructions that raise questions about private terms of reference, of space and interpretation. Indeed, the issues surrounding the complexities of visual representation are central to my approach, especially in relation to historical uses of photography, and its function as an 'objective research tool' in anthropology. One of the aims of my thesis, therefore, was to explore the connections between visual expressiveness and the (ethnographic) documentary mode in photography. In making reference to the work of Robert Frank and Josef Koudelka, Peter Osborne points out that a number of photographers whose work is in some relationship to exile "share the understanding that the challenge of representing exile is the challenge to representation itself."[5] Exile

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[5] Peter Osborne, Travelling Light: Photography, Travel and Visual Culture, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 124

is a condition which demands representation while at the same time questioning its value. In this sense, I have found Stephen Tyler's 'postmodern ethnography' particularly useful as a theoretical standpoint as it proposes to 'evoke' a series of narratives rather than to attempt to represent 'universal' truths.

According to Ali Behdad, exile has been theorized 'as a process of perpetual becoming'[6], involving a separation from home. The exilic experience describes a temporary or permanent period of liminality and in-betweenness, and an incorporation into the dominant host society that can be partial or complete. The phrase 'perpetual becoming' implies movement or transition. Often, refugees or other displaced persons do not simply move from an origin to a finite point of destination.[7] Along these terms, Marc Augé's concept of the 'non-place' illustrates the connection between identity and spatial orientation in contemporary society and the state of 'supermodernity', which he defines as the state of 'excessive information, events, time and spaces' in late-capitalist societies. As a result of industrialisation and urbanisation, population migrations and the mobilisation of spaces, 'non-places' have become increasingly common in cities and urban cultures.[8]

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[6] Ali Behdad, 'Reflections on the Family Photographs of Iranians in Los Angeles', http://www.suitcase.net/behdad.html

[7] Movement, far from being an interruption to everyday life, constitutes a normal condition of existence. James Clifford, for example, proposes that travel should be brought to the forefront of ethnographic analysis, and 'cultures' should be viewed as 'sites of dwelling and travelling', stating that 'travelling-in-dwelling' and 'dwelling-in-travelling' should constitute a central topic in the study of culture. (James Clifford, 'Travelling Cultures', in Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century, Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1997)

[8] Marc Augé, Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, translated by John Howe, London and New York: Verso, 1995, p.34

A 'non-place' as defined by Augé, is a place which 'cannot be defined as relational, or historical or concerned with identity.'[9] He analyses this term in opposition to what he regards as 'anthropological place': where humans are rooted in their origins, and anchored in their societies by ritualised practices: "We will reserve the term 'anthropological place' for this concrete and symbolic construction of space, which could not of itself allow for the vicissitudes and contradictions of social life, but which serves as a reference for all those it assigns to a position."[10] Since all anthropological places are culturally constructed spaces, they are imbued with meanings that communities have invested in them. As Augé states, "To be born is to be born in a place, to be 'assigned to residence'"[11], therefore all places are places of identity, of relations and of history.

With increased mobility and subsequent migrations of populations however, individuals in comtemporary society do not define themselves simply in terms of their birthplace. The dense network of transport with places of transit such as train stations, airports, supermarkets, shopping centres, hotels, motorways etc. are non-places which create 'neither singular identity or relations, only solitude and similitude.'[12] Augé describes a world that has 'surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and the ephemeral.'[13] One cannot analyse an airport check-

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[9] Marc Augé, op. Cit., p.77
[10] op. Cit., p.51
[11] op. Cit., p.53
[12] op. Cit., p.103
[13] op. Cit., p.78

in area, because no collective as such is created there. Unlike places where one has developed roots, the 'non-place' involves no sense of identity, and offers no ability to establish relations with others.[14] The non-place breaks down the hierarchy of space; it refers to places which in a sense do not termini. They specifically describe in-between, connecting places, places which have no identities, and no particular characteristics.

The transitory state exemplified by the non-place generates a particular experience that can be likened to a refugee's existence through a form of solitude: 'an overburdening or emptying of individuality.'[15] This sense of melancholy, resembling a kind of drifting instinct is a consequence of travellers encountering spaces in which 'only the movement of the fleeting images enables the observer to hypothesise the existence of a past and glimpse the possibility of a future.'[16] As such, the individual finds oneself in a 'no-man's-land', in a moment of pause or in-between, that enables one to contemplate one's existence and derive from one's awareness of this state 'a rare and sometimes melancholy pleasure.'[17]

When previously accepted paradigms no longer provide anchorage or clear answers to one's sense of self, one can only cling to the

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[14] Like the waiting area of an airport that Garry Winogrand photographed ('untitled', no date, used on the cover of Marc Augé's Non-Places), or Andreas Gursky's image of criss-crossing escalators in the Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris ('Charles de Gaulle, Paris', 1992), it is only fitting that Terry Gilliam's film Twelve Monkeys [inspired by Chris Marker's La Jetee (1962)] a love story involving time travel, should begin and end in an airport, a classic place of in-between.

[15] Op. Cit., p.145. Indeed, Augé refers to 'the extended transit camps where the planet's refugees are parked' (p.34), and 'transit points and temporary abodes' such as 'holiday clubs and refugee camps.' (p.78)

[16] op. Cit., p.87

[17] op. Cit., p.87

concept of home. At a basic level, it represents something 'real'; a physical location where one belonged and felt connected to. Home is the reference point through which one orientates oneself in the world, offering a sense of stability. It can be described as a socially and culturally familiar environment in which the displaced individual has developed a sense of identity. The host country in the present, is temporally and spatially separated from the past home, which is though of as the point of 'origin'. On first arrival into a host country, refugees normally experience a profound difference of the physical and social space around them, generating an acute sense of cultural displacement. Outside the boundaries of the home looms a seemingly continuous (somewhat imagined) threat to the order within. The present is often conceptualised as 'anti-structure'[18] or a liminal phase which is marked by uncertainty and a lack of coherence. The encounter with the unfamiliar threatens to dissolve the displaced person's sense of 'self', transforming him or her simply into a social 'non-being'. This parenthesised 'wilderness' where nothing is stable and everything seems fluid provokes the need for individuals who have been separated or displaced from their homelands to attempt to order and control this apparently chaotic space, and make it conform to the familiar traditions or practices one believes have shaped their reality. One's homeland also becomes the source of nostalgic longing.

