MUSEUMS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE IRELAND

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Leicester

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December 2012

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Irish society in the early twentieth-first century is experiencing dramatic social, economic and political upheaval and transformation. Concepts of Irish identity and citizenship are being called into question perhaps more so than at any other time in the nation's history. Recent large-scale migration into the country and burgeoning minority ethnic communities undermine any essentialising discourse of what it might mean to be Irish. This thesis explores whether Irish museums, as public facing institutions, can act as spaces of intercultural dialogue and by extension meaningfully contribute to the development of a successful multicultural Irish society. It assesses whether display and representational strategies within Irish museums codify particular readings of Irish identity and queries the extent to which such readings might exclude more that they include. In attempting to answer such questions I used a qualitative research methodology that incorporated three case-study museums and the analysis of visitor responses to semi-structured interviews at all case study sites. Significantly, the research sample constitutes the views of both ethnic majority and minority participants. Visitor feedback confirmed that Irish museums are places where knowledge and understanding about diverse cultures and peoples are sought and expected to be found. Recent migrants are making use of museums to discover how such institutions define 'Irishness' and to better orient themselves in their new Irish surroundings. Intercultural families are actively utilising Irish museums and their collections to educate their children about their culturally diverse backgrounds and to ensure such origins are cherished and not forgotten. Such findings have important ramifications on the social responsibility of museums in fostering a more pluralistic Irish society. My research suggests however, that Irish museums are not maximising on this potential. While some examples of exceptional good practice exist, a wider vision of intercultural engagement and provision is required from the Irish museum sector.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Richard Sandell for his unstinting support over the duration of this thesis. His professionalism, patience and encouragement is truly appreciated.

My second supervisor, Sheila Watson was instrumental in bringing alternative points of focus to the study and for this I am most grateful.

A special word of thanks goes to Jenny Siung at the Chester Beatty Library, Rosemary Ryan at the Waterford Museum of Treasures and Helen Beaumont at the National Museum of Ireland for facilitating my research and sharing their insightful opinions with me.

I would also like to thank both the Waterford Women's Centre and those women who took part in the group interviews at this site. I was humbled by your bravery and determination in the face of so much adversity.

A word of thanks is also offered to all those individuals who agreed to be interviewed across the case-study museums.

My family have been supportive from the outset and last but by no means least, thanks to Jonathan, who now has an in-depth knowledge of the challenges facing Irish museums.

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1 – Introduction: Museums in a Transforming Ireland

> To close the chapter on that which has failed, that which was not the best
> version of ourselves as a people, and open a new chapter based on a
> different version of our Irishness - will require a transition in our political
> thinking, in our view of the public world, in our institutions, and, most
> difficult of all, in our consciousness. In making that transformation, it is
> necessary to move past the assumptions which have failed us and to work
> together for such a different set of values as will enable us to build a
> sustainable social economy and a society which is profoundly ethical and
> inclusive. We must seek to build together an active, inclusive citizenship;
> based on participation, equality, respect for all and the flowering of
> creativity in all its forms. A confident people is our hope, a people at ease
> with itself, a people that grasps the deep meaning of the proverb 'ní neart
> go cur le chéile' - our strength lies in our common weal - our social
> solidarity.

(Higgins 2011)

The above extract taken from the inauguration speech of Ireland's ninth President, Michael D Higgins, elected in November 2011 could almost be viewed as a barometer of the state of Ireland in 2012 and an insight into the many challenges facing the nation. The speech is saturated with terms such as 'transition', 'transformation' and the need 'to build'. It hints at some of the most dramatic social transformations that are now occurring within the country in over half a century. There is a legacy of the after-effects

of the 2008 economic crash which is still playing itself out that has led to a questioning of values within Irish society. A recognition that Ireland is increasingly a multicultural nation and that strategies need to be devised to ensure that concepts of what it might mean to be 'Irish' are understood in the widest possible terms. It is this recognition of a changing sense of 'Irishness' and the challenges that surround it that are at the heart of this thesis. I aim to demonstrate in this study how Irish museums might be counted among President Higgins 'institutions' that create a 'profoundly ethical and inclusive' society in a rapidly evolving multicultural Ireland. There are already in existence foundation blocks for such development. In 2005 for instance, the Irish government launched 'Planning for Diversity, The National Action Plan Against Racism' (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2005). The NAPAR contain recommendations that the Irish government will seek to 'develop the potential of arts/culture policy to promote interaction and understanding of cultural diversity' (Lynam 2007: 15). This is a significant milestone for cultural policy in Ireland in that it is arguably the first time that public and state acknowledgement has been given to the proactive roles that cultural institutions could play in a developing multicultural Ireland. The research conducted for this thesis therefore, has attempted to uncover how a particular section of Ireland's cultural industries, namely its museums, could be said to have responded to this agenda, if at all, and whether visiting audiences to Irish museums see such sites as having a role to play in fostering such diversity work. I provide a fuller outline of my research methodology and case studies in Chapter 2. To date, there has been no in-depth research with Irish museum audiences that attempt to assess the extent to which they might perceive Irish museums as sites for intercultural learning, exchange and understanding. Equally, there is no existing research available that can offer insights into how visiting audiences to the nation's museums perceive the social roles

and responsibilities of museums in relation to the wider landscape of developing attitudes and consensus on what Irish multiculturalism might look like. My research therefore attempts to provide some of this information by selecting three case studies and collecting qualitative data from a diverse range of visitors to these institutions. Significantly, my research data contains feedback from both minority ethnic and majority visitors to the case study museums along with external focus groups. A point to note is that the minority ethnic sample within my study is dominated by recently arrived migrants to the country (the longest being resident in Ireland fifteen years). This is important as it highlights the attitudes and opinions of people amongst the most recent large-scale immigration to Ireland in relation to my research question. It is the perceptions and insights of these individuals that are at the core of this text.

My research agenda poses several questions. All of these questions however have an underpinning research query which asks 'what are the social roles of museums in contributing to cross-cultural awareness and mutual understanding in an increasingly multi-ethnic and multicultural Ireland?' In attempting to define what the role of Irish museums might be in relation to the research question, the primary approach is an exploration of the views and opinions of diverse Irish audiences in relation to the research problem. These views and opinions are secured by posing a series of five subsequent questions, namely:

- What motivates Irish audiences to visit museums and their collections?
- What are the perceived benefits of visiting such sites?
- How do different audiences view the social value of museums to society, and in particular, their potential contribution to the process of social cohesion?

- What importance, if any, is given to museums as sites in which reliable understandings of difference are constructed and communicated? (Sandell 2007).
- What implications does this study of audience perceptions and expectations hold for Irish museums?

These five interlocking questions will continually re-surface over the course of this study and I attempt to provide answers to them in the following chapters that tackle key thematic areas that arose in my research. Rather than confine the findings of my research to the concluding chapter as might be seen in a classic thesis style, I have opted to interweave them throughout the structure of this study and provide a summary at the end. My decision to follow this perhaps uncharacteristic thesis format is influenced by the manner in which my research evolved. Theoretical concepts such as postcolonialism, for instance, emerged to be important over the duration of this work and I feel it better assists the reader in assessing my observations where I introduce key findings in conjunction with the various theories encountered.

Structure of thesis

For the remainder of Chapter 1, I outline the reasons why this research was undertaken, namely the developing multicultural nature of Irish society and the position of the country's museums in relation to such developments. However, I also discuss the context within which the research was carried out between 2008 - 2011 and acknowledge the dramatic economic and social changes sweeping though Ireland and reflect upon how the effects of such are not inconsequential to this study. I also discuss how the role of museums as public institutions has evolved over the past three decades to such a degree that these institutions can now be deemed to have a proactive part to

play in societal debates on cultural diversity and multiculturalism. Chapter 1 also identifies three broad categories of scholarly and professional debate that frame this study, namely multiculturalism, nationalism and postcolonialism, all of which are drawn upon and utilised over the succeeding six chapters to assist my data analysis and findings. Bhiku Parekh's (2006, 1995, 1994) work in the area of minority ethnic rights and representation within plural societies and his theorising on multiculturalism is an important point of reference for my own research. I demonstrate how Parekh's theories are relevant to my thinking from the point of view of his 'interactionist' rather than 'static' view of multiculturalism. Of central importance to my theoretical framework is Parekh's advocacy of establishing a common culture out of difference through intercultural understanding and education via interventions within the public realm. The role of museums and galleries in such work has already been made clear by Parekh in his writings (2006: 223):

> Museums and art galleries, which define and celebrate the national
> heritage, should include and suitably integrate minority contributions
> which are also an integral part of a multicultural society's common
> heritage. Since the public realm sets the tone of the rest of society and
> wields considerable power and prestige, it should ensure adequate
> representation to cultural communities.

Chapter 2 set outs my research methodology and provides a detailed description of the case study museums. This chapter also offers a critique of how Irish museums currently represent the 'nation' and discusses how minority cultures are represented, presented and interpreted at these sites. Chapter 3 explores some of the various reasons behind audience motivations for visiting Irish museums as uncovered in my research and assesses the degrees to which such experiences elicit awareness of (and responses to)

wider cultural diversity. This chapter also considers the economic and social backgrounds of my research participants and sets this data in light of Bourdieu's (1984) theorising on how social class and status might affect cultural consumption. This is an important consideration for my study as an understanding of who visits Irish museums and for what reasons may well provide useful insights into the impact that such sites might already have or could have in the future around intercultural work. Chapter 4 examines the ways in which visitors to the case study museums incorporate notions of multiculturalism and ethnic identity and difference into their conversations. I assess what these conversations can infer about how participants view the role of museums in relation to concepts of Irish multiculturalism. Chapter 5 assesses the impact of nationalism and postcolonialism at the case-study museums, with particular reference to the National Museum of Ireland and reveals how these topics emerged within the data as important factors in contemplating future notions of Irish intercultural identity. I utilise postcolonial theory as a framing device in order to better understand participant feedback around issues of Irish history and identity as discussed at the case-study museums. My research suggests that Ireland's past history as a colony may well have future implications for both the future of Irish multiculturalism and the role that Irish museums could play in assisting the successful development of a contemporary diverse nation. Chapter 6 moves forward from the conclusions drawn in Chapter 5 to specifically look at how Irish museums have been historically involved in processes of identity construction within the state. This chapter utilises the research data to explore the extent to which Irish museums might still be involved in identity construction and how and what implications this has for the nation's minority ethnic citizens. Chapter 7 considers the role of museums as important resources within a wider mediascape in Ireland, particularly for minority ethnic groups attempting to integrate into a new life in

a new country. This chapter also illustrates how engaged or 'active' (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998) my research participants are with the messages or narratives told by Irish museums. Such considerations will be analysed against specific respondent feedback and interpreted in light of audience reaction to the case study sites and their collections. The final chapter offers a summary of findings from earlier chapters to allow some tentative conclusions and also suggest future areas of research to emerge.

Having established both the nature of the research question and thesis structure, I now go on to provide the context and background to the research itself.

The Irish context

Within this section I outline the national background against which my research was carried out and some of the factors that made the research timely. The Irish Census of (2006) collated information for people of ethnic and cultural background for the first time in the history of the Irish state. The findings reveal that over 10 per cent of Ireland's 4.2 million population at that time consisted of people who were born outside of the country. Census (2011) demonstrated this upward trend continuing with a figure of 17 per cent. Such demographic statistics are viewed as an unprecedented historic event by many cultural and economic commentators (Foster 2007, Fanning 2007) in that Ireland has appeared to move from a country traditionally associated with emigration to immigration. The significance of this change is felt all the more keenly in Ireland where the emigrant story has since the mid to late nineteenth century at least, become closely bound up with narratives of Irish identity and the need to leave a homeland in order to find a better life elsewhere. The global Irish diaspora, for instance, is claimed to number

about 80 million people[1]. That migrants would come to set up new lives in Ireland is a phenomenon that Irish society seems to have given limited serious consideration. Census (2011) also demonstrates that the recent recession has not curbed immigration to Ireland as might have been assumed. Such profound internal societal changes can be perceived as potentially threatening by indigenous populations and lead to risks of exclusion, alienation and discrimination for ethnic and minority groups (both long-term settled and newly arrived). Research over the past decade in Ireland would seem to point to significant levels of racist discrimination directed against those from minority ethnic backgrounds (O'Mahony, Loyal and Mulcahy 2001). A study by the Economic and Social Research Institute found that 35 per cent of immigrants have been verbally harassed on the street while 32 per cent had the same experience at work (McGinnity et al. 2006). In 2009, Ireland was ranked amongst the worst five EU states in terms of racial abuse and discrimination (EU Fundamental Rights Agency 2009). The situation is brought into stark relief by high profile public cases of accusations of racism against representatives of local and central government. For instance, in November 2011 the then Mayor of the town of Naas, Co. Kildare was forced to resign over his radio comments that he would no longer represent 'Black Africans' as they were, in his words 'aggressive', had 'bad manners' and were only interested in getting access to local authority housing lists (Carroll and Deeney 2011). The comments caused public outrage and resulted in a fellow TD (member of Irish parliament) referring the incident to the Gardaí (Irish police force) under the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989. An interesting feature of this case however, was the degree of support that the Mayor's position garnered in public comment forums via on-line national newspapers and phone-in radio programmes which tended to view him as a scapegoat for what was

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[1] Discover Ireland, *The Island History*, Available HTTP: http://www.discoverireland.com/us/about-ireland/history/

deemed a 'politically-correct' agenda at large. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which much of this 'support' was motivated by specific racist sentiment or whether it was symptomatic of wider social strains among the Irish populace where access to local and state support structures, in this instance local authority housing, is intensely contested in a recessionary period. The context of these examples and statistics is significant as in 2005 the Irish Government launched the country's inaugural National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPR) which was a response to commitments given on developing anti-racism legislation by the Irish government at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in South Africa in 2001. The resulting consultative process and launch of the Action Plan is a significant milestone in Irish history in that it played a part in forcing Irish society to recognise its complex heterogeneity. As has already been stated earlier, the NAPR made direct reference to the arts and culture as having a role to play within this process.

I began research around this topic in the autumn of 2007. A recognition of this start date is important as it was almost a year prior to the international financial crisis of 2008. Ireland was, and continues to be, affected severely by this crisis. In 2010 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and EU agreed to loan Ireland 85bn euro in attempts to prevent the country's bankruptcy. This intervention and the stringent austerity programme of cuts and tax rises associated with it resulted in the fall of the sitting Irish government in February 2011. The apparent loss of national sovereignty in areas like financial oversight[2] is felt keenly by a nation that has taken great pride in its independence narrative, a narrative that recurs frequently throughout this study. It could also be argued that the difficult economic situation has a direct bearing on issues such as migration, integration and multiculturalism. Certainly the connection between economic

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[2]   Irish budgets are now reviewed in Brussels prior to being made public in Ireland.

hardship and antagonism towards those perceived as 'other' in Irish society was acknowledged by an Irish government minister for integration who hoped that 'with the downturn, people don't project anxieties about the economy towards vulnerable immigrants' (Carberry 2008). Many of the organisations working in the areas of migrant integration and multicultural policy at the outset of my study have either seen their budgets significantly cut or have been abolished altogether. One of the most notable organisations to be dissolved by the Irish Government was the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) following the Irish budget of 2008. This body, which had been core funded by the Department of Justice, had carried out significant policy work in the area of interculturalism[3] but equally had monitored and recorded racist incidents across the state. Its closure led to much national questioning and debate about the Irish state's commitments to fostering intercultural policy and the objectives of the NAPR [4]. Although the functions of the dissolved NCCRI were later transferred to the government run Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration, the effectiveness of the latter government department in carrying forward such work has been questioned by many commentators including some minority groups. The Irish Traveller community for instance, perhaps one of the most politically organised of Ireland's minority ethnic groups, put forward their concerns about the closure of the NCCRI in a submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (National Traveller Women's Forum 2011). The NCCRI as an oversight organisation had been particularly welcomed by the Traveller Community as the Irish government does not recognise Travellers as a distinct ethnic community. Within their submission to the UN body, the Traveller Women's Forum

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[3] The Irish state has adopted a theoretical framework of 'intercultural' dialogue with and between its diverse ethnic groups rather than passively acknowledging the existence of such communities within the multicultural nation.

[4] http://www.nccri.ie/pdf/recent_coverage_about_nccri.pdf (accessed December 16 2011).

drew attention to the changes underway for other rights and equality organisations affected by the new economic circumstances in Ireland (ibid: 8):

> In addition, in the same year (2008), significant budget cuts were imposed on the Equality Authority (43%) and the Irish Human Rights Commission (24%). Reduced levels of funding and staffing cannot but impact on the important work of these organisations.

At the time of writing, the Irish government has opted to merge the work of the Equality Authority and Irish Human Rights Commission to form one body from 2012, namely the Human Rights and Equality Commission. While viewed as maximising overlapping areas of work by the Irish government, it is seen by critics as a short-sighted cost cutting measure that may have implications for the most vulnerable in society, including migrants and ethnic minority communities.

It is against such a background of tumultuous social and economic challenges therefore that I have attempted to ascertain how the Irish public might view the role of the country's cultural institutions, in this instance museums, in contributing to broader social and political agendas. The specific agenda in question within this thesis is Ireland's developing multicultural character and whether museums might be utilised or viewed as resources that assist the negotiation of this term and even become sites that actively encourage debate and theorise how to represent the new diverse nation. In attempting to answer such questions, three distinct thematic areas emerged over the course of my research from the data that spoke in various ways to the research problem. These themes or key concepts include the social roles of museums within societies, concepts of multiculturalism, and Ireland's colonial legacy. It is my intention to interweave these themes, which in some places overlap, throughout the structure of this

thesis with my research data. In the following sections, I elaborate in more detail on these themes and how they interconnect with my study.

The social role of museums

The ability of museums to be important players in debates on social responsibility and ethics, representations of identity and nation are not new to the field of museum studies (Sandell 2007, Janes 2009). A main line of enquiry running throughout this thesis is whether Irish museums have a role to play in assisting debates on what it means to be an inclusive society in the face of dramatic demographic, economic and social changes. Can and should they, for instance, facilitate the questioning of definitions that might often be taken for granted, contested definitions such as 'Irishness', 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood'? And if they can accommodate such questions how might they then become sites that could assist and contribute to the resulting answers that go towards constituting a truly inclusive multicultural Ireland? Increasingly, in a recession stricken Ireland, culture(s) and the arts are being publicly acknowledged as playing a role as equally important in the re-construction of the country as those of politics and economics (Heaney 2011). The most obvious and powerful recent manifestation of this desire to see cultural rejuvenation, agency and expression to be put at the heart of Irish public life was witnessed within the inauguration speech of Ireland's ninth President, Dr Michael D. Higgins, who was elected in November 2011. Stressing the importance of culture he stated (ibid 2011):

> I will champion creative communities who are bringing about positive
> change at local level by giving recognition to their achievements on the
> national stage. I believe that when we encourage the seedbed of creativity
> in our communities and ensure that each child and adult has the

opportunity for creative expression, we also lay the groundwork for

sustainable employment in creative industries and enrich our social,

cultural and economic development. In promoting inclusion and creativity,

I will be inviting all citizens, of all ages, to make their own imaginative

and practical contribution to the shaping of our shared future.

Museums, as important repositories of diverse cultural heritage(s) could surely be seen

to have an important role to play in terms of framing debates on the nation's shared

future and what such a plural future might look like. The assumption that museums can

and should address such wider social concerns is based on increasing empirical

research by scholars within the field of museum studies that has pointed to the

significant role of museums in shaping (as well as reflecting) social, political and

cultural concerns. Over the past two to three decades museums around the world have

been undergoing fundamental changes in attempts at determining their wider roles and

purposes to societies in a development that has been termed the 'new museology'

(Vergo 1997). Henrietta Lidchi (1997: 160) further elaborates on the concept when she

states that 'a museum does not deal solely with objects but, more importantly, with what

we could call...notions of what the world is, or should be'. Wide ranging research within

the field of museum studies has significantly added to the theoretical position of 'new

museology' and suggests that museums can and do in fact play a significant part beyond

their traditional and age old ascribed remits of display, storage and conservation

(Marstine 2011, Janes 2009, Sandell 2007, 2002). These theorists all make the case for

museums as sites that can and should effectively engage with contemporary issues

ranging from challenging prejudice and racism to developing a twenty first century

sense of museum ethics and social responsibility. Indeed promoting the role of

museums in specifically shaping positive images of under-represented and minority

groups and challenging prejudice has hugely extended theoretical thinking on the purpose of museums. As Richard Sandell (2007:195, original emphasis) states 'the question practitioners face is not, in fact, whether museums *should* be engaged in attempts to shape the ways in which difference is viewed but rather *how* they can most appropriately do so'. In a similar fashion Karp and Lavine (1991: 8) set out the positive roles that museums could hold specifically in relation to multicultural dialogue at national level:

> If the museum community continues to explore this multicultural and intercultural terrain consciously and deliberately, in spite of the snares that may await, it can play a role in reflecting and mediating the claims of various groups, and perhaps help construct a new idea of ourselves as a nation.

Such a broadening of the scope of museums beyond object based collecting, display, cataloguing and their more formal education services has not been received at face value by all, both internal and external to the sector, who feel that social interventions fall outside the remit of museum functions. The reasons for this vary, with some commentators seeing a hidden agenda on the part of the state having cultural institutions deliver social policy for them (Appleton 2001). Others are more concerned with defending what they see as the 'traditional' role of the museum curator and preserving a position of impartiality; one that stands apart from contemporary social and political debates. This concern was reflected in comments by a former Director of the National Museum of Ireland when he stated that, 'while no director can afford to be unaware of politics and of course few subjects are as consuming in Ireland, the active involvement of museum professionals in politics can have unfortunate consequences, not least for the professionals in question. Curators and especially directors should not meddle in

politics' (Crooke 2000: 3). Alongside the contention that museum professionals should 'not meddle in politics' there is also the assumption, held by some museum practitioners and the general public, of the supposed objectivity of the museum as an institution. However, the socially constructed nature of museums, especially national museums has been much discussed (Knell et al. 2010) and the tensions between the viewpoints/biases of those working within museums who arrange the displays and the possible conflicting interpretations of visitors viewing such displays has been equally commented upon (Macdonald 2002, Hooper-Greenhill 1994). As Viv Szekeres (2002: 147) states:

> History museums cannot pretend to be objective. Historical interpretation and objectivity are contradictory ideas. Given that we cannot be objective, then at least let us honestly own our own bias and author displays. Let us also ask the public for their opinion and include these responses.