Dislocation is not only a psychological condition, but also a social experience which forces individuals to renegotiate their

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[18] Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (ed.), <u>Anthropological Locations</u>, Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1997, p.18

identities. It is not a linear process that finds a neat resolution, but a complex process that influences all aspects of one's life in an ongoing process of identifications within limited borders and boundaries. At the same time, the concept of home loses its singular definition and becomes malleable and manifold. It is extended to include the diasporic, the nomadic, even exile. 'Home' therefore becomes a shifting and strategic location from which perspectives of an unstable present can be drawn. As Benedict Anderson notes, 'the fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one — and only one — extremely clear place. No fractions.'[19] Personal identity is therefore a complex sense of being or belonging not derived only from a singular local environment, but actively and strategically constructed in relation to multiple spaces and for various purposes.[20] The displaced person becomes a creative agent who has to re-construct one's own sense of identity:

> When we discover that there are several cultures instead of just one and consequently at the time that we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly, be it illusory or real, we are threatened with the destruction of our own discovery. Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just others, that we ourselves are an 'other' among others.[21]

Existing in a transitory and fluid state where borders or definitions are complex and never clear-cut (i.e. it is not simply a comparison of difference between one state or another), the refugee strives to re-construct his identity in the space of displacement. A

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[19] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism, London: Verso, 1983, p.166

[20] Anthony Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity, Oxford: Polity Press, 1991

superficial dichotomy cannot account for the dynamics of this process, and the fragments of difference that remain between one state of existence and another. There is a space between them where the integration is flexible, and mobile. The idea of a boundary between a 'here' and a 'there' is therefore insufficient. It is the space in-between which imposes itself as a reception place for difference at play. The experience of contemporary refugees seems to support this view. Because of displacement, and because of the absolute necessity of constructing new "homes", refugees are in the constant act of re-questioning, re-interpreting, and re-negotiating their lives.

The experiences of migration and travel have led to a surge in recent dialogues on nomadism, diaspora, journeying, travelling, mapping, space and 'non-space', site and 'non-site'. This kind of 'placing', reconfigured by more generalized theories of passage, appears to denounce ideas of rootedness within geographical and historical domains in favour of transitory, fluctuating, psychic experiences. Although this 'openness' of routes constitutes a convenient postmodernism, it also proves a difficulty in real-time navigation, in the everyday lives of individuals. What may be seen as a new type of sublime – the sublime of unrepresentability, of the constant in-between – is a refuge from the real that may indeed embody the imaginary of the refugee; however, there is a need to negotiate one's own space on day-to-day terms. Lives are located and

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[21] Paul Ricoeur, 'Universal Civilisation and National Cultures' in History and Truth, translated by C Kelbley, Evanston: North Western University Press, 1965, p.278

deeply embedded historically and geographically within the economic and the social.

The 'loss' of one's homeland on one level is regarded and experienced as a void over which one grieves, and that needs to be filled and replaced; at the same time, however, this psychological alienation is a constant component of late twentieth century culture. Postmodern life ascribes to us a multiplicity of subject positions and potential identities offering prospects for human development, but at the same time, it also represents a predicament that threatens fragmentation in their lack of personal, or collective boundaries. In this postmodern, 'wide-open' world, our bodies are bereft of those spatial and temporal co-ordinates essential for historicity, for a consciousness of our own collective and personal past. Not belonging, a sense of unreality, isolation and being fundamentally 'out of touch' with the world become endemic in such a culture. The struggles for a coherent identity are centred on the threshold between interior and exterior, between self and other.

It is now more fruitful to understand identity as a result of variable positions rather than as a basic and definite opposition. Thus, identity is portrayed on many fronts: it is an unstable notion formed and deformed through confrontations that simultaneously take place in different settings. This bricolage, this process of trying to reorganise new identities with 'remnants' and relics, is a task of every culture, particularly those individuals or groups who have directly experienced processes of dislocation. We have come to

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realise that 'home' and identity are unstable and malleable concepts, and as Ian Jeffrey recognises, 'where we were was nowhere in particular, in transit through a non-place, a Postmodern homeland.'[22]

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[22] Ian Jeffrey, <u>Timeframes: the Story of Photography</u>, New York, The Ivy Press Limited, 1998, p.56

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APPENDIX

Interview with Mina Swara, Hammersmith, December 1996

Can you tell me your reasons for coming to this country? And When did you arrive?

I arrived in London on 18th November 1994. Due to political problems, I left my country 12 years ago. I haven't seen my parents from that time. When I was fourteen years old, I did not know much about the Democratic Party and politics. However, I knew that this government was not in favour of the Kurdish people. I was distributing newsletters against Khomeini's government when I was arrested. I was in prison for forty days before I made my escape.

How long were you supposed to be imprisoned for?

I was in there for an indefinite period. In Iran, prisoners can be released for three days to join their families in the celebrations of public festivals, if the family offers to the government a certificate for their property and 100,000 tumans as a guarantee. This is one of the 'legal' ways of stealing the people's money. I was released during the Ramadan celebrations. My father was so upset on the second night of my release that he decided to sacrifice our property and money. He told me to run. I spent 10 years in the mountains with the *peshmagar*, or freedom-fighters.

What group were you with?

The Kurdish Democratic Party -- KDP of Iran. There, I worked with French doctors for three and a half years, and then at a radio station for six and a half years, also as a translator and typist. Messages from the KDP were broadcast all over Iran. I was the only woman working at the radio station. The Iranian government hated me not only because of the political party which I represented, but also because I was a woman. I was told by somebody 'they want to kill you'. I was shot in the stomach five years ago by an Iranian soldier. I was scared for my life and so made my escape through Turkey. When I went to Turkey, the Turkish want to kill me. I paid money to come here.

What did you think of England, especially London, before you came here? What were your perceptions? And why did you choose to come here?

My brother was in London before me. I know that here, everything is free. The English government is good to Kurdish people. But Britain was the first to cut my country into pieces in 1923, and divided Kurdistan. So they should be good to us now. When I first arrived here, I was happy but not too much. Because when I worked in the mountain 10 years ago, I had a very different life. When I worked there, I worked for my people. Now, I just stay at home and look after my baby. But at least I know no one is going to kill me, and that if I learnt how to speak English, I can work and live here. And that's good. The first day, when we went to the Home Office, and I saw many people waiting there, about 200 I think. I was surprised to see so many people from so many countries — I thought that there was only Kurdish people suffering. I waited from 9a.m. to 4p.m. on that day. I was very tired and pregnant. I started college two months ago, learning to speak English. I have a French diploma as a midwife already. I cannot find a job here easily because I don't speak much English. I now work for a Kurdish radio station in Australia. They ring me at 7a.m. and I speak over the phone. If I didn't have problems though, I wouldn't have come here. My country is very good life. Good weather and we speak the same language. Some people come here because of this life. But I've been arrested, shot, and they still don't believe me. In Iran, I was not allowed to speak Kurdish, or even wear our traditional dress. We had to speak Farsi. And where politics are concerned, I would like to express my dislike for a government if I do not agree with their ways. In Iran, they just kill everybody or take them to prison.

I should also ask -- Would it bother you to know that my partner is from Iran?

(She paused for a while before saying) Oh, I like Iranian people.

I only hate the government.

Okay, that's a relief. How different do you think life is here for you, as a woman?
In a way, it is much better here; easier being a woman. Generally, women face many problems with men in Kurdistan. However, because I had a different life, and was involved in politics, I was more free than the average woman. I earned the same salary as a man did at the radio station, and was even promoted to a managerial position. Now, I am a housewife.

Is it a large population in the mountain?
Yes, it's quite large. But because of privacy I cannot tell you the exact number.

What has your experience here generally been like?
I like English people because they don't look at me as if I'm Kurdish. In Iran, the Iranians look down at us.

Do you keep in contact with other Kurdish people here? Do you mix with them, participate in your celebrations?
I participate in events organised by the Kurdish Community Centre, like festivals and New Year celebrations. I like Kurdish people, and we are generally the same. And speak the same language. Some of them are becoming more English. But not all of them. I don't like we forget our culture.

Do you have many close friends here?
I'm not very close with Kurdish people. There are some good friends, but they are not my best friends. I like Kurdish people in other countries. There are Kurdish all over Europe.

How do you plan to bring up your son -- the Kurdish way of life, or English?
I think my son is free to choose. I think he must think for

himself. If he wants to get married to an English girl, it is up to him. Although we are Muslims, it is not right that he should be prohibited from marrying someone else outside of our culture. I will tell him about my past, what I was before, and how we came here, but he chooses his own way.

Interview with Mohamed Osman Eltahir, Edgware Road, February 1997

Can you begin by describing the events that initiated your move to England?

There is a difference between a revolution and an uprising. There was a revolution in October 1964, and an uprising in April 1985 in Sudan. With a revolution, everything changes. People are on strike and there is no water or electricity. In the uprising of 1985, there were demonstrations day and night. There is a change in government, but life, and rules do not change. In June 1989, the Islamic fundamentalist regime took over; all their high commanders were Muslims. This dictatorship gave them everything, even banks and insurance companies. These finance companies destroyed the Sudanese economy; they made "Islamic rules" – they want to cheat people in the name of Islam. So they become a rich party, and most of the Sudanese become poor. There are two classes only, nothing in between. This is the gap between the rich and the poor.

How were you involved in the politics of the situation and what prompted you to leave?

I was a member of the Sudanese Communist Party. In 1992, I was arrested and detained. My life was threatened so I had to leave.

You are now one of the leaders of the Sudanese community in London. How large is the community and are you close- knit?

The Sudanese community in England is largely gathered in Central London. I don't think we are more than 15,000 people. Everything is totally different back in Sudan. We are a very close-knit community, and live in extended families. We like to be together. This way of life has followed us here; we are friendly to each other, and keep similar life patterns. I think this is mainly because it is very difficult to fit into society here. The Sudanese people here feel lonely, and miss our home country. We stick to our own people and rarely interact with other cultures here.

Do you personally, and the Sudanese here generally follow your traditional customs, and religious practices?

No, Sudanese people are not religious. We don't pray, and don't fast. Not only here, but also in Sudan. (*But you all have Muslim names?*) My name? Oh, we are all born into Islam. However, we do not have a strong attitude against the practice of Islam, because it is part of tradition. I am not

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a practising Muslim, so although fasting is essential in our tradition, I am not concerned.

Do you still keep in contact with your family in Sudan?
Yes, I still keep strong relations with my country, and would not like to settle here permanently. I miss my family, my sisters and brothers, and the people in my country. I really miss them. But I intend to have both an English passport and keep my Sudanese one. The Arabs are starting an international Islamic movement to form an international Islamic state – they are giving out passports to Algerians. I feel completely outside of British culture and way of life. I am still very, very much a Sudanese. When I meet another Sudanese on the bus or on the train, or wave to a fellow Sudanese on the street, I feel immediately close to my people.

Would you say you feel like an outsider in this country?
For everyone, all Sudanese here, it is difficult to find jobs. But the largest problem that Sudanese people encounter here is not having enough women. But the other night, I went out to a disco with my friend, and when we were leaving late at night, two young English girls with short skirts came to us. They were offering, you know. (He laughed and seemed embarrassed).

You said there weren't enough women. Do you mean Sudanese women especially? Would you only marry another Sudanese?
No, I am not fussy. Of course I prefer a Sudanese woman, but I am open to international races. Sometimes, Sudanese men here telephone their families in Sudan to ask them to send them a Sudanese woman here to get married.

What is your official status? Have you been granted asylum?
ELR (Exceptional Leave to Remain). I have appealed to get refugee status. I am waiting.

Interview with Sister Nicole, Peckham, May 1997

For my project, I look at the process of the setting up of home by refugees who have moved into London, and also what this means for identity. I'm not focusing on one specific group as such, but your own personal experiences, and of course your work within the Vietnamese community puts you in the centre of the frame. Could you begin by describing how you came to be in this country, and what do you think is the experience of a Vietnamese refugee within British society?

Identity itself is a very difficult concept. For example, there is often some confusion about the Chinese who settled in Vietnam, who then had to escape the war. Sometimes I think even *they* find it difficult to define or identify themselves. They have this double-identity. I think the Vietnamese and Chinese differ in that the Chinese are more of a race: they are spread out all over the world; there are different kinds of Chinese in Hong Kong, Southeast Asia for example. Whereas the Vietnamese have a greater sense of land, thus the idea of homeland. We had to fight against the Chinese and the French. Even now, Vietnam has progressed. We seem to have extinguished the exterminator – I am talking about the Americans.

I think Vietnamese identity depends a lot on how educated you are. The more educated you are, the more guilty you feel about leaving your country. Therefore, you cling to us in the community to establish your identity.

Do you follow similar life patterns? Do you keep the same traditional values?

I was recently asked to give a speech at the Festival of the Trung sisters. This is equivalent to the Buddhist Saha -- a celebration that commemorates an event that took place in the 1st Century. We had to dress the women in traditional costumes, and talk about traditional virtues. There are 4 main virtues which women here should follow. These are: *Cong* - which means clever, to have all sorts of skills, particularly in cooking and embroidery; *Dung* - presentation of oneself, to be refined; *Ngon* - this is the art of talking, to be tactful, polite, also saying the truth; *Hanh* - behaviour in relation to hierarchical position, how to deal with people under/above you. These cover the role of women as the child, the wife, and the mother. This is mainly meant for the elders of the

community, who constantly complain about the breakdown in the community.

I think those people who are educated tend to cling to Vietnamese values and identity. My colleague in France is a well-educated lady. I was having a conversation with her one day, and I could not believe the extremes to which she was inclined to go. She said to me to encourage tradition amongst the refugee community here – that they should not be eating bread, and only rice. Why is she clinging to such a symbol?! This only shows the fear of something exterior and not profound. For this reason, a lot of people here worry about mixed marriages. However, the younger generation that was born here tends to be more open, inclined to not differentiate.