Szekeres' calls to identify the voice and opinions of museum staff within displays and allow for public opinion are important. They are important because while at an academic level the museum is widely understood as a socially constructed space, for the public at large and most visiting audiences, great import is still given to what might be termed the 'authoritative voice' of the museum (as I discuss in Chapter 7). Within diverse and multicultural societies the notion of the objective museum becomes increasingly problematic particularly in the display and representation of the myriad of cultures and communities that make up a sense of the 'nation'. Who is speaking on behalf of whom and is there a right of reply, are important considerations for those both inside and outside the museum. In Ireland, the time would seem opportune to interrogate dominant notions of Irish cultural authority[5] as such questioning might offer

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5 Karp and Kratz (2000: 208) define cultural authority as 'Cultural authority....is dispersed and diffuse. It is embedded in educational curricula, part of inchoate attitudes formed through schools trips and

useful foresights into present and future inclusiveness and suggest meaningful routes to negotiated social and civic integration. The importance of viewing Irish museums as having a role to play in the latter process is evident from recommendations seen within international research. For instance, British cultural institutions, which included its museum and gallery sector, are directly referenced within a report for the Runnymede Trust (2000) that highlights the important position that such sites play in fostering a sense of national belonging for minority groups in that country. The report is also clear about the potential for negative and racist outcomes that could result from a group's exclusion from national consideration and representation:

> acts of racism, racial violence, racial prejudice and abuse do not exist in a vacuum. They are not isolated incidents or individual acts, removed from the cultural fabric of our lives. Notions of cultural value, belonging and worth are defined and fixed by the decisions we make about what is or is not our culture, and how we are represented (or not) by cultural institutions.

> Runnymede Trust (2000:159)

Museums can be perceived therefore to act as sites where society catches glimpses of itself, where it sees what is included and what is excluded, what is part of 'us' and what is 'other'. These values bestow on museums a very important social responsibility to consider carefully and negotiate the messages they project to the public about images and notions of nation and membership of such an entity. Having therefore set out the case for the socially engaged museum, it is now necessary in the following section to consider how, in the context of Ireland, such a role interconnects with the country's

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family holidays, manifested in museum architecture, and claimed in assertions or personhood. Cultural authority...relies on sociological embedding and links with other cultural institutions'.

developing multicultural character and what specific models of multicultural theory are most appropriate as a framing device for my research.

Theories of multiculturalism as a framework

From the outset of the research process, I was aware that my work would intersect with theories of multiculturalism due to my focus on issues around Irish cultural diversity. However, it was only as the data from the research began to accumulate and the analysis evolve that I realised where and how it connected to the field of multicultural studies. For instance, a significant observation to emerge from the data is the strength with which both majority and minority participants identified with and spoke about their cultural and national identities and the important role given to concepts of 'difference' and the celebration of such difference when interviewed at the case-study museums. The importance of ethnic or group difference is equally noticeable in participants' discussions of cultures and cultural artefacts other than their own. It is necessary to point out at this stage however, that this strong sense of cultural or ethnic self-identification did not necessarily, in all cases, result in bounded or rigid understandings of identity amongst many Irish majority and minority visitors. Intercultural interactions are, in fact, evident throughout this study with many of the participants utilising museum artefacts and collections to forge connections between very different ethnic backgrounds and in some cases actively using museums as sites to foster new Irish ethnic identities. This is an area I explore in more depth in Chapter 6. This pattern however of strength or self-confidence in what Paul Gilroy (2000) has termed 'collective identity' is significant for my study as it complicates the traditional arguments within the literature between the often opposing theories of multiculturalism

and cosmopolitanism[6] (Waldron 1999, 1996). Within the extensive literature around multiculturalism, I identified a broad over-arching theory and its application to minority group rights, representation and national citizenship that acted as a useful framework for my research. This theory of multiculturalism has been termed 'identitarian multiculturalism' by some social scientists (Fenton 2010) with some of its key theorists including William Kymlicka (2011, 1995), Iris Marion Young (1996, 1989) and Bhikhu Parekh (2006) amongst others. These theorists variously advocate for both group based rights and the formal recognition of ethnic and minority identities and cultures in the public domain as a given of multicultural citizenship. While acknowledging that they all have much in their writings that makes them different from each other, their position on the need to recognise minority positions in society gives them a common platform. Fenton (ibid: 183) has defined this element of multicultural theory as:

> In its barest outline, the identitarian element of multiculturalism is the argument that individuals belong to (ethnic) groups; each of these groups has a distinctive culture; and that membership of the group bestows on the individual a crucial cultural identity. It follows that just treatment of an individual must respect this identity, and that a just and non-oppressive society will give some *public* (emphasis added) recognition to cultural difference.

While Fenton's description is useful in summarising the clear recognition of difference that is at the core of this theory of multiculturalism, it is Bhikhu Parekh's more considered and elaborate conception of the theory that is of particular importance to my

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[6] The social theory of cosmopolitanism views people as 'world citizens' and increasingly inter-dependent. It critiques concepts such as the traditional nation-state and those that support notions of cultural or ethnic allegiance (i.e. multiculturalism), seeing them as barriers to the formation of universal international rights and democracy (Fine 2007, Habermas 2001).

study, a strategy that he calls 'interactionist multiculturalism'. The latter has the capacity to speak directly to the data evident within my research but also provides a foundation from which to critique the official policy of 'interculturalism' as adopted in recent years by the Irish state. Parekh has described 'interactionist multiculturalism' in the following terms; 'it involves not a passive and mute coexistence of cultures and cultural communities but their active engagement with each other' (ibid: 350). Much of this active engagement he stresses should take place in the public realm, with cultural institutions such as museums playing key roles. Parekh sees his vision of multiculturalism as standing in contrast to 'static' and 'ghettoized' conceptions of multiculturalism where there might be a tacit acknowledgement of the existence of other cultural communities but little, if any, social processes to assist their interaction with each other. Parekh is equally clear about what he feels multiculturalism is and is not. As almost all societies today are ethnically and culturally diverse, multicultural states and nations[7] are a reality that have to be dealt with. For Parekh, multiculturalism is not a political doctrine nor is it a philosophical theory of man but rather a 'perspective on human life' (ibid: 336). In terms of my research agenda and analysis of data, Parekh's three core defining features of multiculturalism came to be essential foundations for my outlook on the research problem itself. Firstly, Parekh (ibid: 350) insists that all 'human beings are *culturally embedded* (emphasis added) and live out their lives within a cultural framework. They can certainly revise – even reject – some or all of their culture, and fashion a new one. What they cannot do is to transcend culture altogether and live in a cultural vacuum'.

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[7] Following Smith (1998) and Suzman (1999) the *state* implies the legal and political organisation of a sovereign territory and the *nation* refers to those ethnic groups (majorities and minorities) constituting this body.

Secondly, cultures enrich each other via processes of intercultural dialogue. While cultures may be limited on their own, it is 'by engaging in a critically sympathetic dialogue with other cultures, we come to appreciate the strengths and limitations of our own, become aware of what is distinctive to it as well as what it shares in common with them, and enjoy the opportunity to enrich ourselves by judiciously borrowing their attractive features' (ibid: 350). Finally and perhaps most importantly, is a recognition that cultures themselves are internally diverse and plural. Parekh has stated that 'cultures grow out of conscious and unconscious interaction with each other, partly define their identity in terms of what they take to be their significant other, and are at least partially multicultural in their origins and constitution' (ibid: 337). This latter point has often been the focus of attention for critics of multiculturalism in general and Parekh in particular. Both Fenton (ibid) and Barry (2001) amongst others, have critiqued this strand of multiculturalism from a variety of perspectives. Their counter-views, which are predominantly based in the tradition of liberalism[8], see such approaches as potentially homogenising ethnic and minority groups and not recognising their heterogeneous nature. As Fenton (ibid: 183) states 'this groupist idea makes it difficult to accommodate the fact that the 'groups' as defined are highly heterogeneous....and that multiculturalism tends to incorporate an inflexible and immobile notion of both 'groups' and 'cultures'. Bhikhu Parekh however, has been forceful in his response to such criticisms, most notably in the second edition of his highly influential *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2006) where he takes on such challenges suggesting that critics have misunderstood and in many cases misinterpreted his reasoning. He refutes all accusations that his theories 'homogenise' ethnic and cultural

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[8] Liberal theory which has its origins in the European Enlightenment is often seen within the literature as being incompatible with multicultural theory due to the former's neutral and impartial stance on the rights of individuals and groups within society and the latter's concern with highlighting and supporting difference.

groups, making it clear that he (and other multiculturalist theorists) are of the belief that 'a culture cannot appreciate the value of others unless it appreciates the plurality within it' (ibid: 337). Other critics include David Theo Goldberg (1994) who has attacked what he defines as 'corporate' or 'managed' multiculturalisms which 'reify homogeneity' and instead argues for the development of what he terms a 'critical multiculturalism' (ibid:20):

> I think it is necessary to offer a different kind of argument for the multicultural project, to displace, in part, the way in which the debate is usually fashioned around identity and difference. I want to spell out a vigorous defence of multicultural commitments that are critical, insurgent, polyvocal. The central concept, then, is not identity/difference but heterogeneity.

Goldberg however, never fully defines what it is he is actually defending when he states that he wants a 'vigorous defence of multicultural commitments'? His perspective attempts to be nuanced in its conception of what multicultural theory might look like and how it should operate but it discounts the importance of individual or group identity. These are elements that prove to be important within my study and as Parekh (2006: 372) suggests 'a theory of multiculturalism is integrally connected with a theory of identity'. A basis of Goldberg's reasoning, along with others within the political liberal camp, is that any celebratory displays or manifestations of specific cultural or ethnic tradition(s), especially in the public realm, are something to be discouraged. Rather, a more generic image of national heterogeneity should be put forward as the ideal working outcome of a successful multicultural policy. Goldberg and others never quite define though what or how this heterogeneity could be grounded and described in real terms and what representational modes it would take. This has implications for the

working of museums in diversity related initiatives. If as Goldberg states that 'identity/difference' is not the 'central concept' where does this then position museums within the intercultural nation as they, as institutions along with their collections, have constantly dealt with the representation of cultural identity and difference? I assess some of the issues raised by this question through feedback within my data sample in Chapter 4. An additional concern voiced by many political theorists such as Barry (2001) and Goldberg, is the degree to which they see forms of multiculturalism that emphasise 'identity politics'[9] potentially acting as something of a fundamental threat to Western notions of citizenship as previously defined by Barry himself:

> The core of this conception of citizenship, already worked out in the eighteenth century, is that there should be only one status of citizen (no estates or castes), so that everybody enjoys the same legal and political rights. These rights should be assigned to individual citizens, with no special rights (or disabilities) accorded to some and not others on the basis of group membership.

Barry (2001: 7)

Kymlicka and Parekh, however, have argued that it is exactly because not all groups within societies have been in a position to 'share the same legal and political rights' that justifies their calls in advocating for public recognition and support for ethnic and minority groups. Minority group exclusion, for instance, may be as a result of various forms of discrimination or disadvantage, of an historic or contemporary nature. Those multiculturalist theorists who call for a public celebration of difference and the rights to do so, are also open in their scepticism of what they consider to be a very Westernised

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[9] See Charles Taylor (1992).

vision and celebration of the tenets of 'liberal tradition', a tradition which they feel ignores or is deliberately blind to the cultural differences of minority groups that constitute the citizenry of a nation (Stevenson 2003). The diverging views of the theorists outlined above are all ultimately locked into a debate over what Stevenson (ibid: 54) sees as one of the key objectives of multiculturalism, namely 'the construction of common cultures of difference at the national level'. In attempting to unpack such a challenge in the Irish context it becomes necessary to consider the characteristics of Irish nationalism and the country's postcolonial status, which I now turn to address.

Irish Nationalism and the Postcolonial question

In this section I want to establish the importance for my research of both 'Irish nationalism' and 'Irish postcolonialism' to wider issues of cultural diversity and the representation of such diversity at Irish museums. I deal with both separately in the following section even though there is a close relationship between the two. Both concepts play an important role throughout my study and are themes that I interpret as being evident within the data by virtue of how participants either spoke about Irish history and through their reflections on museum displays and artefacts. As concepts, it would appear that they may well have a crucial place in any discussions around future Irish multiculturalism at the nation's museums. At face value, both concepts might be perceived as potentially limiting in the extent to which they could or would allow degrees of cultural and national diversity to form, considering their usual associations in Ireland with a majority ethnicity that is sometimes defined within the literature as white, Catholic and, more often than not, patriarchal (O'Connor 2008, MacÉinrí 2007). I hope to illustrate however, throughout this thesis that the situation is in fact much more complex than this. My research points to numerous interactions, sometimes in surprising ways, that appear to exist between Ireland's nationalist and postcolonialist

identity and the developing contemporary multicultural nation that creatively open up rather than close down avenues of intercultural dialogue. This is not to say however, that such historical processes do not raise challenging issues for Irish museums or a modern diverse nation, they certainly do. Chapter 5 in particular picks up this theme and I outline where such examples emerge within my data at the case-study museums and focus groups. The academic fields of both nationalism and postcolonialism are, like multiculturalism, extensive and equally riven by internal debates and outlooks. However, for the purposes of this thesis I particularly draw on Anthony D Smith's (1998) theories of nations and nationalism to suggest that concepts of ethnic or ethno-nationalism[10] are not necessarily invariably hostile to cultural diversity and multicultural societies as is expressed in some of the literature (Hobsbawm 1990). As Smith states:

> we should not underestimate the continuing hold of a sense of national identity among the majority of the population in Western states, nor the desire of many members of immigrant communities to become part of a reshaped nation, while retaining their ethnic and religious cultures, perhaps increasingly in the form of a 'symbolic ethnicity'.
>
> (1996: 205)

Smith's theorising on ethno-nationalism and its associated concept of ethno-culturalism is useful for my study as it supports the strong research participant identification with ethnic difference within my sample. It also dovetails with Parekh's 'interactionist multiculturalism' where identities may be noticeable by their difference and desire to be different but yet interlink in a host of ways. Anthony Smith's position is a direct

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[10] Todd et al. (2006) cite Ireland as a prime example of an ethno-national state where a sense of an Irish identity can be traced before the Anglo-Norman invasion of the medieval period and was incorporated into centuries of ethno-communal conflict continuing until recently in Northern Ireland.

response to the more post-modernist formulations of Benedict Anderson (1983) and Eric

Hobsbawm (1990) who theorise states and nations as 'imagined communities' or

'constructs' of the modern era.[11] For Anderson and Hobsbawm, as well as other

postmodernists, it is important that as citizens of a given state 'we should not be misled

by the paradox that nationalists claim that nations are rooted in antiquity and self-

evidently natural, when they are in fact quite recent and novel constructs' (Hobsbawm:

120). Indeed, much post-modern critique is of the opinion that world societies of the

late twentieth and twentieth-first centuries are living in a 'post-national' and 'post-

ethnic' age. Hobsbawm elaborates further as to why it is important to recognise the

relatively recent 'construction' of nations as, for him, the phenomenon led to the

emergence of two distinct types of nationalism, namely civic and ethnic nationalism. As

Smith (ibid: 121) illustrates:

> Hobsbawm distinguishes two types of nationalism.....the first type is that of
>
> mass, civic and democratic political nationalism, modelled on the kind of
>
> citizen nation created by the French Revolution......It was swiftly followed
>
> by a second type of 'ethno-linguistic' nationalism, in which smaller groups
>
> asserted their right to separate from large empires and create their own
>
> states on the basis of ethnic and/or linguistic ties.

For Hobsbawm (1990: 168) civic nationalism as exemplified by the democratic ideals

of the French Revolution is clearly the preferred choice between his two defined

categories as he feels that 'the call of ethnicity or language provides no guidance to the

future at all. It is merely a protest against the status quo or, more precisely, against the

'others' who threaten the ethnically defined group'. Smith, while acknowledging that

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[11] Most historians of nationalism such as Anderson and Hobsbawm tend to see the French Revolution of
1789 as the inauguration period for modern nations and ideas of nationalism (see Smith 1998).

Hobsbawm's categories of nationalism are frequently cited in the literature, queries the extent to which these categories could be said to be truly distinct from each other. As Smith (ibid: 126) contends 'even the most 'civic' and 'political' nationalisms often turn out on closer inspection to be also 'ethnic' and 'linguistic'; this is certainly the case with French nationalism during the Revolution, let alone afterwards, with its appeal to 'nos ancêtres les Gaulois' and a single French people, and its suppression of regional languages in favour of Parisian French'. Smith's counter-argument to Hobsbawm and post-modernist critique in general around the topic of nationalism is two-pronged in that he believes forms of nationalism within modern nation-states are more fluid in nature than the mere 'civic' versus 'ethnic' debate found widely in the literature. He also suggests that belief in the 'constructed' or 'imagined community' sense of nation needs to be tempered with an understanding that pre-modern ethnic ties were often vital components in the emergence of modern day nationalism and nations.[12] For Smith, the latter concepts would not have evolved if they did not have the older social and cultural foundations of an ethnic group to mobilise and support them. Intricately bound up with these ethnic groups is 'the importance of myths, memories, traditions and symbols of sociocultural groupings – including shared memories of historical events, however selective or idealised, and shared myths and symbols of (presumed) ancestry' (ibid:127). It is the consideration of these elements, what might be deemed the cultural legacies of an ethnic group(s) that has direct relevance for my study. Museums share a similar evolutionary time period with both nationalism and the emergence of the nation-state, and in many instances were instrumentalised as institutions in the construction of these concepts (Knell et al. 2010). In the Irish context, notions of Irish ethnicity (cultural and linguistic) were to the fore in both nationalist struggles against colonial

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[12] For debates on modernist versus primordialist or perennialist theories of nations and nationalism see Smith (1998), Breuilly (1996).

rule but also in the postcolonial period while establishing the Irish Republic (see Chapter 6). It also interesting to note that it was Irish ethno-culturalism at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, for example in the revival of the Irish language, literature, music etc, that galvanised Irish nationalism on a mass-scale rather than necessarily the efforts of contemporaneous nationalist political movements such as Home Rule or Sinn Féin (Suzman 1999, Smith 1996). My research encountered a contemporary intersection of the continuing influences of this ethno-nationalism with Ireland's increasingly multicultural character both at the case-study museums themselves and amongst research participants. In the following chapters I explore the outcomes of this intersection/interaction and put forward suggestions as to what role museums might play in defining the next stages of a twentieth-first century 'Irish' identity.

The postcolonial question?

Within this section I want to summarise the often complex narrative of Ireland's postcolonial status and relate how this area of study impacts on my research agenda. I begin by considering the close connection between Irish nationalism and its influence on Irish postcolonial identity. I then outline the debates within the literature as to whether Ireland can be truly considered a postcolonial state or not. This will be shown to be important as much of the academic debate in both Irish Studies and at an international level tends to be polarised between either the acceptance of Irish postcoloniality as a reality or a questioning, if not outright dismissal of this position, a perspective which has come to be known as *revisionism*[13] (Brady 1994). I argue

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[13] Revisionist historians critique what they deem to be biased traditional or established Irish nationalist narratives in relation to the colonial period. They reject the idea that Ireland was a 'victim' of British imperialism and argue for a more nuanced understanding of Irish-British relations in history. The revisionist position largely contests notions of Ireland as a postcolonial state and sees postcolonial theory as offering philosophical refuge to more extreme forms of nationalism, such as the campaigns

throughout this thesis that there is a close relationship between Irish nationalism and the country's present postcolonial positioning of itself that has implications not only for conceptions of Irish majority ethnic identity but more significantly for its minority ethnic citizens. It is incumbent on Ireland's museums to represent the narratives of the colonial past. Yet museums are also representative of a contemporary postcolonial national Irish identity. The questioning of this national identity, what it assumes it is and what it might want to be is a significant theme that runs throughout this thesis. In attempting to query Irish postcolonial constructions of identity I draw on theorists such as Benita Parry (2004) and E. San Juan Jr (1998) who write from perspectives concerned with political theory and materialist or Marxist critique and whose work is concerned primarily with the social consequences of postcolonialism. Their theorising I intend to argue, in particular their more critical analysis of 'orthodox' postcolonial theory which dominates the literature in advocating notions of the hybridity of once subject peoples (Bhabha 1990, 1994 and Spivak 1990) and their defence of ethnic and cultural difference is more relevant to the Irish context. The postcolonial question alluded to within the heading of this section directly relates to debates within the literature as to whether Ireland can even be described as a post-colony? (Flannery 2009, Carroll and King 2003, Howe 2000, Kiberd 1995). As Flannery (2009: 16) explains:

> There is a concerted debate with respect to the legitimacy of Irish claims to postcolonial status; Ireland often seems akin to a pleading First World refugee, seeking asylum in a haven of Third World theory. The facts of Ireland's geographical location and of its relative economic prosperity are ritually garnered as preclusions to its status as definitively 'postcolonial'. The very idea of a bona fide postcolonial society, whatever that means,

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of the IRA from the 1970s until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

residing within the borders of a modernised continent is abhorrent and/or nonsensical to many revisionist critics. Yet, despite this, postcolonial theory has been, and remains, one of the dominant modes of literary and cultural criticism within the broader discourse of Irish studies.

Historical reasons are also put forward to question Ireland's status as postcolonial as the country politically became part of the United Kingdom under the Act of Union in 1801. There is also the fact that thousands of Irish men took part in the Imperial project around the world as members of the British army. All this however, does not negate the historical reality that Ireland was politically, economically and socially subjugated by a foreign power, Britain, for a prolonged period of time. For the purposes of my study therefore, I work from the basis that Ireland is indeed a postcolonial nation in line with the theorising of Kiberd (1995) and Carroll (2003) and that the impacts of British rule in Ireland were/are significant in the colonial and postcolonial periods. Luke Gibbons (1996: 149) effectively sums up the challenge that Ireland brings to the field of postcolonial studies when he suggests that 'a native population which happened to be white was an affront to the very idea of "white man's burden", and threw into disarray some of the constitutive categories of colonial discourse'. It is certainly the case that Ireland's history as a former colony of Britain is recognised and regularly discussed by my research participants from both majority and minority backgrounds, with some seeing implications for contemporary Ireland. The museum case-studies themselves by virtue of their collections, architecture even geographical locations often are enough to initiate discussions on Ireland's postcolonial position.

Throughout the process of this research I was keen to assess the degree to which Irish postcolonialism, particularly when applied to conceptions of identity, might be seen to

converge or diverge from the dominant theories of classic postcolonialism as advanced by theorists such as Homi Bhabha (1990, 1994) and Gayatri Spivak (1990). These theorists' re-positioning of how coloniser and colonised interact with each other and Bhabha's notion of 'hybridity' in particular, emerged as not necessarily the most appropriate approach when considering conceptions of self-identity or identity construction for my study of multiculturalism in the Irish context. Bhabha's theory of hybridity is usually advanced as a means of overcoming conflicts of 'difference' in postcolonial states and represented as a strategy that could assist the future of a given postcolonial nation. Such theorising is dependent on large-scale historical 'mixing' of colonisers and colonised both in the cultural sense from which Bhabha speaks but it could also be said from a biological point of view. Such processes are not straight forward in Ireland as it was by definition a non-settler colony[14] controlled by a military presence in what Ashcroft et al. (1995) terms an 'occupation colony'. Ethnic and cultural difference therefore, rather than being transformed into a new 'hybridised' identity in postcolonial Ireland was actually strengthened in its belief in its own 'uniqueness'. Some Irish majority participants within my sample, for example, self-identified strongly with their ethnic and cultural backgrounds at the case-study museums and the manner in which they did so implied to me that a postcolonial identity was being used as a framing device against which they compared and contrasted themselves against what might be termed 'the other'. Similarly, feedback from minority ethnic participants, many of whom originated in postcolonial states other than Ireland, were equally forthright in their affirmations of their ethnic or cultural difference against that of others. Like the Irish majority visitors, minority research participants are acutely aware of the former colonial history and postcolonial present of their 'home' countries.

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[14] For a full account of the differences between settler and non-settler colonies see Ashcroft et al. (1995).