You say the younger people take on more liberal attitudes. How do you think this affects their Vietnamese identities?
Perhaps an another important phenomenon, which contributes to Vietnamese identity being maintained here, is the acquiring of language. It is mainly at school and with peers that young children acquire language, learn how to construct proper sentences. At home, only casual conversation is made. So most of one's vocabulary is learned at school; they might be familiar with a few traditional phrases like... , meaning "oh my god!"
Mao Tze Tung (the Vietnamese language) is more popular in videos and karaoke, when kids are encouraged to sing. There is now also the possibility of telephoning Vietnam; and the older generation go back quite often. In France, for example, even the second generation of Vietnamese migrants feels the need to find their roots.

Where do you think they consider being their home? Would they, for example, return to Vietnam after earning enough money?
After being in London for a long time, they generally do not consider to settle in Vietnam permanently. The refugees here only go back to help their families to set up businesses. They sometimes stay up to 3 or 4 months at a time. There are difficulties, of course. The Vietnamese State always scrutinises what you do; you have to report where you are.
What do you mean by the state? Is it only the government and police or the people in your own town or village?
The police are always checking on you. I went back for 9 months after I

retired, but discovered I just couldn't live there. Perhaps it was only after 1990 that there was some space and feeling of safety to go back. They still confiscate stuff; no videos can be brought in. Everything has to be censored. Well, the people who live there know immediately where you have been. Everyone knows the families. But they don't mind.

They hold Mao Tse Tung classes here on Saturdays. And a Vietnamese National Council has been set up. On the whole, the Vietnamese community in England is not as organised as in the USA. Over there, daily Vietnamese newspapers even exist. They also have more cultural activities and concerts. Some of their dances are very modern, and not even Vietnamese. Here, the population is not big enough, and we are scattered. In general, we Vietnamese are very proud. We believe in work and study. I think the English have no desire to learn; well, not out of interest anyway. In Vietnamese families, there is a reputation to uphold. There has to be at least one doctor, lawyer or chemist. I think those few who are devoted to the arts are quite brave. Because of this pride, old traditions still prevail in families. Quite often, the children take up medicine just to please their parents.

Some people here adopt both cultures. They see a complementing of the two. It is those who are not so open who see a real danger about adopting a culture here. But this is a simplistic view. Recently, the Vietnamese have discovered that they are just as bad, families are constantly breaking down. So they put the blame on this society, believing that it has brewed this element of discord.

Discipline in Vietnamese families encourages interest in all sorts of things. We are active people and generally do well in our work. I must point out though, that men do not cope so well. They gamble and smoke alot. Women have work to do; being unemployed for the male, destroys the image of the father. Even in poetry we used to read as children, very often there is description of the father returning home after a hard day at work. So being in this situation is soul-destroying for the man, and the women will start despising them. Do children here feel at all Vietnamese? Yes, there is a strong sense of identity, perhaps less with the younger ones who were born here. I feel that if parents are not too afraid and become a little more liberal, and show a little admiration for Western civilisation, then there is more chance that their children will feel Vietnamese. Recently, at our New Year celebrations in Deptford, the children were dancing and enjoying themselves to both Vietnamese and

traditional music; it's good to be Vietnamese in a Western context. Then the elders, who are terrified, insisted that in future celebrations, the children should be taught how to make Vietnamese cakes! A few children have actually left home around the age of 16; they felt oppressed and there was too much pressure at home. These children went to the local social welfare services to make complaints about their home environment, but they are all settled back at home now.

The Vietnamese community here is generally quite close-knit, but this is really amongst the elderly, who are actually out of the game. The rest of the community is under too much pressure. Perhaps it is only in the religious context that people come together. There is group forming at the Buddhist temple, or Catholic Church, for example. It becomes a bit of a ghetto, but then again, it is natural that one thing goes with the other. There is also a centre for Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian refugees.

Where are the Vietnamese communities in London largely based?
The Vietnamese community is dispersed around London. In Hackney, many Vietnamese shops have been opened. This does alot for group identity. The shop around here (Peckham) is a hairdressing salon and restaurant, also a shop that tried to be almost entirely Chinese. Nowadays, they sell more Western things as well; even the dishes served cater a little more to the local environment. They have advertised around the Peckham area; what is significant is that they feel accepted enough to write their advertisements in Vietnamese text, inviting people to the restaurant. A few years ago, that was impossible. There are still racist people around, but if the Vietnamese did this a few years ago, their advertisements would definitely have been torn or kicked down. The skinheads around here even used to kick pregnant Vietnamese women, and we were always picked on. Nowadays, the Vietnamese girls are much better dressed; they look more modern, and so fit in better.

It is also ancestor worship that makes us remain very Vietnamese. It is a very profound practice to respect the dead, respect our roots. Because these are the connecting links to your history, you feel you belong. At the same time, we have photographs and pictures of the dead and also our past. It is good to establish that link to our tradition. So no matter what happens, there will always be something left there.

What do you think is the Vietnamese concept of home?
Our hearts are in Vietnam, but due to economic reasons, we stay here. Also we will not compromise to the communist regime. I guess our roots are determined very much by where you want to stay. As far as the Vietnamese government is concerned, you cannot lose your Vietnamese identity. If I set foot in Vietnam, I still come under Vietnamese law even though I have a British passport. So far, they have only accepted about 20 elderly back into the country.

A group of young Vietnamese people in Northampton recently set up a club called "Be Positive" which is open for all young people, all refugees from whatever background. You see, they do not want the ghetto approach, and are trying to open up our community. It is really the Chinese from North Vietnam who dominate the picture and maintain a group identity. In principle, we should not reject people from outside.
Women who are married to an Englishman keep their Vietnamese names, and don't take their husbands names. This is done so that they don't get rejected too much. We still maintain a strict Vietnamese hierarchy where the younger should always respect their elders.

Being settled in a Western society, has the experience or the role of Vietnamese women changed significantly?
Vietnamese identity is based very strongly on the image of their women. Vietnamese women are unashamedly feminine, projecting an image that is unperturbed, a femininity that is strong. They are protected by a society that they in turn defend. So it is always important to affirm your femininity, but usually within the framework of your family. This is not a puritanical notion, for women to have their own place. It is not imposed; the result is that Vietnamese women can be extremely feminine. The basic tradition in Vietnam is like china. It is becoming a materialist society, so the Vietnamese system is influenced by capitalism. So even if the men are in poverty, they cannot sell the family property until the wife agrees to sign it off. That makes some difference.