Significantly, it is out of this shared sense of a colonial past and postcolonial future that commonalities appear to emerge within the data between majority and minority visitors at the case-study museums in a whole variety of ways. The concept of 'hybridity' therefore, which postcolonial studies usually views as a useful mechanism or theory for overcoming the binary concept of 'oppressor – oppressed' could be argued to have limited if any relevance to my study of Irish museums in the construction of a multicultural nation. Considering the strong identifications of ethnic and cultural difference amongst both majority and minority respondents within my sample, it could also be stated that 'hybridity theory' has perhaps more negative than positive associations within the Irish context. As Carroll and King (2003: 7) explain:

> The revisionary term 'hybridity' has the advantage of restoring a more complex sense of the often conflicted subject positions of the colonized both through resistance and collaboration. However, deploying a concept of hybridity in order to rewrite the history of colonialism as a matter of mutual and neutral interactions, as some readings of postcolonialism in globalization theory at times imply, denies the power relationships under imperialism then and now.

Within this chapter I have laid out the broad theoretical fields that intersect with my research. In numerous ways concepts of museums as agents of social transformation, multicultural theory and postcolonial theory all speak to the findings from my research. These arguments will be shown to emerge and interconnect with each other over the succeeding chapters and I as I aim to illustrate, play key roles around the potential of Irish museums to act as 'interactionist' public zones as defined by Parekh.

2 – Research methodology and case study museums

This chapter sets out the framework of my research design, methodology and the processes of data collection and analysis. I initially discuss the literature review undertaken for this study and highlight some of the key issues emerging from that body of work which both informs and critiques my own assertions. I go on from this to describe the qualitative nature of my research design and the research methodology anchored in case study analysis and the reasons as to why such an approach was relevant to my study. I discuss in detail a pilot study carried out in advance of the main research as it had important consequences for both my fieldwork and the design of the research instrument. I conclude with an analysis of my survey sample and detailed descriptions of the case-study museums and my reasons for selecting them as sites of study for this research. I outline the history and nature of their respective collections, how the public encounter these collections and how the case-study museums present themselves to the visiting public. I also discuss how these museums view their own positions and roles within modern-day Irish society[15]. I analyse the extent to which these museums might be said to engage with aspects of intercultural work and assess what the outcomes of such initiatives might indicate in relation to my research agenda.

Literature review

I carried out an extensive review of the literature around issues connected to my research topic between October 2007 to January 2009. Over this period, I attempted to place Irish museums and museology within the larger frame of the international

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[15] Although my research was concentrated specifically on obtaining audience perceptions around intercultural understanding at museums, I did speak with various members of staff (educationalists, curators, front-of-house, tour-guides) at all three case-study museums who offered insights into how the various institutions perceived their public roles to Irish society. I also utilised information available within the case-study museums mission statements to further get a sense of how they viewed their public roles.

literature. I analysed debates around museums and identity representation and the need to recognise the fluid nature of identity construction (Karp and Lavine 1991; Karp, Kreamer and Lavine 1992; Hallam and Street 2000; Crooke 2000; Macdonald 2003; Watson 2007). I also assessed specific policy orientated publications that have potentially important points of perspective for future museological practice and literature such as the Immigrant Council of Ireland (2008) and the Runnymede Trust (2000). An important element of my literature review was around the perceived roles of museums to society. This incorporates writings on the more traditional functions of museums such as collecting, conservation and display (Bennett 1995, Alpers 1991) to concepts of the socially responsible museum. Work around the idea of socially active museums and the body of research connected to this area is particularly important for my topic in that it considers specifically the ethical role of museums within and for societies and the affective outcomes such responsibilities might take (Sandell 2007, 2002; Janes 2009; Weil 2002). In constructing a theoretical framework for my study, I incorporated the research and findings of this work with an analysis of current debate in the fields of cultural identity and citizenship studies. Both cultural identity and citizenship are subjects that can be seen to act as the larger landscape into which my research might logically sit. Identity politics (Hall 1992) is significant for my exploration of concepts of Irish identity and how minority ethnic individuals self-identify as citizens of the Irish state. The closely allied field of cultural citizenship (Stevenson 2003) is significant in its assertions of the need to consider rights and responsibilities in a wider social sphere other than the purely political. Both these subjects also act in creating what Creswell (2009) has termed a lens effect, assisting with providing a larger scheme within which to frame my research problem. It was important that my literature review analysed material on visitor and non-visitor

perceptions and experiences of museums. From the outset of my studies I was aware that eventual fieldwork for my topic would consist of discovering the attitudes of diverse Irish audiences to my research question. Therefore, I attempted to situate the Irish museological context within the broader international scope of visitor research and studies. Initially taking a broad perspective, I reviewed the findings from large-scale surveys of generic populations (Trevelyan 1991; Hood 1996; Bennett 1994; Rennie 1996). Following on from this, I moved the perspective to a more focused analysis of research carried out with minority ethnic visiting to museums (Denniston 2003; Desai and Thomas 1998; Hooper-Greenhill 1997; Migliorino 1996). Much of this work has identified the often difficult relationships that exist between museums and their diverse audiences in terms of inclusionary access. Reviewing this literature highlighted the need for my future research to be conscious of the broad similarities of opinion that can exist amongst majority and minority visitors (and non-visitors). However, this literature also points out that visitors do bring their own cultural experiences and backgrounds to the process of museum visiting and that such community affiliations can determine attitudes to purpose, expectations and perceptions of museums. Being aware of these findings was to be prove useful during the fieldwork stages of my research. As previously mentioned, there has been no research to date undertaken on majority and minority ethnic audience perceptions on the possible roles of Irish museums as intercultural spaces. The most recent survey of museological practice in Irish museums (Irish Museums Association, 2005) did not address any issues relating to diversity. While international research in this area is informative, it is still essential to determine whether the Irish experience supports or differs from analysis within the existing literature. In terms of audience relevance, it is anticipated that the final conclusions from this research would be beneficial primarily to the museum sector in considering

policy around identity, representation, inclusion and access. Bearing in mind how the theme of identity and its representation might manifest in the Irish context, I included an extensive review of the literature on Ireland's status as a postcolonial nation, especially with regard to attitudes of identity formation via the postcolonial experience (Kiberd 2001, 1995, Crooke 2000, Carroll and King 2003, Brady 1994). This was sent against international work around the subject of nationalism and post-colonialism (Smith 1998, 1991, Parry 2004, Simpson 2001, San Juan 1998, Bhabha 1994).

Research design, methodology and process

My research design is qualitative in approach. Fieldwork was carried out with participants whose opinions and attitudes to the research problem were not known in advance. In attempting to gauge the extent to which visitors to Irish museums may or may not see such sites as assisting intercultural awareness and dialogue it was important for me to be open to the multiple and nuanced responses that emerged over the course of the interviewing process. In light of such concerns, quantitative methods, which rely on the statistical measurement of variables connected to objective theories, would not have been appropriate in this instance (Creswell 2009). Also, as I have chosen to work with case studies as my research methodology, a qualitative focus provides what Mason (2002: 3) describes as 'methods of data generation which are both flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced'. A qualitative approach is therefore better suited to the ontological perspective of this research which is by its nature interpretavist in outlook. Creswell (2009: 8) has defined the interpretavist/social constructivist working method in the following terms:

> Social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding
> of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective

meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects

or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher

to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a

few categories or ideas. The goal of the research is to rely as much as

possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied.

Creswell's suggestion that individuals find and create meaning from 'objects or things' is very appropriate to the rationale of my study. For instance, museums and the objects in their collections while having the ability to narrate past stories can also be viewed as active agents in the creation of individual and group identities and therefore potentially offer insights into these human social constructions. I am particularly interested to assess whether objects in Irish museums might trigger participant discussions on issues of identity, be that personal, cultural or national which all may provide insights into the role of museums in multicultural Ireland. The results from my data may imply that some visitors do indeed evoke notions of complex identities from a wide array of museum objects and in some cases the actual museum sites themselves. The challenge for me as the researcher is identifying the degree to which such comments and observations are contained to specific personal circumstance or whether they have significance in the wider realm of Irish multiculturalism and within the intercultural work of museums generally. As the researcher, I have to be conscious of projecting my own interpretative understandings to participant feedback throughout the fieldwork stages and in formulating my conclusions. In recognition of this, I utilised fieldwork diaries throughout the process to record my opinions but to also critique such opinions and leave them open for further revision. Creswell (2009) and Denscombe (2007) point out that data analysis within a qualitative approach is normally conducted from the beginning of the research process. As I am using a case study methodology, field notes

and recordings were assessed from the beginning of the process to identify possible themes and narratives emerging from the early stages of the research. I also recorded my personal thoughts of the developing process in fieldwork journals which equally acted as important resources in allowing self-reflexivity to be as transparent as possible. My use of case studies for this research allows for insights to be gained from targeted museums which may have wider implications for the Irish museum sector as a whole in terms of engagement on the subject of interculturalism. The benefits of utilising case studies within qualitative research has been described by Denscombe (2007: 39) 'as a distinct alternative to the randomisation principle associated with classic experiments and large-scale surveys, instances selected for a case study are chosen on the basis of their distinctive features'. While my three case-studies therefore constitute a 'class of thing that is to be investigated' (ibid: 39) namely museums, they all have distinct features that can contribute to providing insights into the research problem. The National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks was chosen as it represents on the one hand a 'typical' museum that collects, displays and interprets objects to various publics but yet in its role as a 'national' museum, has additional obligations as an institution that is seen to 'represent' the nation. I am keen to establish the degree to which Irish national narratives, both historic and contemporary, might include or exclude alternative concepts of Irish identity. The Chester Beatty Library was selected as it constitutes what Denscombe (2007: 40) has termed an 'extreme instance' in that 'it provides something of a contrast with the norm'. This contrast is due to the collections of the Chester Beatty Library being almost wholly comprised of artefacts of Middle and Far Eastern cultural origin and not representative of indigenous Irish culture. The significance of the inclusion of the Chester Beatty Library is that it could potentially act as a barometer of intercultural cohesion in Ireland where the cultures represented within its collections

might not be seen as 'extreme instances' but rather part of the fabric of twenty first century Irish life. While both the National Museum of Ireland and Chester Beatty Library are recognised as national institutions, the inclusion of the final case study museum the Waterford Museum of Treasures is representative of a non-national collection and is a regional museum. I feel it is important to have participant feedback other than from purely within the capital city. The selection of these case study sites is therefore considered and while all three have characteristics and outlooks that are unique to each, as museums they all ultimately are sites where members of the public have the opportunity to find out about and create impressions of 'the other'. I anticipated that their selection as case studies may elicit assumptions and presumptions from audiences as to how such museums facilitated diverse ethnic representation in the Irish context, particularly in discussions around objects and collections. The fact that case studies allow for the use of a variety of research methods and types of data is also significant for the capture of in-depth information that can contribute to answering the research problem.

Pilot study

Prior to the main fieldwork research being undertaken within the case-study museums, a pilot study was carried out at the Chester Beatty Library over three weekdays in August 2008 (see Appendix 1). In the following section I elaborate in some depth on the pilot work as it had significant impact on the final design of my research instrument. The purpose of the pilot study was to:

- Assess initial Irish audience reactions around museums and their potential as sites for engagement on issues of cross-cultural understanding and debate.

- Examine whether on-site museum research would provide sufficient access to,

and information from, ethnically diverse minority audiences.

- Explore research methodologies and interview questions.

The pilot study suggested that semi-structured interviewing was a useful method of obtaining in-depth analysis of visitor's perceptions of museums. This methodology also allowed participants to elaborate further on issues of relevance to them about their museum experiences, for instance what motivational factors were behind their visits to the museum in the first place. Other less open-ended interviewing techniques may not have captured this information. Significantly the pilot study also identified that in order to incorporate sufficient feedback from Irish minority ethnic communities, information would either have to be gathered from such communities in a targeted manner or that the main fieldwork research would have to be carried out at more appropriate times. This was because the pilot study did not engage with a wide enough sample of Irish minority ethnic participants over the three days at the Chester Beatty Library. Within that period of time I managed to interview a total of twelve people, eight of whom classified themselves as 'white Irish', one as second generation 'Chinese-Irish' and the remaining three being tourists from Japan and Korea. Prior to undertaking the pilot work I had been in contact with the education officer at the museum who had agreed to set up some advance interviews for my visit. Three of the twelve interviews at the Chester Beatty Library were participants sourced by the museum itself, who all self-identified as white Irish. The education officer had made significant efforts in advance of my visit to recruit people from minority ethnic backgrounds to be available for interview. Information letters composed by the author had been distributed at a week-long series of family workshops one month prior to the pilot study and as an extra measure selected candidates were directly contacted from the museum education

database. None of these approaches however proved successful in bringing together participants of minority ethnic background for the purposes of the pilot study. On reflection, the fact that the pilot study was carried out during the working week excluded the possibility of interviewing many of those from minority backgrounds who may visit museums outside of work hours and in particular those who might visit within family groups. Previous research undertaken in the UK for instance (Desai and Thomas 1998) has indicated that patterns of museum visiting amongst minority ethnic groups is often strongly connected to family leisure activities. Therefore, when it came to conducting the main fieldwork research at a later date, weekend interviewing was carried out at all case-study museums. This change in process did prove successful in capturing significant minority ethnic feedback within the research. The pilot study was also useful in establishing whether I needed to include the views of non-visitors to Irish museums within my research sample or not. My initial considerations of interviewing non-visitors had been based on two premises. Firstly, I theorised that non-visitors might raise issues pertinent to the research problem that could add significance in ways that I might not be aware of and which might differ from those who already visit museums. Secondly, I thought that the inclusion of non-visitors within the research sample would allow more opportunities to interview and gauge the views of minority ethnic communities (whom might be difficult to reach as participants) on the research questions. It should be pointed out that at the outset of this research there was no data available which outlined the extent of minority ethnic visiting within the Irish museum sector. I was therefore unsure even when moving the fieldwork research to weekends following the insights of the pilot study that sufficient feedback would be obtained from minority visitors. In order to further assess the effectiveness of my research questions and decide upon the significance of including non-visitor (majority and minority)

responses within my final sample, I decided to extend the pilot study beyond the walls of the museum to include Ireland's largest multicultural event – The Festival of World Cultures in Dublin in 2008. This extension was possible as the Chester Beatty Library was a partner institution of the festival and the museum's education department was carrying out a series of public outreach workshops and events as part of the festival programme over the period of my pilot study. The festival itself is an annual event in Ireland and is widely considered to be a national showcase of the country's cultural diversity. It was also possible for me to utilise the pilot questions outside of the museum context as the questions themselves were not tied to specific museum objects but rather poised at understanding wider concepts around the roles of museums in Irish society, and of course for my specific purposes, processes of intercultural dialogue. By extending the range and scope of the pilot study it allowed me the opportunity to further test my research questions on a diverse range of minority ethnic individuals and a selection of non-museum visitors attending this cultural event. I questioned a total of fifteen people at the Festival, some individually but mostly in pairs or groups. Individuals were approached following the conclusion of workshops conducted by the museum's outreach team. I specifically focused on minority ethnic individuals to bolster the low numbers encountered at the Chester Beatty Library itself. Most of those questioned self-identified as being Indian, Indian-Irish, Brazilian, Korean and Australian. All were resident in Ireland. At least half of the individuals questioned at the festival had visited at least one of the case-study museums and could therefore positively contribute to answering the research questions. Extending the pilot study to an off-site location proved to be extremely beneficial, particularly from the point of view of whether or not to include non-visitors within my final research sample. The evidence from the pilot study suggested that non-visitors would not contribute

substantially to my specific aim of assessing the roles that Irish museums could play in facilitating intercultural dialogue. Non-visitor feedback, while offering intriguing insights into the reasons why such individuals did not visit Irish museums generally, did not have the appropriate level of contact or experience of museums that was needed in order to have a bearing on my research agenda. Lack of non-visitor familiarity with museums and their collections suggested that interrogation of such individuals was unlikely to yield the in-depth information that I was attempting to uncover around how such sites might contribute to intercultural debate. As substantial international research already exists around reasons for non-visiting amongst majority and minority groups, it appeared to me that my specific research questions on intercultural debate and representation would best be articulated by those already engaged and interested in the sector - the active museum visitor. This was highlighted in interviews carried out with people attending the Festival who already had experience of visiting museums or galleries. Some of them in their responses to the research questions tended to allude more to the possibility of such sites as being intercultural resources due to their understandings of the diverse range of objects stored within museums. This for instance appeared to come across in some participants' descriptions of museums as places where they felt they had 'found out about other cultures' or 'heard about the history of others'. Such an awareness or perception of 'the other' by virtue of museum collections was not as evident within the feedback from non-visitors where museums were more generally perceived as 'storing old things' or places 'where school groups go'. Following on from the results of the pilot study I had initially planned to hold focus groups with members of the Indian-Irish and Chinese-Irish communities[16] but who would have had previous experience of museum visiting. I had anticipated making contact with these

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[16]   My initial consideration of these specific communities was related to their high numerical presence in Ireland and the fact that both communities were prominent in media discussions in 2008 about their racialisation in Ireland.

communities through the assistance of the education officer at the Chester Beatty Library, who has extensive experience of working with diverse ethnic communities through the museums public programmes. However, on further reflection I felt that the selection of specific minority ethnic groups may only serve to narrow the focus of my overall study and possibly obscure the opinions and voices of a wider research sample.

Data collection and analysis

At all three case-study museums I utilised open-ended interviewing techniques. This approach allowed participants the opportunity to discuss in as much detail as they wished their personal experiences and opinions of the case-study museums. It also allowed participants to actually steer the conversation in directions that were directly related to their own experiences of museum visiting but which I as the researcher was still able to give structure to within the sequence of interview questions. There were instances at all three museums where I had to regularly emphasise that I was an external researcher and not representing the case study museum. In the discussions around clarifying my position to the participants it became clear that some were concerned that their comments may negatively affect the jobs of members of staff at the museum or more generally portray the museum in a negative light when for many of them it 'was a place that did good'. The research instrument was designed in such a way that core research topics such as identity and interculturalism were not introduced at the outset but rather probed for relevance as the interviews proceeded. Depending on the attitudes of the interviewees and the manner in which the interview was unfolding, I at times moved the research questions around in order to make the interview process a more fluid experience for all concerned. Although I wanted to ensure variability within the research sample in relation to gender, age and ethnicity, I did make a concerted effort to interview visitors from minority ethnic backgrounds as my research agenda was very

much based on assessing minority opinions on Irish museums and the promotion of interculturalism. Participants were approached at the end of their visit and interviewed in a private room supplied by the museums. The average duration of interviews was twenty minutes with the longest running to seventy-two minutes. All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. At all case study museums I utilised fieldwork diaries which proved highly effective for capturing themes and further areas of enquiry that emerged out of the interviewing process. I also found these diaries useful for cross-referencing my work and thought processes at the three case-study sites. In conjunction with the fieldwork diaries I utilised analysis software NVivo to code all interviews and consider thematic areas that appeared to be emerging from the data. This proved to be a useful reflexive process for me as the researcher over the duration of the research analysis. Written comments in visitor books were also examined in relation to the specific concerns of my research agenda. Along with in-depth interviews, observation of visitors within the exhibition spaces of all three case-study museums was also carried out. Observation was useful in terms of getting a sense of how visitors physically used the museum spaces, which objects or displays caught their attention and to which they devoted more or less time to. I was conscious of the implications that my own identity and ethnicity might bring to working with other ethnic groups, particularly for those within the group interviews in Waterford (Denscombe 2007). I considered the possibilities of facilitating some of the sessions online via chatrooms or messaging services. This would have had the effect of acting as an 'equaliser' (ibid: 187) and lessen the impact of respondent perceptions of my identity. However, I ultimately decided that facilitating such sessions online would take away the vital element of visual communication between a group of participants and not be conducive to 'free flow' discussion, which did actually result in generating rich material for my research.

For the latter reasons, I therefore decided not to use online group forums. Only in Waterford did I carry out group interviews within the main body of my research with groups that were ethnically diverse and which all had had prior connections to the Waterford Museum of Treasures. Museum staff had recommended the work of the Women's Centre as being an important point of contact for local migrants and refugees in the Waterford area. These off-site group interviews were held to ensure minority ethnic views were included in relation to that particular museum. Even though interviewing at the Waterford Museum of Treasures was carried out over a weekend when there was a better opportunity to capture the views of as diverse a visiting audience as possible, I decided in consultation with the education staff at the museum that the regional nature of the museum warranted additional attention in terms of securing minority input to the research sample. The museum education officer therefore facilitated contact with one of the programme co-ordinators at the Women's Centre. This individual's assistance was vital in assembling those women that had been involved in projects at the museum and explaining to these participants the nature of my research in advance of my visit. The two interview groups that were assembled were ethnically diverse with a wide range of ages represented. The reason behind the setting-up of two interview groups was determined by the availability of participants following educational classes that they were participating in at the Centre. An important dimension however of the first interview group was that it consisted of entirely Muslim women of diverse ethnicities and nationalities. For this particular group interview, the co-ordinator at the Centre had informed me that she would have to sit-in on the proceedings as she was of the opinion that the women would have had concerns about taking part in an interview process with a male researcher due to their religious and cultural background. From a personal perspective, my extensive work with Muslim and

Middle Eastern communities at Leighton House Museum in London had given me an insight into such religious and cultural sensitivities so I was confident in putting the participants at ease with the interviewing process. As it transpired, the women within the group appeared more relaxed and found it easier to talk when the staff member had to leave the room for various reasons over the duration of the interview. The reasons for this apparent apprehension to be more open in front of staff became more obvious when they explained their circumstances and experiences in Ireland. The women interviewed within this group all mentioned that they had experienced various forms of racial and religious abuse since their arrival in the country. Not only did their dress mark them out as different in Irish society but they were all either migrants or recent refugees to the country. They were reluctant to speak of such issues in front of staff at the Centre because as in the words of one interview participant it might be taken as a sign of 'ingratitude'. It was clear that the women within this interview group had a good relationship with the Centre and did not want to jeopardise this network of new Irish friends by talking about their experiences of Irish racism.

An issue that I had not considered from the outset which could have had implications on participant responses was the fact that I was undertaking research on Irish museums but within the context of a British university. At all three case study museums I had to clarify to some respondents that the research, while being undertaken at the University of Leicester, was personal in origin and design. For some participants within the sample, predominantly majority Irish interviewees, there was a degree of questioning as to why a British university was studying Irish museums and for what reasons? Such questions were also raised during interviews with some front-of-house staff at Collins Barracks and the Chester Beatty Library. Although never explicitly elaborated upon or described in detail, such suspicions hinted at the protracted historic relationship between the two

countries. Whether such questions would have been asked in relation to a British university in another context is hard to tell, but perhaps I should not have found it so surprising considering the historical narratives contained with Irish museums. As it turned out the historical narratives and legacies between Ireland the UK were to play a significant role within participant feedback on ideas of Irish intercultural relations.

Survey sample

During October 2009, I conducted in-depth interviews with forty visitors to Collins Barracks, National Museum of Ireland and twenty three visitors to the Waterford Museum of Treasures. I conducted similar in-depth interviews at the Chester Beatty Library in February 2010 with twenty seven visitors. In addition to the on-site museum interviews I also held two off-site group interviews with ten users of the Waterford Women's Centre in October 2009 who had made previous use of the Waterford Museum of Treasures for various educational and community projects. The interviewees at the three case-study museums were composed of family groups, couples and some independent visitors with participants self-identifying from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The gender distribution within my sample is relatively evenly distributed with slightly more females interviewed than males. Forty two individuals self-identified as coming from minority ethnic backgrounds with a further forty describing their ethnic origin as white Irish. I included some non-Irish resident nationals such as visiting tourists within my sample in order to compare and contrast their opinions of Irish identity against that of majority and minority Irish resident responses. Significantly for the purposes of this research it needs to be borne in mind that the vast majority of the minority ethnic participants within my sample were recent migrants and refugees. Their views and feedback therefore represent a first generational perspective on their life in Ireland which in turn opens up intriguing windows into how they utilise and

interpret the resources of the case-study museums. Minority ethnic participants interviewed at the three case-study museums largely are from higher socio-economic backgrounds and generally had high educational levels. By far the most common ethnic group interviewed were of Indian origin, followed by the countries of the Far East and latterly the Middle East and Africa. Amongst minority ethnic participants, more females were interviewed than males.,The age ranges of both female and male minority ethnic visitors are significant in terms of their youth, with the vast majority falling between the ages of 20-30. My sample would seem to concur with Barrett and Bergin's (2007: 81) analysis in which they state that 'we have found that immigrants in Ireland continue to have, on average, notably high levels of educational attainment, relative to the Irish-born population and relative to immigrant populations elsewhere'. The two most dominant employment areas for minority ethnic visitors within my sample are professional/technical (categories taken from the Irish Census Report 2006) along with a category defined as 'other' which incorporates students and homeworkers. Many of those who described themselves as students explained that they hoped to enter employment in Ireland and eventually begin the process of gaining Irish citizenship. Those working in the services industry are also common within my research sample and to a lesser degree people working in sales and marketing. It is notable that clerical/management, a category that usually includes local government and civil service does not feature with minority visitors. Many of those working within the services sector are over-qualified for the employment they are engaged in but conceded that they had found it difficult to find work in their chosen area. This is obviously something that will be familiar to all ethnic and social groups in Ireland in the current economic climate. While the economic profile of my sample generally conforms to what the literature defines as museum visitors constituting higher social and educational

class (Bennett 2009) a notable feature amongst the research participants is the presence of both majority and minority visitors who fall outside this definition and who come from lower social, economic and educational backgrounds. I explore in more detail in Chapter 3 as to why this may be the case and look in particular at the issue of recent migration which may affect motivations for visiting amongst lower class migrants within my sample. However, wider research on the social and educational backgrounds of museum visitors in the Irish context is required to provide further analysis in this area.

In the next section I outline the three case-study museums in detail.

The National Museum of Ireland (Collins Barracks)

The National Museum of Ireland (NMI) is a federation of four individual sites which between them attract in the region of one million visitors annually. Three NMI sites are located in Dublin with the final one being in County Mayo in the West of Ireland. Each site takes responsibility for differing collection areas with all contributing to the national 'story' of Ireland. The sites and their collections are:

Archaeology - Kildare Street, Dublin

Decorative Arts and History - Collins Barracks, Dublin

Natural History - Merrion Square, Dublin

Country Life – Castlebar, County Mayo

My case-study museum at Collins Barracks[17] (opened in 1997) is charged with the care and display of 'decorative arts and history'.

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[17]   Named after Michael Collins (1890-1922) the first Commander-in-Chief of the Irish Free State.

Figure 1   Exhibition of 1916 Rising at Collins Barracks, National Museum of Ireland

© National Museum of Ireland

The collections range across fashion and textiles, furniture, silver, glass and militaria and date from roughly 1600 CE to the present day.   The museum now occupies a building that had formerly been the colonial headquarters and garrison of the British army in Ireland which was built between 1704-10. Following independence, the site had continued to act as a military installation administered by the Irish Department of Defence until it became part of the NMI in 1997. The fact that Collins Barracks became one of the locations of the NMI in the 1990s appears to have evolved more out of necessity rather than design and its transition to museum from military compound was evidently a difficult process as is seen in progress reports to the Irish government during this period (Purcell 1996). The Irish government had decided in 1988 to close Collins Barracks as a military installation however the Department of Defence had been unable

to sell the property at what it deemed a satisfactory price. It was at this point that the government stepped in and concluded that 'it had been recognised for many years that the accommodation available to the National Museum was inadequate to allow it to fully discharge its duties....and that all the National Museum's requirements for extra accommodation could be met in a development at Collins Barracks' (Purcell 1996: 1). I selected the Collins Barracks site as a case-study for my research on two specific grounds. Firstly, the museum's remit to interpret modern Irish social and military history has the potential to offer insights on how the museum's displays and interpretations might influence visitor perceptions of Irish identity, both past and present. Such considerations might be seen to have important implications for contemporary articulations of identity within multicultural Ireland. Secondly, the museum displays and stores extensive collections of non-Western decorative artefacts from the Middle East, the Asian sub-continent and Far East, much of which was assembled during the colonial period. The current NMI mission statement suggests that such collections are important in contributing to 'an understanding of international cultural heritage' (NMI:10) within Ireland. I want to assess visitor reactions to these non-Irish and non-Western collections and explore the degree to which, if at all, they act as intercultural resources and instigate debates around pluralism in Irish society. The storage and display of such collections in a location such as Collins Barracks with its strong colonial and military history led to interesting and rich visitor feedback around issues of identity and representation and are areas that I explore in more depth in later chapters. The modern day National Museum of Ireland initially emerged under colonial rule as the Dublin Museum of Science and Art, based in Kildare Street, by an Act of Parliament of 1877. It was administered from London by the Department of Science and Art and modelled on the South Kensington Museum (later the V&A). In 1899 control of

the museum was eventually transferred to a Dublin based department. Although designated a national collection by 1908 (Wallace and O'Floinn 2002) it was not officially called a national museum until independence was achieved in 1921 (Bourke 2011). The original remit of the Dublin Museum of Science and Art was clear from the outset in that like the South Kensington Museum, it was conceived as a site of instruction in the arts and crafts. Its foundational ethos was therefore to advance better knowledge of design and industry and hence promote commercial potential rather than inaugurate a national Irish museum in the truest sense. This is made clear within the minutes taken from a House of Commons report of 1868 on the original discussions around the need for a Dublin based museum as cited in Bourke (2011:191) 'it is desirable that there should be a general industrial and fine arts museum in Dublin. The people of Ireland would thus obtain the fullest opportunity of improvement in the cultivation of the industrial and decorative arts by the study of approved models and objects'. The current director of the NMI has also acknowledged the founding principles of the institution as discussed in Crooke (2000:6) where he states:

> 'The original nucleus of what is now the National Museum of Ireland
> revolved around the natural history collections while the core educational
> concern and actual raison d'etre of the institution were based on the
> decorative or applied arts collections. The museum was known as the
> Dublin Museum of Science and Art which betrays a background with
> concerns which were primarily neither national nor archaeological'.

The artefacts that were to become the core collections of the Dublin Museum of Science and Art were the possessions of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) founded 1785 and

Royal Dublin Society (RDS) founded 1731.[18] These were antiquarian learned societies whose membership was predominantly Protestant and who represented the Ascendancy and landlord class in Ireland. On the passing of the 1877 Act of Parliament they agreed that their collections could become the nucleus of the newly initiated Dublin Museum of Science and Art. Bourke is clear on the important role played by these organisations in the emergence of Ireland's national museum (ibid:172) 'the major roles in the story of the national museums are played by the RDS and the RIA, whose collections were the critical factors in the success of the museum movement'. Along with important examples of decorative arts, geological and natural history specimens the collections of the RIA in particular consisted of some of the finest Celtic and early Christian antiquities found in Europe. Leading up to and following Irish independence in 1921, an important reorientation of the Dublin Museum began to take place. The gold and bronze prehistoric collections associated with Ireland's Celtic past that had previously been displayed in anonymous side galleries now took centre stage in the museum's main exhibition space in Kildare Street. Thus began the National Museum's role in constructing the new Irish state as the direct descendent of an ancient Celtic culture (albeit with an interlude of several centuries). The newly re-orientated National Museum of Ireland and its re-evaluated prehistoric antiquities came to be instrumentally tied up with a re-fashioning of Irish ethnic identity following independence (Crooke 2000) in a process that was to continue throughout the twentieth century as the new nation attempted to find its place on the world stage. I suggest in this thesis that such constructions of Irish identity continue to have implications for Irish society today, particularly in relation to an evolving multicultural Ireland, evidence for which emerged within participant feedback at Collins Barracks and the other case-study museums. The

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[18] For a full overview of the societies that contributed to the emergence of the National Museum of Ireland in particular and the historical development of museums in Ireland in general see Bourke (2011).

federated nature of the NMI is an important point that needs to be borne in mind from the perspective of my research with audiences. For instance, a similar federation of sites constitutes the current day National Museum of Wales (NMW), which has eight separate institutions interpreting Welsh history and identity (Mason 2007). While both the NMI and NMW may work as organisational bodies that inter-connect internally across curatorial, educational and marketing platforms, there is no guarantee that visiting audiences will understand or be aware of such working arrangements. Indeed Mason (ibid: 28) points to research that appears to confirm such a situation in the Welsh context, 'a site audit commissioned by National Museum Wales reported that museum staff felt at that time that the public had a poor grasp of the identity of the overall network and identified much more readily with individual sites'. My research would suggest similar patterns of visitor understandings of the National Museum of Ireland. Such understandings are especially notable amongst minority ethnic visitors and overseas tourists. Collins Barracks for instance is overwhelmingly viewed by participants within my research sample as being *the* National Museum of Ireland, the location where Ireland's story is told. Those who are not aware of the NMI collections in archaeology at Kildare Street or folk life in County Mayo are therefore interpreting a particular perspective on Irish history that in many respects is disconnected from the important narratives represented at other NMI sites. I intend to demonstrate how such compartmentalisation of the NMI led to surprising results within respondent feedback around perceptions of Irish identity at Collins Barracks which in itself has possible knock-on effects for intercultural understanding.

Chester Beatty Library

My second case-study museum, the Chester Beatty Library also located in Dublin 'contains some of the finest treasures of the great cultures and religions of the world,

bequeathed to the Irish people by American mining magnate and collector Sir Alfred Chester Beatty, who chose Ireland as his place of retirement' (Ryan et al. 2001).

Figure 2   Interior of Sacred Traditions Gallery, Chester Beatty Library

"© The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin"

The appearance of the word library within the name of the institution might imply that it only concerns itself with precious books[19]. This, however, is not the case. The Chester Beatty Library is equally a museum that exhibits significant historical non-Western decorative and fine art objects of both secular and religious importance from Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. The museum presents and interprets world religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism, Sikhism and early Christianity through its renowned collections in a major exhibition space titled 'Sacred Traditions'. The non-

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[19]   Chester Beatty made his reputation as a book-collector and later diversified into other areas of the arts. The book collection at the museum today contains some of the earliest copies of the Christian gospels and rare examples of Western medieval and Renaissance illuminated manuscripts.

Irish nature of the collections made the Chester Beatty Library an interesting case-study

for my research particularly from the point of view of Ireland's developing

multiculturalism and the opportunity to explore visitor opinions and reactions around

themes of diverse cultural identitie(s). In a similar situation to the National Museum site

of Collins Barracks, the Chester Beatty Library has since 2000 been located within a

building complex that also has a notable colonial past, namely Dublin Castle. The

Castle had been the seat of British rule in Ireland until independence in 1921. As at

Collins Barracks, participant feedback within my research sample at the Chester Beatty

Library would seem to indicate that the current geographical location of the museum

and history attached to this location are not insignificant factors on visitor responses to

the collections there and by extension to wider issues around Irish society and identity.

For instance some visitors had searching questions about the nature of both the collector

and the non-Western collections at a museum within a former colonial headquarters.

Were the collections colonial plunder? If they were colonial plunder, to what extent had

Irish citizens being involved in such processes? How and why did Chester Beatty

acquire such artefacts? While some participants query whether the collections should be

repatriated to their 'origin' cultural nations other visitors view them as useful

intercultural tools for Irish society. The actual collections had been stored since the

1950s in a library built by Chester Beatty in an area of south Dublin. Limited access to

researchers and the general public had been granted to this library from the early 1950s.

This site however was not adequate for the storage and display of such precious objects

which Beatty continued to add to until his death in 1968. Chester Beatty had stipulated

in his will that the library was to continue as a public charitable trust supported by the

Irish state after his death. The wishes of his will were carried out and today the Chester

Beatty Library is over ninety per cent funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture

and Sport. It is classified as a national collection. An interesting aspect of the museum's self-declared public role in Irish society from the perspective of my research is its acknowledgment of the part that its collections can play in fostering better understandings of cultural diversity. The museum's Mission Statement is clear on this point where it states that one of its objectives is: '.... to promote a wider appreciation and understanding of the international cultural heritage embodied in the collections and to foster relations between Ireland and the peoples whose cultures are represented in the collections' (Chester Beatty Library: Mission Statement). I suggest in this thesis that not only does the Chester Beatty Library and its collections have the ability to inform its visitors of world cultures outside of Ireland but is in itself an active agent in the construction of newly emerging Irish identities within the country. Rather than being viewed as the 'non-Irish museum'[20] the Chester Beatty Library is perhaps one of the most exciting sites in which new concepts of 'Irishness' are emerging, with the museum and its collections being utilised as important resources in such developments. In this regard, it is also notable for instance that the museum's education department works under the title of 'Intercultural Education Services'.

Waterford Museum of Treasures

The Waterford Museum of Treasures in the southeast of Ireland is the only case-study museum to be located outside of the capital city and is not a designated national collection. Its inclusion is important to my research design as it allows for regional voices and opinions to be incorporated into the findings. In particular, I anticipated that the selection of this case-study would open up space to assess the degree to which

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[20]   While carrying out fieldwork for this research the Chester Beatty Library was regularly described by some Irish museum professionals and visitors as the 'non-Irish' museum. This was a cause of concern for some second generation Irish minority ethnic respondents as they viewed their cultural heritage at the Chester Beatty Library as now being part of not only their Irish identity but as being incorporated into the nation as a whole.

concepts of a multicultural Ireland and Irish identity might be perceived and thought of differently, or not, outside of Dublin. Maintained by Waterford city council, the museum is housed in a nineteenth century granary building (dating to 1872) and interprets the history of Waterford[21] from pre-historic times to the present day.

Figure 3   The Medieval Gallery at the Waterford Museum of Treasures

© Waterford City Council

The collections are particularly rich in Viking and Norman artefacts, the majority of which were discovered within excavations of the city during the 1980s and 1990s. Although it is a regional museum, the fact that Waterford was the location for the first large-scale arrival of Anglo-Norman forces into Ireland from Britain in 1179-80 is an event of national significance and is narrated as such within the museum. Waterford is also a port city which means that international trade has impacted on the city and region

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[21] Waterford is the oldest city in Ireland being founded by the Vikings in 914AD. Today it is the fifth largest city in the state.

for centuries. This historical reality can be seen in the collections at the museum which contain coin fragments from eight century CE Iraq, brought to Waterford by its Viking founders, to medieval artefacts from Flanders and Italy. These historical international connections via trade routes were to emerge as significant factors in visitor feedback at Waterford, particularly amongst minority ethnic participants. The museum and its education department actively welcome local community groups to take part in its workshops and also offers space for community exhibitions. This area of the museum's work proved useful for my research in gaining targeted access to minority ethnic users of the museum which I may not have had a chance to do so while undertaking random fieldwork. I discuss this more fully in the following section which outlines my research process. The actual granary building which now hosts the museum collections was itself sympathetically renovated in 1998. The museum shares the building with the city's tourist information office which also has a large shop area selling literature, maps and a wide range of souvenir material. This sharing of space led to interesting discussions with some visitors on the intersection of Ireland's tourist industry and the nation's museums. From such interviews I was able to get a sense of how some participants perceived the role that Ireland's national tourist agency Fáilte Ireland (Welcome Ireland) plays in constructing notions of Ireland and 'Irishness' and how the country's cultural institutions are incorporated into such work. More pointed in relation to my research was the extent to which such discussions opened up questions around whether Ireland's tourist industry and Irish museums might be said to be economically and even politically tied into projecting certain images of nation at home and abroad? For instance, are Irish museums perceived by the public as maintaining perceptions of national identity that correspond to the tourist industry's work of 'selling an image' of such identity to foreign tourists? If this is the case, how readily do Irish audiences,

especially minority audiences, accept such constructions of identity and their portrayal within Irish museums? All these questions are pertinent to my research as any close alliance between the nation's museums and tourist industry in construing and promoting a specific image of Irish identity may have implications for the inclusion and acceptance of the country's minority ethnic citizens. Waterford Museum of Treasures also proves to be an important case-study site in opening up more complex understandings of self-identity amongst majority white Irish participants which in turn had implications about how future Irish plurality and inter-culturalism might be conceived of. Perhaps more so than at Collins Barracks or the Chester Beatty Library, majority participants at Waterford on a few occasions elaborated more freely on how they perceive their cultural and ethnic identities to be layered, complex and affected by historical circumstance. This was usually done within the context of their talking about specific objects or displays within the museum connected to European history. Such analysis of majority Irish identity was rarely encountered at the Dublin case-study museums. I interpreted this situation as potentially being influenced by the specific nature of the Dublin museums and their collections. For instance, Collins Barracks in its role as a national museum may leave less room for wider conceptions of 'Irish' identity such as a smaller, more regional site like Waterford could do. Unlike Collins Barracks and the Chester Beatty Library which have free admission, the Waterford Museum of Treasures charges admission rates.

All three museums could be said to be places where intercultural activity already occurs to varying degrees. This can be said to be the case by the very fact that all museums, irrespective of their geographical locations have objects and collections that relate to other world cultures and peoples. This can certainly be said to be the case with my three case study museums. However, what is at the heart of my research is not only the extent

to which the museums might see themselves or make themselves available as places of intercultural dialogue or debate but whether visiting audiences see such places as sites where this engagement can take place? Of my three case studies, the Chester Beatty Library is by far the most proactive in the field of Irish intercultural work and is nationally recognised as such (Siung 2009). This work is largely led by its education officer who has long recognised that the world collections at the museum not only inform Irish society about 'the other' but that increasingly these collections are now very much bound up with new definitions of Irish identity itself. The Chester Beatty Library has an impressive learning offer for school, adult and family audiences. It has also been very successful in setting up sustained links with diverse communities through family programmes such as its 'Silk Worm Club' on Saturdays and during holiday periods which caters in particular for younger children. A notable feature of the education service at the museum is its inviting of arts professionals from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds to deliver events both within the museum and at outreach venues. The author managed to see one of these workshops in progress during a fieldwork trip and it consisted of a master Chinese calligrapher demonstrating some of the key aspects of this high art form. The workshops attracted large and diverse crowds to the museum. Such skilled practitioners come from minority communities within Ireland but are regularly invited from overseas. The education staff at the Chester Beatty Library also regularly take part in outreach talks and workshops across Dublin and throughout Ireland. In one instance a Japanese freelance member of staff who undertook work for the museum, explained how she had delivered workshops on Japanese block-printing to pupils at a Muslim school in south Dublin. There was a clear desire on the part of the education service at the Chester Beatty to involve local communities within their programming by having members of these communities deliver work for them.

This was acknowledged by a Malaysian woman following a cultural demonstration who stated 'it's nice to be asked'. The education officer at Collins Barracks explained that while they do not necessarily concentrate on intercultural workshops such as might be seen at the Chester Beatty Library, they do run Saturday Art Clubs in which anyone can attend. Members of the Polish community were referenced as sometimes taking part in these activities. It was also suggested that Collins Barracks regularly facilitated schools groups from all over the country which by their nature consisted of children from diverse backgrounds. Waterford Museum of Treasures equally did not have specific programmes that addressed issues of diversity within their collections. Like Collins Barracks, they expressed the view that school groups using the museum were ethnically and culturally diverse in nature and it was hoped found something positive on their visits. Where the Waterford museum had a more obvious connection with its surrounding diverse communities was its openness to link up with and hold events for community groups within the city. It was Waterford Museum of Treasures work with the city's Women's Centre that ultimately became a useful bridge for my interviewing of participants at that community venue. The scale and quality of the non-Western collections at the Chester Beatty Library and its impressive offer of intercultural education and learning appears to affect attitudes to such work amongst some staff at the other case study museums. There seems to be a perception that if the Chester Beatty Library is the leader in the field of intercultural work, then that museum should wear that mantle. Some staff also expressed a view that unlike the education team at the Chester Beatty they didn't feel confident enough in devising intercultural programmes as they did not have the experience to do so. This sense of staff uncertainty was deeply connected to a concern about causing offence to minority ethnic communities if the work or programmes are not developed in a sensitive manner. However, there was also a

feeling amongst some staff at Collins Barracks and Waterford Museum of Treasures that intercultural work could have an air of tokenism about it and that they were just doing it for what were described as 'politically correct agendas' or 'ticking boxes'. This chapter has outlined the research methodology undertaken for this study. It has also discussed the reasons as to why a case-study approach was taken and given in-depth information on the three distinct case-studies chosen and the reasons behind their selection. Having established the nature of these institutions and their roles within the Irish cultural sector, the next chapter goes on to discuss what motivational factors emerged within my data for visiting to such sites. In discussing reasons as why research participants visited the case-study museums I also highlight where appropriate situations where participants experienced or expressed opinions around possible obstacles to such participation. I particularly highlight examples of reasons behind minority ethnic visiting to the case-study sites.

3 - Motivations for museum visiting: Class and status in the Irish context

An important area that needs to be recognised as having significance for my research is that of social stratification and cultural consumption in the Irish context, particularly for public uses of and perception of museums. As my primary research question considers museums as sites that might foster greater social and intercultural cohesion, the ability of museums to reach out to *all* citizens and be seen as places of relevance to *all* sections of society is a key concern. Could it be said for instance that Irish museums might only cater to an economic elite in Irish society? What insights can the social, cultural and economic make-up of my research sample say about the backgrounds of those audiences visiting museums and their reasons for such visiting in the first place? While conducting the fieldwork for this research it was regularly mentioned to me (usually by those working in museums) that most 'ordinary' people, which by inference meant the working classes and minority ethnic groups, were not interested in visiting museums as such places held no interest for them. It was therefore put to me that my main research question was an idealist assumption considering a vast majority of the population would never encounter museums working towards more inclusive and intercultural notions of society. Alternatively there were those whom I spoke to (both working within the case study museums and research participants) who felt that Ireland, unlike the UK for instance, was a classless society and therefore access to the arts and museums does not face the same issues around elitism as highlighted by theorists such as Fleming (2002) and Young (2002) in the British context. This chapter therefore sets out to analyse the complex intersection of cultural consumption in relation to social class in Ireland and to also consider the role that ethnicity may, or may not, play in such relationships. I draw on my research sample to put forward some tentative suggestions with regards to the situation in Ireland. Studies within Ireland, the UK and the Netherlands (Bennett 2009;

National Economic and Social Forum 2007; Hibernian Consulting 2006; Trienekens 2002) on public participation in the arts and cultural sectors are compared and contrasted in order to get a sense of how Ireland is similar or not to other EU countries. Consideration is given to whether Ireland's dramatic economic growth between 1994 – 2002 affected social mobility and hence cultural consumption patterns, particularly museum visiting. The implications of the economic crash of 2008 and its continuing legacy are also taken into account. I then go on to argue from the findings of my research as to how public utilisation of museums in Ireland, while having parallels with the above referenced research, appears to further intersect with Irish historical phenomenon such as colonialism and more modern issues such as migration, which might be argued to over-ride presumed educational, class and ethnic boundaries.