The question of identity is a difficult one. The Chinese in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong are different, for example. What makes for humanity is the opening up to everyone. I know a Latin saying, but I can't directly

translate it, but I try to explain it to all the refugees I work with. "
I am human and nothing that is human is foreign to me." Very often, they
don't understand what I am saying. I can't call a foreigner entirely
foreign. We always have something in common.

Here in London, distances are a great problem. We are all spread out.
Perhaps it is only during the New Year celebrations or the mid-Autumn
festivals that the bulk of the Vietnamese community gathers together -
about 10, 000 people at the Riverside Centre in Greenwich. The problem
that the elderly here still face from the rest of their family is how to
justify leaving Vietnam in the first place. Now that Vietnam is becoming
more prosperous. Even the police are more friendly with the civilians and
the arrests are more justified.

I guess it is in the home that you keep your identity. There are some
things which help to maintain a sense of identity for the Vietnamese:
1. Names: some parents have started giving their children English names,
   but they still call them by their Vietnamese names.
2. Food
3. Ancestor worship, and anniversaries
4. New Year celebrations and ceremonies
5. Language (Mao Tse Tung classes)

Is there anyone else in the area who may be willing to speak with me?
I would give you some names and addresses but they didn't return me my
diary this time. I don't know why. Usually when I am robbed, they send my
diary back to me. This happens about once every two weeks. I've been
approached by a group of black youths who asked me if I were Chinese.
When I said "not really", they asked if I were Vietnamese. I shouted "so
what" and they came towards me, and only let me off because a girl member
of their gang told them to leave me alone.

Interview with Osman Ali Hummaida, Colindale, June 1997

When did you arrive in England, and why did you want to leave your country Sudan?

I first left Sudan when I was released from prison in 1991. I was arrested for being a political activist. I first lived in Wales as a student; my sister was living there. I later gained refugee status.

Why did you choose to come to England? What were your perceptions before you arrived? Was it in any way a culture shock for you when you actually came to this country?

There are lots of people in my generation who perceive the West is very free – everything is perfect like in the cinema or TV, the way the media presents them. The image of the West, even the women... the TV woman --- it is a very ideal world. That's what I think my perception of the West is. I first came to London as a tourist in 1986. Because I stayed in a hotel, I kept that picture I had of the West. But when I came to live here, all my perceptions of the West started to change severely. Except for me it's different. I first lived in a University environment were I happened to meet really good people. They helped me to understand lots of things about this culture. They were open and friendly. Many times I embarrassed myself because I discovered that the way I approached girls was not acceptable to people. Sometimes I expect a certain response from my good intentions; and yet I get a negative response. Then I learned to neutralise myself, become more conservative. I became more accepted. It is the opposite in Sudan. People there would think you don't like them if you behaved that way. It is definitely more individualistic here, and more sense of community spirit in Sudan.

However, Sudan is divided politically, socially, and regionally. But in

London, regardless of our social or political backgrounds, we stick together to compensate the feeling of being alienated in this society. Two people might never meet in Sudan - there is nothing in common. They are from different social classes, different regions. But here, lots of people have to change their lifestyle. This is a contradiction with the younger generation who adapt more easily here. Daughters pose the biggest problems - they have boyfriends who drink or smoke. Their fathers go crazy. Lots of them are thinking seriously about sending their daughters back home. The fathers prefer Sudanese guys; the daughters like English men or other nationalities. I know a 15-year-old daughter of a friend who refuses to go for Sudanese gatherings because she thinks the music is boring.

So do you think Sudanese culture is being eroded?
The people above 25 are still extremely Sudanese. Their cooking, lifestyle and dressing haven't changed alot. They live quite similarly to the way they lived in Sudan. Only things that changed are time, their work, and income.

You mentioned Sudanese daughters earlier, and I've gathered that women generally take second place in Sudanese society. I'm interested to know how significantly British culture has changed their perceptions of themselves, and their roles within the family and community?
Sudanese women have definitely become more Westernised. Men's shirts remain plain or striped or checked - the traditional, conventional way of dressing. The younger generation is more Westernised. The colour and style of skirts that Sudanese women wear in Sudan are different from what they wear here. They are more formal in Sudan. I think this is the first time that women have benefited out of liberalisation. They have lots of

women's rights here.

How do men in the society generally respond to this?

The domination of men over women is very strong in Sudan. Here, they try to challenge women's rights, especially when the control that they have over their women and children has become looser. There is alot of hypocrisy in Sudanese groups. Intellectuals or political activists theoretically, they fight for freedom; but in practice, they don't. Therefore, in England, they is a high rate of divorce, and social problems. Women are very happy here, I think. Not in terms of payments or jobs, but in terms of social relations.

I've been to your gatherings and functions, and I've noticed there is only a small percentage of women. The men were dancing, and the women hardly participated. Is the a normal practice?

Men dominate women in Sudan. That's why even at public, political gatherings, men do most of the dancing; whereas at a wedding, you might see women dancing. Sudanese women drink but not in front of Sudanese men – only with close friends or non-Sudanese. They want to retain the image of themselves as being decent, of good mentality. The majority of Sudanese men here are obsessed about marrying a Sudanese woman. Some have even got their parents in Sudan to send them a wife here. Younger girls here inter-marry; older Sudanese women still want to marry their own, because of family reactions.

Sudanese men are allowed to stay with women before marriage. But not the women – she will be called a slag.

How does that work? How can the man possibly stay with the woman if the woman mustn't be present?

No, the woman must not be seen. For example, we are talking here and if

someone knocks on the door and comes in, it is common in this culture. But if we were in Sudan, you would be called a slag and people will gossip about you.

Where would you consider your home to be?

Home? Home is for me something in between. I like Sudan very much. If Sudan was reformed, not only in terms of politics and economics, but also culturally, I would go back. But if I were to return now, I'll be in trouble. I am thinking seriously about going back to Sudan - to reform it politically. For me, I feel I have a part to play. I have committed myself. I don't have two sides of me. My attitudes have developed very much. My personality consists of a combination of being born in Sudan with certain attitudes, cultures. I might have had bad attitudes towards gays or lesbians, but I don't have those prejudices anymore.

When and why did you leave your country? How long have you been in England for?

My family left Vietnam in 1979. This was after the war. My father is Chinese and my mother Vietnamese; they met while my father was working in Vietnam. Some of my relatives had migrated to France some 50 or so years ago, and set up big businesses there. They were successful, so we were encouraged to also move to a country in this region. When I speak of my family, I am actually referring to my extended family. I have 7 aunts and uncles, most of whom came at the same time as my immediate family. In total about 30 of us came together. We first went to Hong Kong, and then to Wales for a few months, and finally settled in London. We were forced to move partly because of the war, and also my parents felt that Vietnam was not the right place to bring up children. There was no work, and we could not survive. We gained refugee status on arrival in the United Kingdom.