Ireland – a classless society?

An enduring myth held by many both inside and outside Ireland is that the country does not have and has never had a class system (Foster 2007). This line of thinking stems from the concept that once independence was achieved in the 1920s, the dominant British class structure was dismantled and the new nation were as one. However, as Foster (ibid:16) asserts:

> To anyone who has actually lived in Ireland, the notion of class is hardly alien; though its structural base may operate differently in Cork than in Cheltenham, the stratifications, codes, signals and exclusions are no less complex and rigid.

In fact, Lane (2010) makes the case for an emerging Irish middle class at least as early as the eighteenth century. More recently, the rise and fall of the now infamous 'Celtic Tiger'[22] has led to a debate between economists on the one hand and sociologists on the other as to what the last twenty years has meant for class divisions and social mobility in Ireland. For many social researchers Ireland's dramatic economic growth, which roughly took place from 1994-2002 is viewed as a time of deepening social inequality and stunted social mobility (Kirby 2002, Coulter and Coleman 2003). Others however disagree, with work undertaken by the Irish Economic and Social Research Institute (Whelan and Layte 2004:37-39) finding that:

> While the transformation of the class structure was a gradual process, the shift from large-scale unemployment throughout the 1980s to labour shortages in the 1990s was a dramatic one. In terms of absolute mobility, one of the striking consequences of such changes was increased access to the service class across the spectrum of class origins.......contrary to the assumptions and predictions of many Irish sociologists, economic growth and, in particular, the economic boom of recent years has been associated with substantial social mobility and with increased equality of opportunity.

For some commentators the impetus for this social mobility was the availability of easily obtainable credit for virtually everyone from all backgrounds throughout the 1990s up until the financial crash of 2008 (McWilliams 2007, 2005). Research since the onset of the recession (Barrett and Kelly 2012) indicates that while falling living standards and unemployment is a nationwide problem, it has been Ireland's minority

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[22] The term 'Celtic Tiger' was coined in 1994 by Kevin Gardiner of Morgan Stanley Investment Bank, London when comparing the Irish economy of the 1990s to the Asian tiger economies (Coulter and Coleman 2003).

ethnic communities that have been the most adversely affected. If it is the case that class

boundaries have blurred in Ireland over the past twenty years, what have such

transformations meant for public consumption of culture, in particular the use of and

attitudes to Ireland's museums? I explore debates around class and ethnicity in the Irish

context in some more depth later within this chapter. In bringing these economic and

social debates to bear on Irish museums, it is at this point useful to overview previous

research on class and cultural consumption in the wider European context by

considering Pierre Bourdieu's 'Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of

Taste' first published in English in 1984. Focusing on class and cultural consumption in

1960s France, Bourdieu identified strong parallels between high levels of education and

social class in identifying those within society who participated in what he termed

'highbrow culture'. Bourdieu defines 'legitimate taste' as opposed to 'popular taste'

(ibid: 16) as an appreciation of art forms such as opera, museums, art galleries, ballet

and theatre. Today, definitions of what might constitute terms such as 'high' and 'low'

culture are increasingly open to question and seen as 'difficult to maintain in

contemporary Western societies in which the study of the consumption of popular

culture is no longer regarded with disdain and popular culture is no longer seen as

'vulgar'' (Trienekens 2002: 283). Also, postmodernist economic theorists have

increasingly attempted to widen discussions around notions of class and its stratification

to include areas such as race, gender and culture (Ruccio and Amariglio 2003). For my

purposes, race and ethnicity is taken into account when discussing class visiting patterns

and attitudes to Irish museums as minority ethnic feedback has been an important

element of my research. However, the more classic, or Marxian notion of 'class' as

economic construct around capital/wage labour relations is used throughout this chapter

as that is predominantly how it is discussed and analysed in Irish academic discourse,

both economic and social (Coulter and Coleman 2003; Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin 2002). This construct of social class though will be shown to have limitations when assuming who does and does not visit Irish museums based on findings within my research.

Bourdieu's efforts in assessing class and cultural interaction in French society has been replicated in the UK (Bennett, 2009: 1) in attempts to compare and contrast both countries. As Bennett states:

> In the absence of studies probing the social organisation of British tastes in as much detail and depth as Bourdieu's studies of French tastes, answers to such questions have been largely speculative. Our study makes good this deficiency, analysing the social aspects of cultural practice in contemporary Britain as extensively and systematically as possible.

Bennett's conclusions largely echo Bourdieu's earlier statements on French society in forwarding the notion that attendance at 'high cultural' events in the UK is largely determined by those with higher levels of education and who hence come from higher social classes. However, what is interesting in Bennett's findings is the apparent fraying or opening up of class distinctions in twenty first century Britain and the implications of this mobility on cultural consumption. Unlike Bourdieu's definitions of mid-twentieth century French middle or bourgeois classes being essentially closed entities, Bennett discovered that middle class membership in the UK was flexible or elastic. Whereas the 1960s French middle classes saw their closed class membership as a form of identity or distinction, contemporary British middle classes in particular are more keen to highlight their appreciation of diversity and in many instances accommodate sub-cultures into

their own identity. Such a change, or broadening of interest in cultural participation by individuals in higher social strata has already been noted by other social researchers such as Peterson and Simkus (1992) who coined the term 'cultural omnivore' for such eclectic cultural practices . Bennett's analysis puts forward the contention that for UK middle classes, the boundaries between high and popular culture have become blurred and they easily move between the two. This social flexibility does not however appear to be the case for working class populations with Bennett (2009: 201) stating:

> The most striking feature is the abstention of the working class from participation in state and commercial forms of public culture.

If such a finding is taken to be true then it poses certain challenges for the aspirations of museums anywhere, not just in Ireland, to foster wider community cohesion and interculturalism amongst all citizens. Yet, Bennett in his own account offers room for optimism as he cautions that his finding does not mean that lower income groups are not culturally active or in fact disinterested in culture. This is an important observation and is supported by previous UK research particularly in the area of museum visiting. Trevelyan (1991) for instance found that while lower income respondents in her particular research expressed interest in history, it was still the case 'that museums were not felt to deal particularly well with the subject of the past or convey it in an exciting or involving way (ibid: 34). Similarly, Bennett (1994: 20) in conducting research with non-visitors to Australian museums and galleries from low-income households concluded that:

> there was little evidence of any significant differences between visitors and non-goers regarding the type of history they most valued. On the basis of

this evidence, then, it would be difficult to conclude that non-goers don't

visit history museums because they are disinterested in history. To the

contrary, all the indications suggest a parallel degree of interest in history

and, moreover, interests of a similar kind.

The British and Australian research therefore suggests that reasons other than

disinterest, must be sought for any limited participation of working class and minority

ethnic profiles at museums. Prohibitive entry fees are equally not the full answer as

most British national museums and galleries have had free admission since December

2001. Research undertaken by MORI (Martin 2003: 4) established that 'while the

number of people coming through the door might have dramatically increased, the

profile of a typical 'population' of museum or gallery visitor has remained relatively

stable, and firmly biased in favour of the 'traditional' visitor groups'. Within Bourdieu's

assessment of cultural consumption the answer to this might be suggested in his theories

around class cultural appropriation (1993: 237):

the museum gives to all, as a public heritage, the monuments of a splendid

past, instruments of the sumptuous glorification of the great figures of

bygone ages, but this is false generosity, because free entrance is also

optional entrance, reserved for those who, endowed with the ability to

appropriate the works, have the privilege of using this freedom and who

find themselves consequently legitimised in their privilege.

Statistics released by the Department for Culture Media and Sport in the UK (DCMS

2011) ten years on from the introduction of free admission confirm that numbers

continue to rise with a jump in visiting figures from seven to eighteen million over the

course of the last decade for UK government assisted national museums. Yet

Bourdieu's claim that 'free entrance is also optional entrance' is still a salient point. An interesting feature within the DCMS figures however is the success rate of National Museums Liverpool and Tyne and Wear Museums in attracting high levels of visitors from lower socio-economic backgrounds[23], totalling almost 40 per cent of total visits during 2010/11. Significantly both these museum services have been to the fore within the British museum sector in advocating a more socially inclusive attitude to museum display, interpretation and public involvement (Fleming 2002). David Fleming's directorship at both institutions has been marked by a process of self-reflection at these museums about the nature of their relationship with the public and how they should, as publicly funded museums, be serving their diverse audiences. Both National Museums Liverpool and Tyne and Wear Museums have acknowledged that the collections displayed within their venues cannot be disconnected from those individuals (past and present) who did the collecting. There is also an awareness that museum collections and the history of collecting are tied to elite class circles within both historic and contemporary societies. Museums in essence have not always reflected everyone's stories. Both these museum federations have therefore re-positioned themselves to actively work with local communities and engage with people on issues relevant to their lives in ways that are explored imaginatively through the collections. In the wider field of museological studies, some researchers have even gone further and actually linked class background to specific behaviour patterns within museums, galleries and historic sites (Hood 1996, Trevelyan 1991). Vanessa Trevelyan in particular noted that visitors from lower socio-economic and educational backgrounds were felt to have a preference for interactivity and active participation at museums during their leisure time[24]. Her

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[23] Figures for minority ethnic visiting, however was low across all class categories.

[24] In contrast visitors from higher socio-economic groups within her research appeared less inclined to favour interactive museum displays or workshops and relied on more traditional forms of interpretation such as labels and display boards. Individuals from higher social groups were also noted

research therefore suggests that museums not only need to re-orientate how they interact with their audiences but that the processes involved in this interaction should take socio-economic factors into account when doing so. There are echoes here of Bourdieu's descriptions of working class perceptions of plays where 'the desire to enter into the game, identifying with the characters joys and sufferings, worrying about their fate is based on a form of *investment*' (ibid: 33). These researchers suggest that free entrance on its own is not enough to guarantee all socio-economic groups share in the cultural capital offered by museums and that other more far reaching and engaging strategies need to be found. More recent research by Watson (2011) in the UK goes further to suggest that there is evidence that individuals from working class backgrounds can be just as interested in heritage as their counterparts from middle and upper class profiles, it is rather a question of how this interest is made accessible at heritage and museum sites that is in question. In the next section of this chapter I go on to focus specifically on recent research concerning the socio-economic factors involved in public participation in the cultural domain in Ireland. It will also attempt to draw out implications from this work on the ability of museums to engage in intercultural work across social divides as evidenced in my research.

Cultural capital in the Irish context

In recent years some important reports have been published in Ireland on public rates of participation in the arts and culture, factors that affect such participation and the importance of the sector to social cohesion in general (Jewesbury, Singh and Tuck, 2009; Lunn and Kelly 2008; NESF 2007; Hibernian Consulting 2006). It should be noted at this point however, that museums did not receive attention as a distinct cultural

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as being more likely to visit museums independently over those from lower socio-economic categories who came with family groups.

entity within these reports and that therefore the qualitative research conducted for this thesis is at the time of writing the only independent information on public attitudes to the potential of Irish museums as sites of intercultural understanding and debate. A report carried out by Lunn and Kelly (2008) for the Irish National and Economic Social Forum was the first comprehensive study to date on social factors that affected public involvement in the arts in the country. Making use of the Irish Arts Council commissioned report, 'The Public and the Arts' (Hibernian Consulting 2006) the authors analysed the socio-economic and demographic material from this report to conclude that:

> social class, income, and especially educational attainment are stronger
> factors than earlier reports have indicated. In other words, for those already
> disadvantaged by low income and inadequate education, there is the
> additional disadvantage of being cut off from the powerful personal effects
> of the arts.

Such findings are brought into further stark relief by a separate report by the National Economic and Social Forum titled 'The Arts, Cultural Inclusion and Social Cohesion' (NESF 2007). This report considered both the economic and social advantages to participation in the arts in Irish society. While the authors draw a direct connection between arts and culture contributing to social capital they also went on to state that:

> What is of particular significance, for the purposes of this report, is that
> none of the mainstream arts organisations are required by any national

policy or legislative provision to allocate funding to programmes to

promote cultural inclusion.

<div align="right">(ibid: 108)</div>

This situation has not changed at the time of writing of my thesis and is a significant

concern for those within the Irish museum sector who see such institutions as sites of

intercultural debate and inclusion. For the three case-study museums at the centre of this

thesis only the education departments could be said to engage with the agenda of

cultural inclusion and specifically intercultural education in a targeted manner. Out of

the three, the Chester Beatty Library has explicitly made a commitment to actively

facilitate intercultural understanding within its Mission Statement and is recognised

internationally for its work in this area (Bodo, Gibbs, Sani 2009). In line with other EU

countries it would appear that class and particularly educational attainment is a marker

of participation in 'high' culture in Ireland. However, in similar fashion to Bennett's

(2009) findings in the UK, Lunn and Kelly (ibid. 61) also make it clear that their

analysis does not point to a disinterest in cultural participation by lower social classes

but rather possible obstacles or failure to encourage such participation:

> even comparing individuals who profess the *same* (authors emphasis)
>
> interest in the arts and who watch or listen to television, radio, CDs or
>
> DVDs of a particular art form, those in more advantageous circumstances
>
> are still considerably more likely actually to attend an event.

Responses within my research sample offered some possible reasons as to why

attendance at museums in particular might be adversely affected. For instance, Helen, a

<div align="right">74</div>

thirty-four year old refugee from Malawi at the Waterford Women's Centre mentioned that:

> I've not been to much museums. I find it interesting, but at the same time I love watching documentaries on tv about history. I don't know, for me..... I've watched loads of documentaries about ancient Egypt and they show lots of interesting things. There are some museums that you go to and once you leave the museum you forget about them.

The inability of the few museums Helen had visited to sustain her obvious interest in history became a determining factor in her decision whether they were worth visiting again. The engaging methods of historical documentaries on television left the dry, text heavy presentations at museums wanting in her opinion. The actual wording and presentation of information within museum displays also left Helen feeling that perhaps the curators were not 'trying to talk to her' but rather to a more specialised, previously informed audience. However, it would be misleading to assume that only those of lower socio-economic backgrounds or difficult social contexts such as Helen are disaffected by the interpretation practices at the case-study museums. James, an Irish university student studying law at University College Cork visiting the Waterford Museum of Treasures with his Japanese girlfriend Angela, who was also studying law at an Irish university, made suggestions as to how their uninspired visit could be made more rewarding:

> James: We were in the Famine Ship in Dunbrody in New Ross.
>   That was interesting as it was more interactive, they had
>   people explaining the story to you.

Angela: The role play, I loved the role play because it brought you back. It felt like you know, you were one of them, that you were in the past. Here, (Waterford Museum of Treasures) caters for the academic group of people.

James: Like that place yesterday with the Famine Ship, that caters for tourists because you have a guide going around with you and you can interact with things as well.

Mark, a civil engineer, again at Waterford Museum of Treasures, was pleasantly surprised to find some interactive elements which he had not expected and which in his opinion enlivened the experience for him:

I didn't expect it (the museum) to be as audio-visually inclined, you know, with the little hand-held thing, which is good because no-one likes to read reams and reams of displays. So it exceeded my expectations in that way anyway.

The fact that these visitors with higher educational levels and coming from middle and upper middle class backgrounds differentiated themselves as an audience that was not expert, more ordinary or 'tourist' and certainly not 'academic' and who clearly preferred interactive museums, contrasts with Hood (ibid) and Trevelyan's (ibid) description of the self-confident higher social class visitor. Indeed Chan and Goldthorpe (2007: 169) caution that it may be too simplistic to 'claim that social stratification and cultural stratification map closely on to each other'. These theorists argue that 'while it is true that those individuals who do have the highest levels of consumption of the

visual arts are very largely drawn from higher social strata, they still constitute only a small minority even within these strata' (ibid: 187). Chan and Goldthorpe therefore open up the debate and reality of individuals from higher socio-economic categories whose actual experiences (or not) of museums has much in common with their lower socio-economic counterparts. There is significant evidence of this in my research, as throughout my fieldwork, I was struck by the public's desire for more interactivity and information provided in accessible formats at all three case-study museums across all social classes. This was not something I had necessarily expected for the middle and upper class visitors in line with the UK research previously cited. The strong responses of the students at the Waterford Museum of Treasures to interactivity and role play recall the findings of work by Bagnall (1996: 229) in that 'visits to such sites are not necessarily the cognitive experience that has previously been associated with such visiting. The key is an emotional realism, the ability of the sites to engage visitors on an emotional and imaginary level, to engender feelings which are meaningful'. A powerful example of this was given by Susan, a fifty- seven year old Iraqi lawyer now a refugee in Waterford.

> Susan   For myself, when I was in Iraq I visited the Baghdad
>   museum. That was talking about the Iraqi family from one
>   to two hundred years ago, what was their job, how they
>   studied and how they ate, how they talked and what was the
>   community between the family and their neighbours. There
>   was a sound of how they talked and the names for the
>   people. There was one family and it was like a picture, but
>   it was a model. They had one house about one family and

then another. The coffee shop at that time and what they

drank.

Interviewer   So you got a sense of what it was like back in those days?

Susan   Yeah. And you know, you feel yourself in that time.

Participant feedback within my research sample appears to echo Bagnall's assertions about the importance of creating a sense of emotional realism around collections which facilitate an engagement on the part of the visitor which is worth their investing time in. Gregory and Witcomb (2007) have recently explored such issues in relation to historic house museums in the Australian context. When I witnessed such engagement taking place at the case-study museums it had a tendency to cut across class and ethnic boundaries which suggests that effective interactive and interpretative methods can be used successfully to appeal to those from both lower and higher socio-economic backgrounds. Another observation I noticed within my research that appeared to over-ride class boundaries when it came to making decisions about visiting museums was their geographical location in terms of being part of the surrounding city or landscape. Many visitors to all three case-study museums whether they were first-time or repeat visitors had been drawn by such factors. In many cases knowledge about the collections or specifically wanting to see certain objects and displays were a secondary concern. For example, Tom, a Dublin taxi driver visiting the National Museum of Ireland stated:

What really stands out is the beautiful setting here, it's a fantastic building

and again it's steeped in history. You know if you're a visitor here, you

have the Brewery (Guinness) across the road, you've the river, the Phoenix

Park, it's a great setting. It's a reason to come out of the city centre, it's
another add on to Dublin.

Sandra, a nurse in Waterford found herself returning to the museum there due to its
position on the quayside which made the city's past and significance real to her as a
native of that area:

The location of the museum is lovely really. I love that because it gives a
history of Waterford and the things that Waterford has done. Waterford
was traditionally a port, so even going back hundreds of years, it's because
it was a port, it's a city where it became a centre where a lot was done.
Even in going back as far as the Vikings.

Sandra also commented favourably on how the Waterford Museum of Treasures has a
specific exhibition area given over to the display of Waterford crystal and glass as this
made the museum more connected to her, more local. There is evidence here of what
Watson (2007) terms 'communities defined by location'. Drawing on Ashworth and
Graham (2005), Watson puts forward the idea that museums 'often see themselves as
working within and for a geographical place whether it is a region, city, town or rural
district' (ibid: 7). It was certainly the case that of the three case-study museums, the
Waterford Museum of Treasures, as a regional museum, most aligns to this perspective
with regards to participant feedback. For many visitors, knowledge about the collections
at all three case-study museums is limited or non-existent but the wider environment in
which the museums are located is a strong motivational factor in itself to ensure a visit.
For instance Tracey, a retired secondary school teacher visiting the Waterford Museum
of Treasures found that the environment of the museum offered her a sanctuary from the

everyday world, something she found precious and which lay behind much of her reasons for visiting as she explained:

> They're (museums) the soul, the history, especially when so many people are formally out of touch with their religious or spiritual side. There's a void created by that and it has to be filled. The whole getting in touch with yourself, it's just essential. It's essential with the deformed spiritual thing but when there's less formal religion it's even more important to have space to think, relax and reflect.

Tracey's comment reflects the views of many participants within my research sample across the case study museums from both majority and minority backgrounds. The atmosphere and contemplative context of museums was often described in language more fitting of a religious or spiritual situation. I had initially speculated from such feedback whether there might be a link between experiences of museums in a spiritual sense and participants coming from faith backgrounds. This however, was not the case with most participants self-identifying as secular or non-religious. It appeared to me on the basis of much of my visitor feedback that museum staff should not perhaps overly assume that their audiences are visiting them due to advance knowledge of the collections or that specific exhibitions or objects are the reasons behind such visits. Responses within my sample suggest that motivations for visiting Irish museums are various and very personalised in nature. I consider some of these motivations, particularly amongst minority ethnic participants in the next section and also reflect on some of the barriers that can possibly hinder them.

Motivations and barriers to visiting

Sofia, a 38 year old Somali housewife interviewed at the Waterford Women's Centre came to Ireland as a refugee in 2005. She expressed herself how she had low educational attainment levels but is undertaking further education courses at the Centre to improve her job prospects. She describes how she is eager to visit the Waterford Museum of Treasures with her family stating:

> I haven't had a chance to because all my children; they have visited; and
> my husband, he's only been here one year and already he's visited three
> museums with the school. When he was telling me the other day that they
> are going to visit Reginald's Tower I said "can I go with you'' and he said
> "I don't know, we'll ask the teacher''. I could go by myself but I love to go
> as a group.

While Sofia was clearly eager to visit museums, her preference to do so was with her family. Outside of an organised school trip, this would have had for her a significant impact on her limited finances once entry charges and other related trip costs were taken into account. This knock on effect of economic disadvantage can be seen to directly impact on areas of social cohesion when viewed in the light of why Sofia wished to visit her local museum:

> It's good for everyone to know the origin of the country that he lives in.
> For all the new generations now, museums can help them know about the
> old countries. They make people aware of us. I don't think that it will be as
> hard for the younger generation as it was for us.

Sofia's statement reveals a wealth of information around her motivations for wanting to visit the Waterford Museum of Treasures even though she was not familiar with the collections displayed there and never actually visited a museum before in her life. She primarily assumes that she and her family will discover more about the history and background of the Irish community they now live in. However, she goes on from this to emphasise that museums also have a role to play in accommodating newcomers within long established communities. For her, this accommodation ensures that not only do the second generation never forget their origin countries and cultures but that indigenous Irish majority populations understand those minorities within their midst. The theme of minority ethnic groups using Irish museums for the above purposes is a strongly recurring one throughout my research.

For instance, Cora, an Indian mother visiting the National Museum in Dublin had become a repeat visitor with her family to Collins Barracks. She works long hours at a restaurant in the city centre and explained that when she had some time off she likes to come to the museum with her children because she finds it a peaceful environment and it was close to Phoenix Park. On the day I interviewed her she had brought her father to the museum who was visiting from Delhi. She explained that she wanted her father to get an understanding of the country she now calls home by visiting the National Museum, this was also an important motivation for her trips to Collins Barracks with her children:

> ......we just know of the present but we don't know what happened
> in the past. This gives a sense of what it (Ireland) was like, what it
> used to be, what the country used to be and what it is now. The past
> and future.

A strong motivational factor that seems to emerge from the research across minority ethnic class boundaries is the utilisation of the case study museums as resources to discover more about local and national narratives and gain possible insights into majority Irish customs and ways of life. For instance, Adrian, a male Filipino nurse visiting the National Museum of Ireland sums this motivation up well:

> What I really wanted to know was what were the things that established Ireland, their ways of communication, the do's and don'ts, things that would offend people.

Adrian recently arrived in Dublin to join his wife who had already worked for over a year in one of the city's largest hospitals. On the day I interviewed them both at the National Museum, Adrian was preparing to sit his English language oral test which would determine whether he was to be successful in gaining full-time employment and work residency in Ireland. He explained that sections of the test questioned candidates about their knowledge of the host society that they were coming to live in. A specific question within the exam requires candidates to explain how a visit to a museum might inform you about the culture of the country you want to live in. In this case, there is clear evidence of the role that museums play in facilitating processes of integration. In a similar way Joseph, an Indian engineer whom I interviewed at the Chester Beatty Library, who had also recently arrived in Ireland to take up employment was initially disappointed to come across the predominantly Eastern collections of the Chester Beatty as he explained:

> Actually, there's nothing much here about Irishness, if it had been, it would have really interested me. Irish history etc. I came to see some Irish history and didn't see it.

Helen, a refugee from Malawi found the Waterford Museum of Treasures useful as an orientation resource for the new city she now found herself in:

> But I think there should be something that tells the story about the ......maybe, about the place or the country, like you should be able to tell a story about the place. Like say you are there for the first time, you should be able to have the ideas of what the place is all about. So it's making me understand a perspective of where the old town is coming from, up to now like, you know.

Museums, while certainly being places that hold beautiful objects, have as outlined in the comments above, more immediate pressing social purposes for many minority ethnic participants within my sample. Museums were first and foremost resources for orientation, discovery and understanding of the new contexts many migrants found themselves in. As stated previously, it is predominantly first generation migrants that constitute the minority ethnic profile of my sample. It is possible that different themes and outlooks would have been provided by second and third generation citizens. However, it would appear significant in itself that the minority ethnic feedback element of my sample was dominated by more recent arrivals to the country and this perhaps says something about the importance and use of museums to such groups. The economic circumstances of Ireland's minority ethnic populations however have to be taken into account on how they might consume cultural resources. Research carried out with both the Chinese and Polish communities in Ireland (Wang and King O'Riain

2006; Kropiwiec and King O'Riain 2006) highlighted the necessary work focused ethic of immigrants lives. Although largely well educated, the latter research revealed how due to language barriers, the Chinese and Polish respondents worked predominantly in service sector work and had salaries below that of the average Irish worker. For many minority ethnic individuals then, their use of leisure time is interwoven with economic circumstance. Free museums are a viable source of leisure activities and places of informal learning for both adults and children. Education staff at all case-study museums made reference to minority ethnic families making use of after-school or weekend activity clubs for children and I observed such workshops over the course of my fieldwork. What appears to be common within my sample about minority ethnic family participation at the case-study museums more so than amongst the Irish majority (where fathers were largely in attendance) was the dominance of female members of the family unit, usually mothers. The influential role of mothers in introducing children to cultural forms has already been documented by Van Wel et al. (2006: 75-79):

> Mothers appeared to serve as a clear example or stimulus for their children's active and receptive cultural participation. It appears that the influence of the family on an adolescent's cultural participation is of greater importance than his or her educational level

Within my sample there is evidence that class status can be overcome as a barrier to museum visiting if other needs dictate so. This appears to be the situation particularly with minority ethnic visitors. Cultural capital, in this instance museum visiting, for minority ethnic participants has more to do with issues of integration and gaining social capital rather than trying to obtain class status per se as defined by Bourdieu. In the current context of early twenty first century Ireland there may be short-comings in

socialist or Marxist frames of reference around the reasons for consumption of cultural capital, particularly with regards to minority ethnic patterns of museum visiting. Statements such as the following from Bennett (2009: 236) would not seem as clear cut in the Irish context:

> On the other hand, lie those whose mobility is a marker of their exclusion
> and marginalisation: the asylum seeker or 'economic migrant', typically
> working within the unskilled or semi-skilled sectors of advanced Western
> economies and frequently without civic or political rights. Members of
> such groups suffer from a double jeopardy: excluded from the
> cosmopolitan forms of cultural capital that bind trans-national elites
> together around key marker institutions like art galleries, they are also
> unable to claim and mobilise those specifically national forms of cultural
> capital that confer on 'host' populations the advantages of specific forms of
> national belonging that are not readily available to minorities.

It would seem within my sample that minority ethnic cultural capital cannot always be reduced to class cultural capital by any straightforward 'currency exchange', as Hall (2002) suggested. Neither is it a straight forward situation that minority ethnic participants at my case-study museums are visiting such sites as they primarily are 'interested in seeing things which reflected their own cultures, histories, religions and backgrounds' (Desai and Thomas 1998). As I argue throughout this thesis, most of the minority visitors[25] within my research are on the whole utilising the case-study museums to discover more about the historical and cultural identity of Ireland and are involved in processes of deciphering how notions of Irish identity is represented at the nations museums. While Desai and Thomas's (ibid) research was largely carried out

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[25] The fact that many of these visitors are non-traditional museum goers is significant in this context.

with second and third generation minority ethnic British citizens, my sample is representative of individuals who are amongst the first large-scale in-ward migration to Ireland over the last ten years[26]. Caution therefore has to be exercised when considering the uses of museums in the British and Irish contexts by minority ethnic communities by virtue of the very different histories of migration to both countries.

So far within this chapter I have been outlining various visitor motivations and barriers to museum visiting as uncovered within my research sample. The important issue of admission fee is now something I turn my attention to. While real or perceived lack of interactivity and engagement are barriers that affect visiting at all three case-study museums across all Irish social classes, the issue of entrance fees does have a particular impact on the lower strata of society in terms of motivation to visit. Such financial barriers have only intensified since the financial crash of 2008. Free admission to museums is a bonus for families when trying to balance the fact that other cultural institutions charge, as Nuala, a home-worker visiting the National Museum of Ireland with her family explained:

> And there's a huge, huge plus in that it's free. The Wax Museum is 30
> Euro and the Guinness Store is 34 Euro, and Kilmainham Gaol is up on
> that as well. And we're a party of five, so it's a great plus that it's free.

There is also evidence that free access contributes to a pattern of repeat visiting by families across economic and ethnic backgrounds. Tom, a Dublin taxi driver explained the merits of the free National Museum:

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[26] National Census Ireland 2011 has confirmed this in-ward migration has continued throughout the recession.

Another thing that's important, it might sound trivial, but it's that it's free. That people can come in, because it means that people can wander around and like if you pay 5 Euro you might feel that you have to spend 2-3 hours but you can dip in and out of it, it's great, particularly for small children who wouldn't necessarily have the capacity to stay for long.

Apart from the basic economic implications of entry charges, my research also points to other, more psychological barriers that fees can infer – particularly to those from lower socio-economic groups. For some participants within my sample entry charges are seen as an outward symbol of class distinction, the ability to pay these charges or not as the case may be, signalled a person's economic and social background. For instance, two participants at the Waterford Women's Centre, Alice and Sarah, were conflicted over the community work carried out by the Waterford Museum of Treasures and the fact that it charges for entry:

Alice   Museums are elitist.

Sarah   Yeah, because there's an entrance fee ....but because they're open to community stuff, it just makes it like a resource for surrounding communities, because they are open and they welcome anybody.

For these women the fact that the Waterford Museum of Treasures charges for entrance signalled to them that it put itself as an institution beyond their financial means and ultimately catered for a wealthier 'class' of person. The museum was elitist in their view as it had not considered that not everyone could pay the admission price. As the researcher I was intrigued by this interaction as the discussion around what might make

a museum elitist appears to differ in some respects from my experiences working in the UK as a museum professional. In the UK context, access to cultural capital and early acculturation to museum visiting (often by virtue of class background) is often cited as determining factors in individual perceptions of museums and whether such places are seen as elitist or not. For some of the participants within my sample it is not necessarily their personal lack of cultural capital that might make museums elitist but rather the decision by museums to charge in the first place – hence inhibiting their opportunities to visit such places. A similar sentiment was expressed in Dublin at the free entry Chester Beatty Library in a discussion between Thomas, a fifty two year old part-time gardener and Sean, fifty seven who is registered unemployed:

Thomas I would suggest that culture isn't a snobby thing in Ireland,
     and that just because they (the public) were less educated,
     they wouldn't feel.....

Sean   inhibited! All the museums are free, you can come and go.

While the main national institutions in Dublin are free, the vast majority of Irish museums and galleries charge for admission (Irish Museums Association 2005). Therefore, while lower socio-economic groups may not necessarily feel inhibited about entering museums, entry charges can act as both a financial and psychological determinant as to whether they choose to visit or not. Free access to some museums and cultural venues was suggested by some Irish majority participants within my sample as a motivational factor behind what they considered to be large amounts of 'non-Irish' making use of museums, galleries and other cultural resources in Dublin. Some of these participants were very keen to know from me the interviewer whether I had spoken to

any of these immigrants during the course of my research and what opinions had these migrants formed of the places they were visiting, why they were visiting and what their educational status was. Some of the interviewees had their own ideas as to why recent immigrants might be visiting Irish museums as was revealed in an exchange between Thomas and Sean again at the Chester Beatty Library:

Sean   It's cheap. It's free. It's somewhere to go, it's somewhere to bring your family. It would be family people mostly. It's somewhere to bring your kids of a Sunday or Saturday, it's for nothing. The Paddies would be bringing their kids into supermarkets and places like that, what do you call it, IKEA, but the Eastern Europeans bring their kids into places like this.

Thomas   But even if you go to Glendalough in the summer, the Eastern Europeans are there with their picnics but the Irish, I don't know where they are?

Visitors to Irish museums would seem to be just as curious about others that visit as they are about the collections on display. There is an obvious 'space' here for museums to allow this curiosity and interaction to be explored by opening up public feedback forums in some capacity. Entrance fees then, when combined with family circumstances and commitments would appear from this research to have identifiably negative implications for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds from both majority and minority backgrounds. The implications are even more pronounced for these groups who live outside Dublin with its predominantly free entry museums as is evident in the feedback in Waterford. Community based projects arranged by a local museum or in

partnership with a community group itself, may sometimes be the only experience of museums that people from these socio-economic classes have. The example of the partnership work between the Waterford Women's Centre and the Waterford Museum of Treasures is such an example as explained by Lynne, one of the women at the Centre:

> We also did our community arts exhibition down there (at the Waterford Museum of Treasures). This group (the Women's Centre) came up with a community arts exhibition in relation to Sixteen Days of Action Against Violence to Women. We put up an installation, which is actually still here. We made these plaster of paris hands and we had our own stand for it and we came up with some words. Like the theme was 'You Are Not Alone' so we had our exhibition down there . There was a choir there. There was a lot of community people there. And it was good that they used the museum in that way because I don't feel that museums are promoted enough. Like, if that exhibition wasn't on and the drama wasn't on down there, you know, would I even have had the notion of coming to see the museum!

A significant element about this collaboration with the local museum was the fact that women of different ages, ethnic origin and social background came together to tackle a common issue – violence to women. The exhibition was such a success that it went on to be displayed within the city's libraries – a development that the participating women were extremely proud of. Their experience of the Waterford Museum of Treasures appeared to give the impression that the women did not purely see the site as a place that was only for the upper echelons of society. The museum had directly taken part in active social agency around women's rights and at the same time fostered intercultural relations between the participants involved. While it would be imagined that such work should be seen as a case-study of good practice there is apprehension among many of

those who work in the wider Irish arts sector of utilising culture as an agent of social change. This was recently made clear in research commissioned by the Irish Arts Council report 'Cultural Diversity and the Arts' (Jewesbury et al.2009: 6):

> There is a wariness of collaboration with groups or organisations that
> might want to use the arts as a tool for social change without regard for: the
> quality of the artists or arts practices involved; the propensity for
> intercultural arts work to be complex and challenging; and the limited
> resources available to the arts sector.

While such concerns have to be taken on board, it would be unfortunate if the ability of the Irish arts and cultural sector, including its museums, to inaugurate debates on social change and transformation was blunted by such same concerns. As I outline in the next section, my research has revealed interesting ways in which Irish museums are being utilised as resources by minority ethnic groups of varying socio-economic profiles to assist their integration into Irish life. Their quest in sourcing as much information as possible on varying aspects of Irish life so as to facilitate easier integration into surrounding communities has provided the stimulus or motivation for visiting in the first place.

Ethnicity, social class and cultural participation in Ireland

Over the past decade the role of ethnicity and its relationship with class structure has increasingly been considered as to its influence (or not) on whether individuals participate in the arts and cultural activities (Bennett 2009; Van Wel et al. 2006; Trienekens 2002). Much of this literature cites how Bourdieu's (1984) seminal account of class and culture did not consider ethnicity as a variable of social division due to the

fact that 'the traditions of French republicanism militated against according ethnicity much theoretical or political significance; few social science surveys at that time included questions focused on ethnic identifications (Bennett 2009: 234). Theorists such as Bennett (ibid: 237) have suggested that ethnic background has little if anything to do with cultural consumption and he concludes that it is certainly less of a factor than educational attainment and therefore social class:

> against our expectations, ethnicity is not as strongly correlated with our cultural map as are class, education, age and gender divisions. This apparent lack of association exists even though we made a serious attempt to explore the cultural practices of the three largest ethnic minorities in Britain in some detail by conducting a boost sample amongst the Indian, Pakistani and Afro-Caribbean communities.

Likewise in the Netherlands, Van Wel et al. (2006) in conducting research into minority ethnic youth participation in the cultural sector in that country, found no direct connection between ethnicity and participation. Research by Trienekens (2002), also in the Netherlands, went further to establish that the consumption of 'highbrow' culture (including museums) by Dutch minority ethnic groups was dictated more by class characteristics as opposed to their ethnicity but conceded that there can be 'additional driving forces behind cultural consumption besides class-related issues' (ibid: 284). Research by Desai and Thomas (1998: 53) came to similar conclusions when they specifically analysed British minority ethnic uses of museums and galleries, finding that 'there are, then, often many issues which are common to people from ethnic minority communities and to white people. Much of their museum visiting has little to do with

their ethnic and cultural identity and more to do with their children's interest in science fiction or dinosaurs, for example'. Significantly however, they go on to state that the issue of ethnic identification and cultural consumption (in the museum context) cannot be said to be completely irrelevant as many minority respondents within their sample expressed 'a very real interest in seeing aspects of their own cultural heritage presented in accurate and interesting ways'. Other minority ethnic respondents were more direct in confirming that it was the opportunity to engage with their own cultural backgrounds that dictated whether they would visit a museum or not. The Desai and Thomas research is particularly interesting for the manner in which it highlights the extent to which minority ethnic groups can feel excluded from museums when they perceive that their ethnic and cultural backgrounds are either misrepresented or not at all at such institutions. There is no existing comprehensive data to draw upon for minority ethnic cultural consumption in Ireland. Lunn and Kelly (2008: 42) are clear on this point in their report 'In the Frame or Out of the Picture: A Statistical Analysis of Public Involvement in the Arts':

> The results for attendance by ethnic minorities must be read with a statistical health warning. The survey asked respondents to categorise themselves into one of four ethnic categories: white, black, Asian or other. The number of non-whites picked up among the sample of 1210 was just 21. Thus, any inferences drawn are based on a very small sample of individuals.

More extensive research with minority ethnic communities and artists was carried out for the Irish Arts Council's report 'Cultural Diversity and the Arts (Jewesbury, Singh

and Tuck 2009) which covered the arts scene in Ireland in a general sense.[27] The Irish Arts Council does not have a specific remit over the country's museums but its' policies are tacitly acknowledged by the sector. The findings of my research offer some insights into the socio-economic profile of minority ethnic visiting to Irish museums and some of the motivations and barriers to such visiting. There is some evidence within my research for minority ethnic visiting of museums that have 'additional driving forces behind cultural consumption besides class-related issues' (Trienekens: 284). The driving force in question is recent immigration. Irrespective of whether minority ethnic respondents are from higher or lower socio-economic backgrounds, there is a common perception that the cultural capital acquired by visiting local museums could be utilised in settling into their new lives and communities. Because of this, a large proportion of minority ethnic respondents within my sample perceive of museums as fulfilling numerous roles to society as was summarised by James, a Singaporean urban planner at the Chester Beatty Library:

> I think they play several roles, I mean at the educational level it's opening
> the eyes of the visitors to other cultures other than themselves or giving
> information. Then you've got the nation who looks back at things which is
> perhaps more important at the National History Museum and then there's
> the Museum of Country Life in Castlebar, that's about transmitting and
> recording national identity or national culture. And then the third is
> economic, because for tourists by having museums of certain standards you
> get visitors who come. It makes the city more attractive you know for
> tourists to come and spend money and help the economy. There are all
> different levels of why they are important.

[27] In 2010 the recommendations from this research informed the very first Irish Arts Council policy document on cultural diversity and the arts.

The question that arises from this however is what perceptions do minority ethnic participants have of the Irish communities they hope to make new lives in and do they feel that they and their diverse identities are made to feel welcome by the majority population? It is these questions that I move on to discuss in the next chapter and in particular the degree to which the case study museums are utilised as places of construction and projection of diverse Irish identities.

This chapter has considered how socio-economic conditions affect public attitudes to and uses of Irish museums. In particular, it has attempted to analyse the roles that these factors play within my own research findings and the degree to which they impact on the central research question of whether Irish museums can be sites of debate on what a more inclusive and intercultural Ireland might mean. The chapter has made reference to international and Irish research that has already considered socio-economic factors that affect cultural consumption in order to place Ireland within a larger frame of reference. In situating my own findings within this broader body of work, it might be seen that socio-economic factors do have an impact on public uses of Irish museums and yet while there are obvious parallels with international research there are also additional variables to consider in the Irish context. The social and economic profile of my sample would suggest that it is predominantly those from higher social strata that do indeed visit and make use of Irish museums. This situation can be said to be the case about both majority and minority ethnic visitor types. However, my research would warn against assuming that those from lower social and educational backgrounds are not interested in much of the work that museums are involved in or simply do not visit out of disinterest. There are other motivational factors at play that need to be considered. There is also substantial evidence from some of the participants within my sample that

economic factors pose a barrier to museum participation. This barrier cuts across ethnic divides and affects both majority and minority Irish citizens. The economic disadvantage is particularly pernicious with regards to those from minority ethnic backgrounds, as there is evidence within my findings that these residents see museums as social resources that could assist their better understanding of an area, the history of the local communities and ultimately their integration into the wider society. Ireland now has a large first generation minority ethnic citizenry making its way through its schools and universities which will with time move from a position of questioning current constructions of Irish identity to looking for itself within a renewed version of that identity. It could also be argued that the relationship between economics and culture in Ireland is not just restricted to having access, or not, at an individual level to museums. Culture is intrinsically incorporated into a national industry with billions of euro invested in the creation of an image of Ireland that is projected at home and abroad. For example, the implications of the relationship between the Irish tourist industry and the country's museums are outside the scope of this research but it may well have future significance on the image of Ireland as a truly heterogeneous, multicultural nation.

Having explored motivational factors around visiting within my sample and how this intersects with economic and class background, the next chapter assesses the degree to which these visitors experience multicultural Ireland at the case-study museums.

4 - Finding multiculturalism within Irish museums?

In 2010 Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel claimed that her country's attempts at being a multicultural nation had 'utterly failed' (Irish Times 2010). A few months following this in February 2011, the British Prime Minister David Cameron also criticised thirty years of 'state multiculturalism' for dividing rather than unifying UK communities (Wright and Taylor 2011). The concept, even the word multiculturalism, which had on the whole been considered important in developing positive relations between ethnically diverse groups since its first application in Canada in the 1970s, is suddenly something that some politicians and social theorists want to distance themselves from. Even countries which do not have as much experience of engaging with large-scale immigrant communities like those of Germany or the UK have become reluctant to use the word multicultural. Ireland for instance, which currently has no formally designated multicultural policy has opted to use the term 'intercultural'[28] in its dealings with the accommodation of other minority groupings in the country. The word intercultural, is at the present time, the preferred term used by Irish state departments and agencies and this is also the case for the arts and cultural sectors, including museums (Arts Council 2010). This chapter aims to explore how the realities of Irish multiculturalism and the embroynic state adoption of interculturalism as policy intersect with my central research question around whether Irish museums might be regarded as resources that have the potential to assist cultural understandings between Ireland's diverse ethnic communities. I also assess some of the reasons behind the re-positioning of wording of these concepts and whether the altering of semantics can be seen to affect

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[28] A study for the European Commission by the European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research (2008:12) defined interculturalism as: 'Intercultural dialogue is a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange or interaction between individuals, groups and organisations with different cultural backgrounds or world views'. Its difference from multiculturalism was viewed to be its aim to 'go beyond a mere 'tolerance of the other' and can involve creative abilities that convert challenges and insights into innovation processes and into new forms of expression' (ibid:12).

public opinions on social cohesion and questions of integration. Throughout this chapter and my thesis in general I use the word multicultural rather than intercultural in acknowledgement of the statistical reality of Irish diversity as a demographic and sociological reality and in part due to its dominance of use as a term within the literature. I make clear for the reader when I use the terms multicultural or intercultural to denote policy objectives rather than merely the fact of plural diversity. While I aim to provide an overview of the terms multiculturalism and interculturalism, I specifically want to assess Irish perceptions of these theories and their use or non-use in Ireland's public domain, particularly museums. My research reveals rich material around how individuals from diverse backgrounds, through their discussions on objects and collections actually relate to these wider theoretical concepts as citizens of the Irish state while visiting museum sites. I therefore examine how participants within my research made reference to notions of multicultural Ireland during interviews and in their opinions around the public roles of museums to Irish society. This chapter sets out to explore the degree to which these opinions might be insightful to museums in encouraging and fostering greater public understanding between diverse ethnic communities in Ireland. I go on from this to assess what is meant in the Irish context by intercultural rather than multicultural policy and examine debates within Irish academia to highlight the degree of questioning that exists in this contested arena and its relevance to Irish museums.

Multiculturalism or interculturalism? The Irish context

Duncan Ivision (2010:2) provides a useful working definition of multiculturalism which he himself admits is open to debate:

multiculturalism refers to a broad array of theories, attitudes, beliefs, norms, practices and policies that seek to provide public recognition of and support for accommodation of non-dominant ethnocultural groups. The nature of these non-dominant groups will vary: some may be immigrant minorities (including refugees), others will be 'historically settled' minorities such as national minorities or indigenous peoples.