Are you now British citizens?

Yes, we hold British passports.

How would you describe the way you live here? How different is this from life in Vietnam? And outside of your family, do you interact with the Vietnamese community in your area?

I do not see my family as the typical Vietnamese family. We might keep ornaments in the house to remind us of where we came from, but we are quite isolated from the Chinese community. My mother is still quite religious, by the way. She goes to pray at the temple sometimes. There is a block (of council flats) down the road, which has many Vietnamese

living in it. The families are close to each other there; they do not really integrate into the rest of the neighbourhood. Because I speak with an English accent (I left Vietnam when I was very young and spent the most part of my childhood here), and do not conform to the typical Chinese dress codes, I am often referred to as a "banana". This word is used to describe individuals who look Chinese but whose lifestyle and mannerisms resemble those of a "white" man. Most of the Chinese and Vietnamese here dress in that Hong Kong gangster manner, and I don't.

Do you speak your mother tongue? What language do you converse in at home?

I speak fluent Vietnamese. Most of the time we speak a combination of the two (even in one sentence - we've made our own language), but I guess it is more Vietnamese. My parents do not speak much English. My father speaks Cantonese, which I speak too. However, my grandmother speaks the most fluent English. She came together with us, and lives by herself in Rotherhithe. My grand-dad is dead. My grandma does not act her age, and is definitely not like the traditional Vietnamese woman. She goes to play bingo several times a week, and travels every weekend around London to visit us and the rest of the relatives.

Do you cook and eat Vietnamese food at home?

Where food is concerned, we try to eat Vietnamese style cooking. But we do not always use bowls and chopsticks. We eat on plates and in front of the telly. I think we are close more in terms of a family unit, than in terms of Vietnamese community or society in London. For example, recently, Vietnamese karaoke became popular. It was like an outbreak. My family does not want to get involved or have anything to do with that; having too many acquaintances is not good.

Are there community centres in the neighbourhood?

Yes, there are Vietnamese community centres around, but the activities are largely meant for older people.

So what are your ideas of home?

Frankly, I do not have many memories outside this flat. I still feel patriotic about Vietnam.

What do you mean by this?

Oh, I support them in football. I guess although I know more about the U.K. than about the country in which I was born, I am still in some way attached to it; and I would like to go back. Not to live there, just to see what it looks like now. I think it is a great country. The Americans ruined Saigon; but I'm in the north. I have heard from relatives who have been back that the authorities there do not really welcome indigenous Vietnamese carrying foreign passports, but bribing still takes place, and that's how we find our way through. You see that turtle on the wall, my mother brought that into England the last time she went back to Vietnam. They didn't even check her luggage! Perhaps I have only one Vietnamese friend here whom I've known for the past 5 years or so. But other than that, all the other people I mix with are English or some other foreigner. My younger brother is also quite British, but he is very much more Chinese than I am. I think the basic values from Vietnam are still intact here. The only difference is that they are at a different level, or perhaps gone off in a different direction. For example, I have arguments with my parents, which is unheard of in Vietnam. I raise my voice at them, which I know is wrong, but I still do it. My mother seems to enjoy picking fights with me too, just for the sake of an argument. But we are a very close family.

Do you think Vietnamese people here are losing their 'Vietnameseness', if there was even such a thing? Are they losing their heritage, their identity?

Actually, you don't really hear much about Vietnamese here. They prefer to be known as Chinese. They are embarrassed by the idea of it. Maybe it's because of the way they got here, being stereotyped and labelled as "refugees" or "boat people", and want to break out of it by disguising themselves into another type of people.

And what about yourself? Are you conscious of a Vietnamese side of you and a separate English side to your identity?

Me? I'm a Vietnamese, and I'm also British. What can I do? Frankly, I know more Irish jokes than I know South Vietnamese jokes. Sometimes I do joke with Trang (a refugee from Saigon). She likes to call me "VC"; and in retaliation, I like to tease her with something from (*Stanley Kubrick's*) Full Metal Jacket, where prostitutes are trying to chat up "soldier lovers" or "G.I."s – they say "Fucky! Fucky! Want some fun?"

You're just finishing your degree at art college? What are your plans afterwards?

I intend to find a job in Graphics, whatever there is available. However, I know I am destined to the wok. Somehow, we always end up opening take-aways wherever we go, and whatever we do. My uncle was a VC, and has two University degrees in Chemistry and Maths, and he's still making stir-fries here.

Interview with Shuja Anas and his two Sri Lankan companions, Wimbledon, September 1998

When did you arrive in this country and why did you leave Sri Lanka?
I arrived in London in 1991, and stayed for 7 years with a friend's family in Colliers Wood. I moved here about a year ago. To tell you the truth, I was working in Sri Lanka and was earning something like 1500 rupees (£30) a month, so I was still dependent on my dad. I was working as an accounts clerk.

Did you particularly want to come to England? Why?
The place that I was staying at in Colombo — I was with friends and they all wanted to go abroad. We all thought that things are free here. I don't like to depend on my parents. My friends also wanted to go abroad — some are already here; the rest are in Australia and America. I just came as a student to continue studying accountancy, and when I got here, I changed my status to "asylum seeker". Right now, I still have my Sri Lankan passport and Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) in this country. I now work as a senior accountant in Baker Street.
To tell you the truth, I've applied for Canadian citizenship, even gone for the interview. There weren't any problems, so hopefully in 2 months, I can get a Canadian passport and move there. I plan eventually to move back to Sri Lanka. My idea is to set up a proper business there. My home is in Sri Lanka; my family and friends are in Sri Lanka. My sister is in Dubai.

You've been here for almost 8 years. Do you still feel you've assimilated yourself into British society, or are you separate from it?
I feel Sri Lankan — I was born one. I still keep in close contact with my family (my sisters and parents) in Sri Lanka. I send them money every month to support them. My sisters telephone me to ask for more money because they are getting married.

You don't seem to have many belongings in your room. Is everything you have here with you?
I didn't bring much with me from Sri Lanka. What's the point of keeping anything, even books when I have to move everything everywhere? This is my prayer rug, and that's my towel. My father bought it from China in 1986, and gave it to me in 1991 before I came here. See, I'm still

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keeping it.

Visahan interrupts to say: He's still using that dirty towel. His name is Suja Anas; we call him 'Sugar Anus'.

I gather you have many Sri Lankan friends here?
Ignore him. I have been here for 8 years and have a reasonably good life. The easy thing is I never have to cook here. My friend's mother used to cook for me in Colliers Wood, and here, my breakfast and dinner are provided. There is probably a community of 70, 000 – 80, 000 Sri Lankans in London.