It is the phrases 'public recognition of' and 'support for accommodation' that politicans such as Merkel and Cameron have recently focused attention on in their questioning of multiculturalism. In their views, state initiatives in these areas have not effectively created more cohesive, integrated British and German societies. Rather, they believe that multiculturalism as a policy in itself has led to the 'ghettoisation' of communities and ethnic groups living distinct lives from one another and that a return to 'core values'[29] is required. Both Kymlicka (2011) and Modood (2011) have been quick to defend the principles of multiculturalist policies in respect of their possible applications to national liberal-democratic values and a recognition that success is as much dependent on majority participation as it is minority. There seems to be an awareness within Ireland that while Irish society is without doubt multicultural, actual policies that could be termed multiculturalist or interculturalist to support such societal change are still in early stages of formation within the state (Lentin and McVeigh 2006; Fanning 2007, 2002; Mac Einri 2007). Mac Einri (2007:232) for instance points out that 'Ireland has yet to engage proactively with a more fundamental question about what is meant by a politics of integration in the most comprehensive sense of the term'. In attempting to answer these 'fundamental questions' Irish universities have been leading the way with

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[29] Neither Angela Merkel or David Cameron have been specific about what 'core values' actually entail.

various initiatives researching migration to Ireland and resulting publications suggesting insights into migration and integration management[30]. Much of Irish academic discourse around multiculturalism/interculturalism would seem to be strongly influenced by David Theo Goldberg's (1994) theories of the need for what he has defined as a 'critical multiculturalism'. This influence is evident within Fanning's (2002:194) criteria of what would make Irish multiculturalism a success where he states that 'multiculturalisms stand to be evaluated by the extent to which they acknowledge and contest racism in society'. For Fanning, such an approach would give Ireland a 'strong' multiculturalism rather than its current 'weak' version which he claims 'is characterised by a narrow focus on liberal democratic rights with little emphasis upon racism as a factor in inequality and discrimination' (ibid 2002). Going further than this in sentiment is the work of Lentin and McVeigh (2006:178) who forcefully conclude:

> as an ideology of change, multiculturalism needs to be repudiated, not celebrated, nor quietly ignored. Because of their refusal to name and address state racism, these ideologies actually become racist themselves – they function to disguise and protect the operation of state racism. From this perspective, 'multiracialism' is a racism; 'interculturalism' is a racism; 'good relations' is a racism. From this perspective, the multiculturalist/interculturalist paradigm should be repudiated as a method of progressive change in Ireland – it has nothing to offer in the project of dismantling racism and smacks of the biopolitical state, 'caring' as it is controlling.

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[30] Notable projects are The Migration and Citizenship Research Initiative at University College Dublin http://www.ucd.ie/mcri/index.html and the Trinity Immigration Initiative at Trinity College Dublin http://www.tcd.ie/immigration/ (accessed 19 May 2011).

For large sections of current Irish academic discourse, it would appear that the root of the issue in the multicultural/intercultural debate is the degree to which representations of culture and cultural difference supersede acknowledgments and contestation of inherent power structures in Irish society. Forms of symbolic cultural representation such as might be seen at multicultural festivals, possibly even within museums, could, according to these theorists merely reinforce cultural and ethnic stereotypes, even fuel racism. Similar concerns have been voiced by Steve Fenton (2011:15):

> It is assumed that what minorities lack is recognition and affirmed identities; a cultural solution to a material problem. Inclusion or 'integration' is not only or even mainly a symbolic question. It is also a material question of good schooling, safe neighbourhoods, secure employment and social welfare. A political approach that focuses on the symbolic can only ask people to 'think about things' differently and to have new and more generous thoughts. This we should do – but we cannot detach this question of symbolic integration from the wider problems of social integration applicable to the whole population.

However, what is less clear and what my research explores is what do members of Irish minority communities actually think in relation to if and how they should be recognised or presented at local and national level, either symbolically or not. Can museums as public contact zones participate in and contribute to such debates? More importantly do minority communities want or indeed expect them to? In Ireland, multiculturalism as political theory is under critique but not only from the academic and political elite of society but from one of the non-dominant ethnocultural groups within Ivision's definition – the 'historically settled' Traveller community. For the purposes of my

research it has been important for me to bear in mind the relationship between the Irish state and the country's Travelling communities[31]. I have had to keep this relationship in mind as Travelling communities have had a longer exposure to Irish government attitudes to issues of integration of minority groups. Such experience of exposure could prove useful when considering future possibilities for those minority ethnic participants within my research sample, all of whom are recent migrants to the country. Irish Travellers were among the first to question how multicultural policy was being formulated in Irish society and can be largely credited with beginning debates around the application of the more recent concept of 'interculturalism' within the sphere of Irish politics (Fanning 2002). Throughout the 1990s, Traveller groups in Ireland criticised what they viewed as weak Irish multicultural initiatives, and the negative effects that such proposals had on the education of their children within the state school system (O'Connell 1994). Reports such as O'Connell's highlighted how multicultural policies appeared to actually exclude Traveller children as attention was focused on their difference and the 'exotic' nature of their cultural background rather than interrogating the nature of dominant 'settled' Irish culture itself. This is a significant point of reference for my research as I discovered that many minority ethnic participants at all case-study museums are actively interrogating notions of majority Irish identity via museums and their collections. O'Connell's report makes clear that intercultural policy is seen by Travellers as being more equitable as it addresses everyone and not just the situation of the minority group, as is common in some multicultural provision (O'Connell 1994: 31):

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[31] I managed to secure Irish Traveller feedback on their perception of how the nation's museums interacted with them during intercultural conferences attended in Dublin over the course of my research.

'We use the term intercultural education because this is what has become

acceptable within the EU context and because it has the potential of

overcoming the shortcomings associated with multicultural education by:

a) Focusing on ethnic and cultural activities while acknowledging power and

racism as major obstacles in the educational system;

b) Targeting everybody in the education system regardless of whether or not

they are in a multi-ethnic scenario.

The notion of interculturalism is therefore seen, certainly by Irish Travellers, as being

something more robust than multiculturalism in not only maintaining their rights but

creating a dialogue (an interaction) with the majority culture and others around them.

While interculturalism respects the notion of difference and the integration of cultural

and ethnic difference into wider communities, it is also seen to go further in recognising

and challenging power structures within society and combat racism itself. It is the

particular points around contestation of power structures and racism that are noted by

Irish academics in their discussions around multiculturalism and interculturalism.

Fanning (2002:191) for instance is critical of the Irish state's application of the concept

of interculturalism to date where he states 'intercultural policies are not backed by

legislation. There is a disjuncture between the ideal of interculturalism, where racisms

are acknowledged and contested, and the actuality of state responses to black and ethnic

minorities which have been depicted as interculturalist'. For Fanning, it would appear

that the Irish state has appropriated the mantra of interculturalism, therefore distancing

itself from so-called 'failed' multiculturalism, but yet has not followed through on the

objectives at the heart of the intercultural agenda i.e. a commitment to tackling power

inequalities and racism. It was the case that at some of the conferences[32] I attended in

Ireland while conducting this research that representatives of the Irish government,

including Ministers for Integration were eager to point out the Irish state's advancement

of interculturalist over multiculturalist policy when dealing with minority ethnic

integration. Often within these presentations, speakers set out the supposed failures of

the multicultural agenda in relation to countries such as the UK and Germany and spoke

of how Ireland had the opportunity to learn from these 'mistakes' by reviewing and re-

contextualising prevalent multicultural theories. British multiculturalism and its

supposed failures is a significant debating point within Irish sociological circles where it

is assumed by some theorists that UK policy has not sufficiently succeeded in managing

to get that country's various communities to interact and integrate in more meaningful

ways. The race riots of 2001 in Oldham, Manchester were usually cited by speakers at

these conferences as evidence of such policy failures. It would appear that Irish

intercultural policy, as it is presently being formulated is a concept that seems to be

defining itself against perceived notions of what British multiculturalism might be. In a

similar fashion to how I explore Irish postcolonial attempts to separate Irish identity

from 'Englishness' in Chapter 5, there may well be echoes of this same process 'of what

we are not' at play in Irish definitions of its future multicultural strategy as being

distinct from its near neighbour. The current economic difficulties in Ireland however

mean that integration initiatives and evolving intercultural policy are not moving

forward as dynamically as they did prior to 2008. Economic agendas have eclipsed

debates on integration. Such a slow-down is reflected in the government deciding not to

progress with establishing its 'new structures and co-ordinating mechanisms' as initially

set out in its integration strategy document 'Migration Nation' (Office for the

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[32] 'Migration Studies in Ireland: An Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Conference', Trinity College Dublin, http://www.tcd.ie/immigration/archives/conferences.php (accessed 19 June 2011).

Promotion of Migrant Integration 2008). While such current inaction at government levels on proceeding with government policy around better integration measures for minority groups is regrettable, what is not in doubt is that Irish concepts of interculturalism as already developed has given a particular emphasis on the use of civic spaces as platforms for dialogue between Ireland's citizens from all ethnic backgrounds. In light of this the possibilities for Irish museums to contribute to this 'civic debate' and assess the degree to which their audiences are already involved in 'intercultural' dialogue at ground level would seem opportune and valuable to society at large. Bhikhu Parekh's theorising around public spaces as sites of civic engagement and multicultural understanding would seem to have particular relevance to my research findings. It should be pointed out that the perspectives of Irish sociologists in the area of integration policy and theorising are not disconnected from relevance to the country's arts and museum sector. For instance, both Ronit Lentin of Trinity College Dublin and Piaras Mac Einri of University College Cork, both leading names within migration and integration debates in Ireland, acted as Research Advisers to the Arts Council of Ireland's first ever policy and strategy report around minority ethnic participation in arts and culture titled 'Cultural Diversity and the Arts' (Arts Council 2010). While the Irish Arts Council does not have a mandate over the country's museums as is the case with Arts Council England in the UK, it is an influential body nonetheless within the Irish museum sector. In 2010 for instance, the Irish Arts Council embarked on closer co-operative working with the Council of National Cultural Institutions (CNCI) specifically in the area of interculturalism. The CNCI membership consists of all the country's national cultural institutions, including its museums and galleries. The Arts Council strategy document on 'Cultural Diversity and the Arts' states as one of its core underpinning principles:

3.2. An intercultural approach

The Arts Council recognises the value of adopting an intercultural approach towards arts provision in Ireland, promoting inclusion and interaction between individuals and groups from different cultures and recognising the need for two-way negotiation and change. This is in keeping with the approach taken by the Office of the Minister for Integration.

This paragraph in my opinion highlights some of the complexities, perhaps even confusions at the heart of official Irish debates around strategies to encourage cultural interactions and integration. For instance, the Arts Council's decision to embrace an 'intercultural approach' within its new strategy would appear to be at odds with some of the written output of individuals who were acting as advisors to the new arts policy. A case in point is Ronit Lentin's (Lentin and McVeigh 2007: 178) previous view that 'once we repudiate 'multiculturalism' we are actually able to mobilise 'culture' to challenge racism. It is about political struggle, not about ethnic identity or cultural diversity'. The Arts Council's eventual employment of the term 'intercultural' would therefore appear to diverge in thinking from that of some of the cultural and social theorists on its advisory boards who, in their writings at least, strongly challenge concepts of multiculturalism/interculturalism. It is also significant that the Arts Council which receives all its funding from government is therefore unlikely to diverge from the integration policies advocated by the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration, which is part of the much larger Department of Justice and Equality. There was an acknowledgment from the Arts Council itself when they officially launched the strategy

in Dublin in November 2010[33] that there is widespread confusion around concepts and terms associated with cultural diversity in the Irish context. In response to this confusion, the Arts Council ensured that the main strategy paper is also accompanied by a document titled 'Cultural Diversity and the Arts: Language and Meanings' (Arts Council 2010). This document which was distributed to cultural providers and practitioners on a national basis acts as almost like a glossary of key concepts within the field of cultural diversity. The document's definitions of multiculturalism and interculturalism are worth quoting at some length as the use of text gives an interesting insight into how the Irish Arts Council (ibid: 9-10) would like the cultural sector in Ireland to understand these terms.

Multiculturalism is described as:

> There is a degree of confusion in Ireland, surrounding the terms 'multiculturalism' and 'interculturalism'. To some extent this reflects an ongoing political and semantic contest over the terms and their supposed implications. This, combined with Ireland's historical lack of official policies relating to multiculturalism, means the terms are sometimes used interchangeably in Ireland. Multiculturalism is a term grounded in British cultural theory and race relations discourse, and is strongly associated with conflicts within British society. At the simplest level, it refers to the parallel existence of distinct cultural or ethnic groups within the same nation, without any exchange or dialogue necessarily taking place, or being encouraged or facilitated between them. In the British context it has been

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[33] The launch was part of the one day seminar 'Whose Culture Is It? convened by the Irish Council of National Cultural Institutions at the Chester Beatty Library on November 19, 2010 http://www.cnci.ie/news-events/whose_culture/index.html (accessed 19 May 2011).

criticised as being primarily concerned with the commodification of minority cultures (and their artefacts) through discourses of 'celebration'.

In contrast, interculturalism is described as (ibid:10-11):

> Implicit in the notion of interculturalism is a process that enables or encourages interaction between cultures: Interculturalism is the development of strategy, policy and practice that promotes interaction, understanding, respect and integration between different cultures and ethnic groups on the basis that cultural diversity is a strength that can enrich society, without glossing over issues such as racism. There is a limit to the extent to which these processes can be prescribed in legislation or ensured through the formation of a cultural diversity arts policy. Rather than seeking to 'direct' intercultural dialogue at a state level, policy is required to make (and protect) the space in civil society in which such dialogue can take place.

What seems to come across from the Arts Council's definition of multiculturalism is a suspicion of highlighting and promoting the differences inherent in minority ethnic cultures and identities. This suspicion could arguably be seen in the use of words such as 'commodification' and 'celebration'. However, it might also be seen that there is a thinly veiled warning within the definition as exemplified by the fact that multiculturalism '......is strongly associated with conflicts within British society'. There is a suggestion that the Irish Arts Council sees identity recognition and the celebration of such within current formulations of multicultural theory as something that can

destabilise any successful interaction and integration of diverse communities in Ireland. It must however be recognised that the Arts Council definitions are themselves particular subjective points of view and as I have mentioned had the input of academics within the Irish social sciences who equally hold particular views on the topic. The question remains as to what extent Irish society at large and particularly citizens of the nation's minority ethnic communities would agree or disagree with such definitions. In the following sections I offer some insights into how concepts of multicultural Ireland emerged in discussions with my research participants.

Recognising difference at Irish museums

A noticeable feature at all three case study museums is that debates around the plurality of Irish society both past and present is already underway amongst visiting audiences irrespective of whether the museums are actively engaging with such issues or not. There is evidence within my data to suggest that many visitors would like museums to take more proactive steps in highlighting the nation's diversity. However, the manner in how participants themselves discussed diversity was not as straight forward as I had initially assumed it would be at the outset of my research. I had imagined that Irish audiences might perhaps have opinions on new immigrant communities within their locale and that they would offer suggestions as to what they might like to see or perhaps learn about in relation to cultures distinct from their own. I had even imagined that Irish audiences might have suggestions as to how minority communities might be involved or represented at the case study museums, if at all. I had not taken into the account the reality of the situation of Ireland's developing multiculturalism. A part of this reality is that outside of work and school environments majority and minority citizens rarely interact or socialise with each other as already suggested by Wang and King O'Riain

(2006). Thus, while Irish society is rapidly transforming into a multicultural state, most majority Irish citizens will only have rather limited contact with those minority ethnic groups at the heart of this change. This lack of connection or interaction with individuals from minority backgrounds means that multiculturalism or interculturalism as either demograhic reality or sociological theory for the majority Irish is something they perceive as happening around them but is not necessarily involving them. This partly explains participants' generally positive attitudes to notions of inclusiveness and intercultural interaction but at the same time seem reticent in suggesting how this might be done. It became noticeable to me however at all three museums that many majority Irish participants seemed to make reference to present multicultural Ireland through a historical lens as their frame of reference for the present day. An example of this was Dermot, an engineer visiting the Waterford Museum of Treasures who utilised his knowledge of Irish history to try and imagine how a newly arrived migrant in Waterford might perceive processes of integration:

> I suppose if you were a foreigner and you didn't feel so welcome, you
> could see that Waterford is built up of different cultures. Well the Vikings
> came first, they plundered and then they settled in and adopted Irish ways,
> then the Normans came and did the same.

Although Dermot's attempts at trying to define multiculturalism in his native Waterford is grounded in a historic context of other cultures arriving over the centuries, it is representative of how many white Irish participants across the case-study museums generally comprehend multicultural Ireland. It is on the whole a multicultural mosaic that is white and of European origin. Dermot's comment however is also instructive of how research participants at the regional Waterford Museum of Treasures were much more likely than their counterparts at the Dublin case-study museums to reflect on the

heterogeneous nature of Irish society, albeit through the historical lens. My research reveals high levels of interest and curiosity amongst participants in how other visitors, both Irish and migrant, are relating to and engaging with the artefacts on display. This interest goes beyond a mere curiosity of whether opinions would differ or be the same but a questioning of how the museums actually present information to enable visitors to come to individual conclusions. When it came to drawing conclusions about Ireland's past and present multicultural situations, some participants were adamant that museums needed to foreground such information better than they currently do. A discussion between sister and brother, Emma and Philip both in their early twenties visiting the Waterford Museum of Treasures with their parents, for instance highlighted how Emma felt that the historic multicultural nature of Waterford city needed to be made more obvious to the visitor:

Emma   There's a couple of points but it (Waterford's past

            multiculturality) needs to be more obvious I would say.

Philip   If you read the detail you can work it out for yourself.

Emma   Yeah, but who's gonna do that, you have people like mam

            and dad who will go walking past and go 'oh there was

            Flemish here' they won't see it!

What was interesting to observe in this conversation was the underlying reason for Emma's desire to have Waterford's diversity explained more fully. For her, the museum's potential to better illustrate the city's past multicultural make-up was seen as a method of informing her parents and other visitors of something they might otherwise just pass by and not necessarily recognise. Her concern about this is further elaborated upon in a follow up statement:

I just think that in this day and age like, it's good to know that it wasn't just English and Irish and that was it. There were people from other countries here too. We're becoming a multicultural society, even more so than it was back in those days. What you have happening now is more of a development of what started a thousand years ago.

This comment might be seen as a good example of the linking of historic and contemporary Irish diversity that was occurring in the minds of some of my research participants. For this visitor, multicultural Ireland was not a recent phenomenon but had origins 'a thousand years ago'. I interpreted her desire to see the museum reflect Waterford's diversity and her linking this to the education of the visiting public on the topic as a wider appeal to tackling racist sentiment. This was due to the fact that Emma made reference on a few occasions to negative attitudes she had experienced amongst her family and friends in relation to specifically Nigerian migrants in Waterford. While the case could certainly be made for museums such as Waterford Museum of Treasures better highlighting the multicultural nature of the city, this is not to say that many visitors to the site do not already make the connection as was evidenced by Janet, a midwife visiting from the UK:

And all about the mixed races that are here, that were here from a long time ago, the Welsh, the Flemish and the Anglo-Saxons, the Italians, I picked all that up. And they still have people here called Lombard who were bankers from Italy, and now I'm thinking why so many people here have black hair. We did learn quite a bit.

Janet had enjoyed looking at the objects at the Waterford Museum of Treasures but in her own words they were 'not as good as what you'd see in a national museum'. For

her, the significance of the museum was what it managed to tell her about the character of the region and its people, which to her surprise was more diverse than she had expected. All the above comments are useful indicators as to how perceptions of diversity are being perceived at Irish museums. Yet, what became clear to me over the course of my research is the degree to which Irish diversity and multiculturalism is spoken of in a specific manner. For instance, while some Irish majority participants directly make connections between museum collections and the heterogeneous nature of Irish identity, such acknowledgement is the exception rather than the rule within my sample. Even amongst those participants whom recognised perspectives of difference, such 'heterogeneity' is still perceived as bounded in a white, European mould. At the National Museum of Ireland and Waterford Museum of Treasures, a few Irish participants spoke of diversity and multiculturalism in broad terms of inherited Scandinavian, Norman and British legacies i.e. through a historical construct and from the third person perspective. This is perhaps not surprising considering the manner in which Irish museums have contributed to the construction of ideas of nation and national identity since the foundation of the state. In contrast many minority ethnic participants at these museums and at the Chester Beatty Library discussed concepts of Irish multiculturalism very much in the present and from their personal, first person view. It would appear that the social vacuum that can exist between majority and minority communities as uncovered in research (Immigrant Council of Ireland 2008) has created a situation whereby understandings of what multicultural Ireland might be varies widely between such groups. In the absence of public forums to adequately address issues of migration and multiculturalism the prospect of racist discourse can emerge. An example of this could be seen at the Waterford Museum of Treasures whereby Norah, a Waterford woman in her fifties in discussing contemporary

immigration to Waterford in particular and Ireland in general linked it once again to historic 'invasions':

> We're still being invaded! There's still different people coming through (to Ireland) and still people who think that they should change the way that things are done......

What is interesting about Norah's opinions is that she had emigrated to Liverpool from Waterford in the 1970s so had herself experienced the life of a migrant. On the day I interviewed her at the museum she was back visiting her family in Waterford city on a short vacation from the UK. Norah's references to the contemporary migrants in Waterford, predominantly citing those of Nigerian or general African background was specifically made with reference to getting access to Irish social welfare benefits. It seemed to me that while she was conscious during the interview of her own migrant status she did not readily see the possible similarities between her own need to migrate in the 1970s to Liverpool and the need for African migration to Waterford today. While such similarities would definitely consist of the chance to avail of better economic opportunities, it was the case with many of the minority ethnic participants I interviewed in Waterford that they were also fleeing wars or other forms of human rights persecutions. It occurred to me while in discussions with Norah of how insightful it might have been for her to have had the opportunity to hear the experiences of recent international migrants to Waterford, something that research participants at the Waterford Women's Centre, many of them refugees, felt the museum could capably do. In the following section I specifically go on to explore minority ethnic views of developing Irish multiculturalism and assess how Irish museums might become spaces that bring public concepts of contemporary plural Irish society into a more open public realm.

Museums as places of cultural interrogations

Bhikhu Parekh's (2006) theorising on multicultural societies intersects closely with some of the underlying principles at the heart of currently defined Irish interculturalist policy. In particular, Parekh's notion of 'cultural interrogations' echoes Irish policy calls for cultural 'dialogue' to take place amongst its diverse communities of citizens. As Parekh (ibid:220) explains:

> In a multicultural society, cultures constantly encounter one another both formally and informally and in private and public spaces. Guided by curiosity, incomprehension or admiration, they interrogate each other, challenge each other's assumptions, consciously or unconsciously borrow from each other, widen their horizons and undergo small and large changes.