What about traditional festivals – do you celebrate?
We organise Christmas parties and food festivals. Most of the time, we are aware of traditional Sri Lankan festivals but we don't actually celebrate. I have lots of friends in Harrow, about 100 of them. If you go into one house, you find about 30 people living there.

Interview with Thamsy- Panchadcharam Nanthakumar ("Nanthan"):

When did you get to this country, and what were your reasons for leaving?
I came to London as an asylum seeker in 1991. The people who lived in my place in 1989, 1990 were in a very bad situation – so my parents didn't want me to stay there. The freedom- fighters were staying in my village.
Visahan: This is nonsense! What the hell were they fighting for? Ask him.
Nanthan: Freedom. These people were fighting for freedom – they are never going to meet freedom. They threatened us to fight against the government, to join them. We didn't want to, so we left the place. I came on my own, but met friends who lived here.

Have you been living in Wembley all this time?
I was living in Harrow for 6 months at first, then I moved to Wembley with Visahan. I am now working as a systems operator in Hammersmith, for Tesco.

What's a systems operator?
I am a computer analyst.

Where do you consider your home to be? Will you like Shuja, return to

your country some day?

I don't ever want to go back to Sri Lanka because I had a very bad experience there. I miss my parents and keep in contact with them. I plan to permanently settle down here.

What has your experience here been like? Do you feel assimilated?

I didn't have a very good time here at first because when I came I couldn't speak English. I studied and did computing courses for six years. I even went to University - The University of North London. A computer science degree. Yes, I did find it hard to assimilate.
I still feel very much Sri Lankan. I like our culture. There is no change about this - I don't think there ever will be a change here. I just feel very Sri Lankan, and close to the community. But we don't really celebrate Sri Lankan festivals, maybe just go to the temple on that day. I am a Hindu and still practice Hinduism.

Does having a secure job at Tesco make it easier for you to live in this country?

I have never been independent when I was in Sri Lanka. Here, I am working independently - it helps me with my confidence. This could never happen at home. I can now support my family in Sri Lanka, and they are very proud of me. I have not seen my family since I came here because the British government will not give them a visa to visit from outside. We have never applied, but we know what it's going to be like.

Can you visit them instead?

I can't because I don't have a passport. And I would be arrested if I return.

Interview with Visahan Subramaniam

Visahan, when did you arrive in this country?

I arrived on 13th December 1987 on a Sunday at 4:55 p.m. that's the time the plane landed.

Why did you leave Sri Lanka

My parents kicked me out of the house. They didn't want me there - they can't have 2 sons there. I am still studying to be an accountant. I

didn't apply for asylum. I'm a bit more patriotic than the rest of them.

Where do you consider your home to be?
Physically, this has become my home. But at heart, there.
Here, I play cricket and live for cricket.

Interview with Sharaza Keshavji, Middlesex, March 1999

Could you please start by telling me how you got to this country, and your reasons for doing so?

I arrived here in 1971 and lived in a bed-sit in Earls Court. After I finished my 'A' levels, I emigrated to Canada in January 1973. My husband migrated with me. By then, my family had come to England. You see, all Asians were thrown out of Uganda by 1972. Idi Amin made a rule saying that any man knocking on the door of any woman's home could marry that woman. So many parents panicked and sent their kids abroad. Anyway, my family came as asylum seekers, and was sent to Camp Honiton, in Devon. They were there for a few months, and then ended up in Birmingham. They came legally with their Ugandan passports, and when these expired, they were granted Indefinite Leave to Remain in this country. They all hold British passports now.

Could you say a little on your ideas of 'home'? Where do you consider your home to be?

I've always considered Uganda to be my home. I never wanted to leave. I still remember the time I left Uganda. The other day, as part of the training for social workers, the teacher asked the students to describe certain memories. I talked about how you remember in your memories about goodbye. Uganda is the only place I have ever known, the social life, the friends, the community.. We belonged somewhere. It was part of my community, of my life. I said goodbye not knowing that I'll never go back. I left in the middle of the night and did not even say goodbye to some of my closest friends. (She began to cry and said) I am one of these silly people who cry at the slightest thing… I remember crying on the day I left. (She showed me a faded photograph of a blue Mercedes parked at the front gate of a house, with herself as a young girl in the front passenger seat) You see this photograph of me in the car just before I left? This is my father in the car, and my uncle opening the door (of the car), and that's me crying. You know, I won so many prizes at school because I was in the Debating Society; I had beaded cups and other trophies which I kept above my window sill in my room. I packed nothing when I left. Now they are all gone. My family had to leave everything behind when they fled the country. I never knew that I would never return. I always assumed that I would come back one day.

The rest of the people in this photograph – where are they now? Do you keep in contact with them?

Some of my school friends are in Canada, and I see them occasionally and still keep in touch with them. It's not the same now. Even if I were to go back. The community is splintered and it can never be the same. We cannot come together as one. My people – no one is around – everyone has gone their own ways. Yet I have an affiliation with Africa - with Uganda. It is my motherland. I cook African food all the time. Sweet-corn and peanut- butter sauce – it is a common dish and part of my culture, my heritage. I speak Swahili, an East African language. I was in Bombay several years ago, and sitting alone in a restaurant. I overheard three men from Uganda in the next table talking about business, and I understood everything they said. They were staring at me, wondering if I could be from Uganda. You know, I was so tempted to walk over and speak to them, but I finally told myself, no Shaz, just walk away. I was also at a Sugar Growing Conference in Cuba where there were some Kenyans looking at my English friend and me and talking. My English friend Paul interrupted them and said to be careful when they spoke because 'this woman' understands everything you are saying. They did not believe him, and laughed. I finally spoke with them in Swahili, and they were shocked and impressed. I felt so proud at that moment. There is so much pride and satisfaction with speaking Swahili. They say smiling is the universal language, but speaking the language builds better bridges.

Another time, I was sitting with my son at a petrol station along a motorway here, and two Spanish men were again looking at me and discussing in Spanish whether or not I myself was Spanish. I didn't say anything to them until we got up to leave. I spoke in Spanish to them, and they really thought I was from their country.

Where do you work now?

I am working at the Hammersmith and Fulham Town Hall. I recruit foster carers and train them. The council has a lot of money and also serves areas like Haringey, Newham, Thornton Heath, and Ealing. Right now, we pay foster carers 350 pounds a week for looking after each refugee child. Most of these foster carers are Eritrean, and they earn a lot of money, because only £100 of what they earn is taxable. They probably spend about

£100 at the most each week, so they actually make a profit of £250. So, when they arrive and are given a council home to live in, they buy it within 2 years of being here. If not for foster carers, the council has to pay £1500 a week to look after each refugee... because of staff incomes, insurance, the building, rent and all other overhead costs. So foster carers seem to be the cheaper and more productive option. It is really mostly foreigners who are social fosterers. Somalians hate the law, and don't like institutions and organisations. So only 1 or 2 families foster. So it's mainly Eritreans who foster these kids. But there is something not right here; how can our own clients foster these kids?

To the best of your knowledge, how well do you think refugees assimilate themselves into this culture?

They usually have family connections here. What surprises me the most is that it is mainly *young men* who appear as asylum seekers. Eritreans, Rwandans -- they all have connections here. They always have a telephone number and someone to call when they arrive here. They know what their entitlements are. In the 1970s and 80s, they had no information. Therefore, refugees like us from Uganda, Sri Lanka for example had to live and work for seven days a week in order to exist. We were very proud and kept our dignity, and did not want to owe anything. Today, it is no longer the philosophy -- they want only to collect. And the government pays them. You ask any pedestrian in London and they would say how much they hate the refugees being here, and how much they exploit the system. But, you know, these people don't know much but keep that perception. I personally think the system is being abused. I can say this as a professional who works with refugees on a daily basis. Refugees are not chasing jobs or competing with the English in that way, but they are chasing housing. And you know what? The government gives it to them! I was fostering an Afghani boy who declared himself a 14- year old orphan at the airport. I spent £210 on his school uniforms and books, and after 2 weeks, he said he didn't want to go to school anymore. Because there were no other Afghani kids at the school. He told me he didn't want to stay at my house, and that he wants his own apartment. He said he was an independent 16 year old. Today, asylum seekers come here with pre-set ideas, and the government gives it to them. There are 14/ 15 year old African mothers here collecting benefits of about 40 pounds a week, and

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an additional income of about £20 - £40 from each customer -- they are prostitutes. They walk into my office at 10 a.m. drunk! I pay for my mortgage, my food. I am angry that they are abusing the whole system, and I can't fight it. But why am I complaining? I'll be out of a job. The reason why I feel this way is because I know who the real refugees are: they are the victims of ethnic cleansing in Africa, the current Kosovo Albanians, the Pakistani women who are in prison on death row, and victims of domestic abuse. And still, nearly all the asylum seekers are *men, young men!* Even the Kosovo Albanians who come here are all men! What happened to the women and children they have left behind! These men are all big and grown up, and are in their early 20s, but they claim to be 16 at the airport, and still within the age of dependency. I wish there was a way of testing and verifying this, like do a bone test or something. You know that's why I have to leave this country at every opportunity. These things make me so angry -- that's why I travel so much, not only for my work.

Interview with Hiwet and Fecadu Abraha, Wembley, March 1999

Could you tell me where you came from and when you arrived in this country?
Fecadu: December 1989. We are from Eritrea, but we've been through other countries, like Saudi Arabia. There was a political situation in our country, and we were fighting against the government. My wife and I were both members of the Eritrean freedom fighters.

Hiwet: We came as asylum seekers and stayed in London. When we came, they gave us a bed and breakfast accommodation in Harlesden. We were there for 8 weeks, then we moved again to 2 temporary accommodations. Then again, the government moved us to 2-bedroom flat permanent accommodation. But we swapped it for this bigger flat. *What kind of swapping system is this?* There was another lady who had this house and wanted a smaller 2 bedroom flat, so we exchanged it. We can do that.

Fecadu: We were living in the bush all our lives. We were fighting in the bush since 1974, 1975. The Ethiopian government were in control of most of the seats in our government. We were in the bush, you know, just hit and run. That's where we met.

Where do you consider 'home' to be? Are you happy living here?
Fecadu: Well, not me. I don't like it here. I don't know about her?!
Hiwet: We are stuck between two things. Our heart is always looking backwards. We are torn apart. Our children were all born here, and they don't want to go back. We don't want to destroy their future. It is an identity crisis for them.

How many children do you have? Do they speak your language?
Hiwet: Three: 12, 8 and 3 years old – 2 boys and a girl. They are all born here. Only my oldest child knows how to speak a bit, but the other two don't know anything. My children don't want to look like foreigners at school, so they speak English. They want to deny their identity.

What language do you speak?
Our mother tongue is called Tigrina. It is the Eritrean language.
(At this point, Fecadu, the husband receives a call on his mobile

telephone and apologises because he has to go to work)

Do you still cook your traditional food and celebrate the same festivals?
Yes, we still cook and eat our traditional food and celebrate Easter and Christmas. But it is a different time from the English celebrations. We follow the Greek and Russian orthodox and go to church every week.

Do you feel close to the Eritrean community here?
The church is like a community. Everybody knows everyone. We visit each other, and if anyone is in trouble, the rest of the community knows about it. There are Christians and Muslims in Eritrea. And each tribe has its own languages, but when we meet others here, we still speak Tigrina.

Do you miss anything about your past?
We were members of the Eritrean Liberation Front. I miss my past life so much, especially the way of life because back then, you never know when you are going to die. You don't owe anybody anything, you have no possessions, you have what your community has and keep a good relationship with others. You don't know when you are going to die, so you eat for today and you don't think of tomorrow. Here, nothing is the same or simple as my life in the bush.

What do you and your husband work as now?
I am working as a nurse in a nursing home. I used to work in a hospital, but then I changed my job. Fecadu is working for a refugee project - the Refugee Arrival Project at Heathrow airport. He interprets for the refugees and fills in forms for them, and he teaches then where to find the DSS, their GP, and how to do shopping. He is a project worker, working for families of refugees, not people on their own.

What is currently you immigration status?
We have our ELR (Exceptional Leave to Remain).

But you've been here almost 10 years?
Yes, but we were waiting for more than 2 years without any status.

What about travel documents? Have you travelled since you came here?
Fecadu has been to Germany once, and then they took away all our travel

documents because they stopped the invitation visas to Europe. So I'm stuck here.

I understand you are fostering a few refugee kids?
Yes, there are 2 boys from Zanzibar. Did you see one of them on the stairs when you came in? He has gone to school. He was not feeling well, and went to see the doctor this morning, but the doctor said he wasn't too sick and to get to school. (She laughs). The kids have been with me since November 1997 - one is 14, and the other 15. They are cousins. They are very worried about their status here.

Do you think they have been able to fit in well into English culture?
Well, happiness is relative. When you leave home, you leave behind a lot of things -- food, culture, relationships, family, community. And they don't have their parents, and at this age, it is really not easy for them.

What do you do in your free time, if you have any?
It's not easy. Every morning I have to prepare breakfast for all my kids, and look after them I work as a nurse on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and overnight to Saturday. I tried before to go to Keep Fit class and sauna to relax, but I am working so hard I am very tired. Once I lie down, I couldn't get up. On Sunday I go to church, and sometimes do shopping for food on Saturday or Tuesday. *Where do you buy your food?* The Indian shops sell all African foods. Even the clothes from Eritrea I can buy here, from Ethiopian shops.