I encountered such interrogations taking place at all case study museums and by minority ethnic visitors in particular. Unlike many of the Irish majority research participants who tend to contemplate present multiculturalism by utilising historic examples, migrant participants are actually living current change. Parekh's notions of public spaces as being the domains where intercultural understanding could take place thus leading to more integrated multicultural societies could be said to be already taking place within some Irish museums. A notable example of this was offered by an exhibition held by one of my case-study museums during the course of my research. In 2010 the Chester Beatty Library attempted to open up debates on multicultural Ireland by hosting a temporary exhibition titled 'A Sikh Face in Ireland'. The exhibition, devised by independent researcher Satwinder Singh was supported by the Forum on Migration and Communications (FOMACS) based at Dublin Institute of Technology in

association with members of the Irish Sikh Council. The content of the exhibition consisted of large portrait style photographs of a cross-section of the Irish Sikh community taken in various social contexts such as the home, at work or at leisure activities accompanied by brief biographical narratives from the sitters. Following the London terrorist attacks in 2005, the Sikh community in Ireland had noticed an upsurge in racially motivated attacks against its members whereby the perpetrators assumed them to be Muslim. The stabbing of one of Singh's close friends in Athlone along with the increasing severity of the attacks pushed him into action about addressing the levels of ignorance within Irish society about Sikhs. Taking his cue from a previous photographic exhibition held at the Dublin Institute of Technology titled 'Portraits of Somali Elders' Singh worked with photographer Glenn Jordan to produce the exhibition that would eventually go on display at the Chester Beatty Library. The exhibition while achieving its aim of highlighting the diversity of Sikh identity was also intended as a powerful anti-racist initiative. The supporting public programmes at the Chester Beatty further built on the intercultural agenda of the show. The organisers succeeded in balancing the presentation of Sikhism as a religion and yet not allowing Sikh identity to be defined purely in religious terms, as often happens in museum representations of minority ethnic communities. For instance, the display panels accompanying the portraits of some of the sitters clearly established the individuals' connection to Sikh cultural heritage but not always Sikh religion. There were also poignant reminders of the sacrifices that are sometimes made to personal identity in order to 'integrate' with a new host society. One such example within the exhibition was the story of a father who no longer wore his turban and cut his beard so that his children did not feel embarrassed by the public stares. On the day that I observed visitors reactions to this exhibition it was predominantly majority white Irish visitors in attendance. Comments left in the

visitor book clearly highlighted that the show had achieved its aim of raising intercultural awareness. Emily from Dublin wrote:

> This was a very thoughtful exhibition with a message. Thank you for this project and for increasing awareness of other cultures in Ireland.

Other visitors clearly made connections between themes of migration, emigration and diasporic communities with Winifred from Donegal leaving a very emotional message:

> The pictures and stories are wonderful, powerful, moving. There is such spirit in the faces. The stories of emigration are familiar to millions of Irish, the loss, the going back, feeling more Irish abroad. It's strange how we seem to forget those things when it comes to people here. Keep strength in your traditions, it brings so much to Ireland.

The exhibition while successfully offering a snapshot of Sikh identities in Ireland had also (unconsciously it seemed to me) tapped into a shared, communal theme of migration for many of those visiting the exhibition. The negative and positive experiences of migration, all too familiar to Ireland for nearly two centuries would seem to provide Irish museums with rich material to explore notions of displacement, forging new homes and new identities in twenty first century Ireland. The exhibition also proved effective in the manner in which it presented the stories of men and women of both Sikh and Irish cultural backgrounds who had met, married and had families together. The exhibition therefore celebrated Sikh identity in its own right but also illustrated to visiting audiences how such identities move, shift and intermingle with others around them. The images on display and the personal narratives that accompanied them clearly presented a vision of contemporary multicultural Ireland, one that broke down barriers and lived up to Parekh's (2006:204) reasoning that; 'We'

cannot integrate 'them' so long as 'we' remain 'we'; 'we' must be loosened up to create a new common space in which 'they' can be accommodated and become part of a newly reconstituted 'we'.

Processes of conceiving wider definitions of Irish multiculturalism or 'We' are also evident in the thoughts of James, a Singaporean urban planner visiting the Chester Beatty Library who commented:

> although the past was 99.9% white, but if you look at it another way you can make analogies to the present, like why does Dublin have two names? Because it was settled by two different groups of people. There was a such a generic mish-mash of people who came and raided and pillaged and then settled, so yeah if you think that yes, it's white, but if you look at it another way the modern Irish are a product of genetic mingling.

James went further to give his personal opinion on what the final successful outcome of the multicultural process could be in terms of integration:

> the USA, and Ireland to a lesser extent, and my own country, Singapore, where being Irish or being American is not dependent on being a particular ethnicity, it's a culture. And by defining your culture as not being ethnic you are making it easier for people from different ethnicities to blend in.

This individual was very clear however in his own mind of two concurrent processes that needed to take place for both majority Irish citizens and new migrants in order for a functioning multicultural society to evolve:

> So a sense of being Irish is based on tolerance, it makes it easier but they (migrants) must know about the culture, the history before they can

assimilate. We are a young nation in Singapore, so we are struggling with nation building and shared symbols because it's about translating shared ideals that people must buy into.

James's comments around the needs of minority ethnic communities to get a sense of the history and cultural perspectives of the 'host' society are processes that appear to be already taking place within my case study museums. However, it is the notion of 'shared symbols' translating into 'shared ideals' that is still very much open to question and actually still in the process of development. James again, had his own views on what one of these ideals might be:

Interviewer   And you see a shared ideal here, in this country?

James   I think there is, the fact that it's not ethnic based. I think that multiculturalism is the way to go but it's like a flower that you actually do need to...it's nice to look at and is pretty but you need to put it in a green-house otherwise you find the aphids and insects, you know it's fragile, so it's nice, but it needs to be nurtured and protected.

I was initially surprised that James did not seem to think that Irish ethnic identity could be a challenge to the development of multiculturalism within the country. This surprise stems from my own personal perceptions whereby I had come to perceive of certain constructions of Irish identity as posing barriers to a more inclusive, plural society. However, as I discovered over the course of the research, James's views were shared by many minority ethnic participants within my sample and this feedback ultimately forced me to re-evaluate just what it is I find so potentially exclusive within conceptions of Irish identity to multicultural Ireland. I equally find James's analogy of Irish

multiculturalism as being like a delicate or precious flower that needs protecting in a green-house an intriguing one. I never managed to question him further to discover what his 'aphids' and 'insects' might symbolise in terms of challenges to Irish multiculturalism. Again, I add my own interpretations to think that it could be Irish nationalism? Or was it perhaps Irish racial prejudice? Maybe he was alluding to feelings of separateness within Ireland's minority communities who did not necessarily want to 'integrate' into everything that Irish multiculturalism would ask of them? These however, are purely my speculations and are speculations that have of course been influenced by the literature on the subject of multiculturalism itself. James's concept of a greenhouse to protect and sustain a developing Irish multiculturalism however is very apt. At the moment there is no obvious framework or 'greenhouse' either facilitated by the state or elsewhere to steer such an important process in Irish society. With no obvious national lead being offered in the area, can the nation's museums put forward suggestions as public facing institutions? Irish museums could find much inspiration in Parekh's (2008:234) suggestion that by 'including minorities in the community's self-definition and giving them official recognition, such a definition legitimises and values their presence and makes it possible for them to accept it with enthusiasm'. An example of such a process can be seen within Cork City Museum. Although not one of my case-study sites, an exhibition it created in consultation with the Traveller community is worth mentioning considering its relevance to my research agenda. In 2005 the museum began a working relationship with the Cork Traveller Women's Network to create a permanent Traveller culture exhibit within the museum. Titled the 'Barrel Top Wagon Project' the women's group had secured funding from the EU to create a project that would represent Traveller culture and heritage. From the outset various segments of the Traveller community were involved in the process including local young Traveller men

who built the barrel top wagon itself, supported by an elderly women's group who undertook research into the historic interior designs of such wagons and traditional costumes. Other women's groups collected oral histories and numerous local Traveller groups donated photo albums to the project. All this collected material eventually went into producing a booklet called 'Echoes of the Past – Reflections on Life in a Barrel Top Wagon'. The project was such a success that it received further funding from Vodafone Ireland Foundation and the Heritage Council to develop an audio-guide of the exhibit for the museum. Email correspondence with the member of staff at the museum involved with the project confirmed good audience attendance and a sense that majority visitor understanding about Traveller culture is heightened. The aims of the project from the Traveller community's point of view are clear as stated in an edition of The Irish Traveller Journal (2006):

- The creation of a resource to highlight and celebrate Traveller culture and to challenge negative stereotypes of Travellers.
- The transfer of intergenerational cultural learning within the Traveller community.
- The creation of increased visibility and recognition of Traveller culture, identity and heritage in cultural institutions, among the general public and the media.
- The promotion of pride in Traveller identity within the Traveller community.

Exhibitions such as 'A Sikh Face in Ireland' and 'The Barrel Top Wagon Project' are obvious examples of where museums have made attempts to highlight Ireland's contemporary diverse make-up. The Sikh exhibition for instance touches on issues of faith and religion, concepts with an often difficult past in Catholic Ireland. An obvious

and readily visible marker for members of many minority communities is their religious and spiritual belief systems. This is an area I discuss in the next section.

Religious diversity – A barometer of multicultural Ireland?

Historically Ireland has been defined as a Catholic country. However, the reality is that there has always been a diversity of faith systems amongst its people. Census (2011) gave insights into just how multicultural Irish belief now is. Although 84 per cent of those responding to the Census classed themselves as Roman Catholic, the Central Statistics Office of Ireland does not define the percentage of people who answered this question in a 'cultural' sense i.e. those who identify loosely with a Catholic upbringing (by virtue of being baptised into the faith) but who may not in themselves be practising Catholics. This is significant as it perhaps skews the actual importance of the place of the Catholic Church in twenty first century Ireland. An interesting fact that emerges is that 7.3 per cent of those who identify as Catholic are non-Irish nationals. The Church of Ireland is the second largest religion in the country at 6 per cent with Islam for the first time in the history of the state the third largest faith group. The Census recorded 49, 204 people or 0.8 per cent of the population who identified themselves as Muslim. This was a 51 per cent increase on the numbers of the previous census taken in 2006. Although still a small number within a population of just over four million, it represents notable changes within Irish society. It is also hugely significant that 40 per cent of those who identified as being Muslim also classed themselves as being Irish nationals. Within my research I observed that participants' responses to artefacts connected to Islam in particular and Muslims more generally offered useful insights into how this important and growing community was integrating into Irish life and what perspectives visitors took away from museums having

encountered such objects. It was also very beneficial to my research that I managed to gauge the opinions of several Muslim participants from diverse cultural backgrounds on these issues. In considering specifically the numbers relating to the continued growth of the Muslim faith in the country, some of the media coverage following the release of these statistics bordered on the hysterical (Dudley Edwards 2010) with a more typical pattern that followed Ivision's (2010) observations of a tone of general defensiveness around Muslim immigration in Europe. What was largely absent in the coverage of these statistics was that the Central Statistics Office was not in a position to reflect the true heterogeneous nature of the Irish Muslim community. For instance, by ticking the box 'Islam' under the Census question 'What is your religion'? many respondents may have been denoting their generic Islamic cultural background rather than signifying any definite beliefs in Islam the faith. To self-identify as Muslim on the Irish Census marks an individual as confirming a religious background even though that individual may in fact have no religious affiliation. It also does not take into account the multiple strands of difference that exist within the actual religion of Islam itself such as Sunni, Shia, Ismali or Sufi. Muslims are currently to the fore in the public gaze in light of world events and the mass media has a tendency not to elucidate on the vast heterogeneity of the faith or the people associated with it. Considered representations of their religions and cultures at museums would seem opportune. Such moves are certainly supported by Muslim participants within my sample. They, more so than any other ethnic group within my research, spoke of specific events of racism directed towards them in Ireland. What surprised me is their identification of the majority of this harassment and racism coming from teenagers and young people in particular. This is a trend that has already been commented upon in other Irish research (Immigrant Council of Ireland 2008). While it has been stated that the Irish education system 'stands at the vanguard of Irish

intercultural policy and equality discourse' (Fanning 2002:190) it would seem that the actual outcomes of such claims could be open to question, certainly from some within Ireland's Muslim communities. For instance, while conducting a group interview with three Muslim women at the Waterford Women's Centre around their uses of and attitudes to the Waterford Museum of Treasures and the wider museum sector, racism as a topic in general came up frequently. Although different nationally and ethnically from each other, all three followed the Islamic faith and two women wore hijab which they themselves stated was for religious reasons. The physical manifestation of their religious 'difference' in Ireland had made them targets of ridicule for some within the wider population. Sofia, a refugee from Somali described a frightening experience she had had over her wearing of hijab:

> Once, I was walking on the quay and a man caught my veil and said,
> "don't you know that here (in Ireland) this doesn't need to be worn" but I
> ignored him and he didn't do anything.

Nighut, a Pakastani national now living in Waterford who chooses not to wear hijab was eager to point out that her harassment in Waterford is not solely instigated by the wearing of hijab but just by the virtue of being a different skin colour. It became obvious in discussions with these women the importance they placed on the need for the 'normalising' of difference in Ireland's public spaces. For them, public staring and racial comments is a daily occurrence by many individuals on the streets of Waterford. What is more frightening for them are the quick character assumptions that are then made based on appearance. These concerns exist at the local level when they spoke about relationships with their immediate Irish neighbours or where their children go to school, but also the national context and how they feel they, as Muslims, are spoken about on television and radio. There is currently little if any public channels where Irish

Muslims can enter into discussion and engagement between their communities and the majority Irish population around issues of Islamic cultural identities and religious beliefs. Such public engagement is believed to be particularly important from the participants point of view as they feel Irish society is becoming more hostile to religion in general. However, they acknowledged that museums could play an informative role in explaining about other cultures and actually showing the real people behind the newslines. For these participants however, I detected that it is not necessarily their religion that they wish to be foregrounded, as they are then defined by this and this alone. Rather in my conversations with them they continually emphasised or kept returning to the point of who they were as women, as people in a larger sense. A good example of this is Susan a refugee from Iraq. She had been a practising lawyer in Baghdad before she and her family fled the recent wars there. She was eager to use her legal training in Ireland but as someone registered as 'refugee status' this is currently not possible for her under current Irish law. Within the interview process I was attempting to get a sense of how the participants might imagine or like to see their faith represented within an Irish museum, how best could a museum inform wider Irish society about what it meant to be Muslim. Susan in particular appeared uncomfortable with the proposition that simply putting a religion on show necessarily offered any more insights into that faith or the people who followed it. Her Islamic faith was personal to her, as she suspected it was to the other participants within the interview group, and how could a museum capture that experience? Even if it could, would it be ethical? For Susan, her religion is bound up in a larger sense with who she is as a person, it cannot be sectioned off and analysed in a separate realm for this renders it sterile. To emphasise this she explained her annoyance and frustration that often within Ireland she felt she was first and foremost seen as a refugee and not a fully rounded person. She is

essentially being defined by her legal status. She had similar concerns about how people define her as 'Muslim' including museums. Susan's point is well made as most museum displays on Islam and Muslim life tend to utilise artefacts to describe the theological principles of the religion but rarely the real human stories that give the religion life. The Chester Beatty Library's gallery on Islam similarly displays it's artefacts in a narrative that chronicles the history of the religion and highlights the artistic beauty of the objects but it is questionable the degree to which it brings into focus or educates the public on the lives of Muslims in Ireland today. For Susan a sense of getting to know about her religion needs to go further, it is not just a display of objects under the titles of Muslim or Islamic art. It is about getting to know where she comes from and even getting an insight into her life as an Iraqi woman now living in Waterford in southern Ireland. She thought museums could assist with this but was not sure of the overall effects it would have:

> If a country knows and has information about another country, when they come to visit your country or they come like the refugees, they don't get surprised. They (museums) help educate the country. Those people (refugees) have a good history and they are not ignorant people.

Susan's comment also reveals the inherent discriminations that many refugees and migrants to Ireland experience. Large sections of Irish public opinion apart from having little if any understanding of these new cultures also predominantly view these individuals as first and foremost to be unskilled and purely seeking Irish social welfare assistance. What was interesting for me about Susan's story was the degree to which she was trying to prove to Irish authorities that she could be a future asset to the country. In order to do this her prime aim was to increase her English language skills and apart from attending English language classes at the Waterford Women's Centre she was also

regularly attending tours and talks at the Waterford Museum of Treasures to assist her vocabulary development. For some of the other Muslim participants not of the educational and professional background as Susan, formal representation in whatever manner at museums is seen as a basic way in which the Irish Muslim presence could be made accessible within the country. Sofia, a refugee from Somali, who is particularly concerned about the future integration of her children into Irish society noted:

> They (museums) make people aware of us. I don't think that it will be as
> hard for the younger generation as it was for us.

Such feedback about how public spaces, including museums, could potentially assist better understandings of Muslim life and culture in a developing multicultural Ireland echo Parekh's (2006:223) comments that:

> Museums and art galleries, which define and celebrate the national
> heritage, should include and suitably integrate minority contributions
> which are also an integral part of a multicultural society's common
> heritage.

As already stated much of current animosity directed towards multiculturalism as a reality and policy concept across Western Europe has some basis in negative attitudes to increasing Muslim populations within EU countries and their integration (Ivision 2010). Some of these attitudes are evident within my research sample. For instance, a discussion at Waterford Museum of Treasures between Michael, a self-employed husband and his wife, Gillian, who worked for the civil service, around the topic of the representation of other cultures at Irish museums directly involved the Muslim community:

Michael   I'm not sure about the Muslims, they don't want to integrate, they don't know how to integrate. They're so different from us....how would that work? And the way they treat their women......

Gillian   Yeah, they can be intolerant can't they? But do you remember Michael when we saw those Muslim pots and plates in that French museum, they were lovely. It was interesting that they made those beautiful things....

Such an interaction highlights the wide chasms that can exist in perceptions of the 'other' within Irish society. While both these participants had seen members of the Muslim community on the streets of Waterford they admitted they knew nothing about these communities and had never actually spoken to someone from a Muslim background. As Michael stated openly 'where would we talk with them'. What struck me in particular about this discussion was Gillian's encounter with Islamic cultural objects in a French museum and how the beauty and craftsmanship of such objects had made her pause to consider Muslim life in a way she may not have done previously. She herself stated that the culture was so 'alien' to her that she did not really understand anything more about Islam and Muslims but the beauty of the objects had made her realise just how little she actually knew. It also did not go unnoticed to me that she had to go to France and encounter Muslim cultural artefacts in a French rather than Irish museum to have this realisation. The reality of the situation however is that outside of the main museums in Dublin there is little opportunity for Irish citizens to view Islamic historic or contemporary cultural artefacts. Even within the capitals museums, the situation is not straightforward. As already discussed in Chapter 3, the display and interpretation of objects from Muslim cultures at the National Museum of Ireland is

questionable in the degree to which they are effectively fostering better public understanding of the artefacts and cultures that made them. The Chester Beatty Library, arguably the custodians of the finest Muslim collections in Ireland tend to highlight religious art of the Muslim world and rarely consider secular or more human perspectives of these cultures. Echoing the points put across by Susan earlier, an Indian student visiting the Chester Beatty Library illustrated how some visitors would like an expansion of such agendas and not a sole concentration on identification by religion:

> Museums should show much more cultural objects of others – not just religious objects. It should be wider in scope to help other nationalities learn about other cultures. Also, I don't know enough about my own Indian heritage and would like to learn more about it.

The ability to compare and contrast religions beside each other was also seen as important in participant feedback as an Indian engineer visiting the Chester Beatty Library made clear:

> Well, we are not biased to a particular religion, it was really nice to put Hinduism and Buddhism beside each other, putting the facts there.

A recognition of the changed religious landscape of Ireland was often remarked upon by visitors to the case study museums. For instance Geoff, a bank employee visiting the Chester Beatty Library commented:

> I suppose one hundred years ago people might have taken exception to the fact that there was iconography that was non-Christian and now we seemed to have moved on from that. Maybe it's a reflection of a change rather than part of a change, which is the chicken, which is the egg, you know!

This change was important for Geoff as he was visiting the museum with his wife Jennifer, who was a Thai national and brought up a Daoist. Neither had any religious beliefs but explained their interest in the religious artefacts as more 'cultural' in orientation. Geoff had deliberately thought of museums as places that could act as intercultural links between himself and his new Thai in-laws:

Geoff   I suppose it's just because there are connections you know, to childhood, so I thought my wife would enjoy it (the collections at the Chester Beatty), you know.

Jennifer   It was the Daoist stuff really, it reminded me of going to the temple as a child.

Geoff   It's going to be hard, such a big cultural shift to come to a northern European country which has nothing to do with Thailand at all so you're trying to look for cross-connections to give it relevance.

The positive experiences that this couple had had in looking at the various religious artefacts connected to Jennifer's Asian heritage and upbringing ensured further visits were going to be undertaken by themselves and with other family members:

Geoff   I'd be inclined to come back here now, like my mother-in-law is coming back here in March and she's the daughter of an imam, the daughter of a Muslim preacher. I think she'd like it here.

Jennifer   We are looking for a comforting place.

Geoff   Yeah, she (his mother-in-law) can go 'oh that's interesting'

and she can be the older person telling us the younger ones

what that is and what it's used for.

Geoff's reference to the fact that his Thai mother-in-law would take the lead in telling the family about the objects on display at the Chester Beatty Library was just one example of many within my research sample where minority ethnic participants made reference to the role of elder members of their communities being viewed as custodians of important knowledge. It is also a matter of respectful deference whereby the young learn from and are passed down cultural knowledge from the elderly. Such traditional and personalised transmissions of information can question or diverge from the role of the museum as privileged mediator in the process. For instance, Jennifer on a few occasions noted how the information panels referring to the uses of certain Buddhist and Daoist devotional objects would be interpreted differently by an individual of Thai background.

Museums, however, are also seen by participants as places of importance to secular Irish society. The 2011 census recorded a 45 per cent increase over the 2006 figures in those who classified themselves as having 'No Religion' which effectively makes this grouping the second largest after Roman Catholic. The past decade in Ireland has seen the reputation of the Catholic Church severely shaken by both sex and corruption scandals. What had been for many citizens a foundation of support has been abruptly removed. This has led to much questioning as to what in society might fill the spiritual vacuum left by the former role of the Church. Some participants saw a natural role for museums in this endeavour as a mother visiting the Waterford Treasures Museum commented:

so many people are formally out of touch with their religious or spiritual

side. There's a void created by that and it has to be filled. The whole

getting in touch with yourself, it's just essential. It's essential with the

deformed spiritual thing, but when there's less formal religion it's even

more important to have space to think, relax and reflect.

In the previous section I have attempted to highlight how the increasing diversity of

religious practice in Ireland can be a useful measure against which to assess the impacts

of multicultural understanding and interaction in contemporary Ireland. While the

religious landscape in Ireland is without doubt a much changed one from fifty or sixty

years ago the experiences of some of those of Muslim faith testify that sentiments of

suspicion, even hostility pose barriers to an acceptance of all faiths in multicultural

Ireland. As I demonstrate in my research participant feedback, museums are seen as

locations that can address such issues but to truly make an impact must work with

individuals and communities to enliven such personal and human sentiments.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to situate my research within the wider conceptual debates

around multiculturalism both at an international level as well as within the specific

particularities of the Irish context. The strategy of intercultural policy adopted in Ireland

at government level aims to promote an active engagement between the country's

majority ethnic population and minorities. While the actual implementation of such

policies are open to question and are certainly being debated in Irish academic circles,

the concept does open up the possibilities for Irish museums to become civic forums for

such debates. I have discussed in this chapter how visitors to my three case study

museums from both majority and minority ethnic backgrounds would appear to be

involved in a process of intercultural negotiation and finding out about the 'other'. As I have attempted to demonstrate, there are instances where such interactions go further than this, with Irish citizens from a diversity of backgrounds utilising museums and their collections as stabilising foundations for new ethnically diverse family units. The changing face of Irish families that I witnessed over the course of this research at museums is the reality of twenty first century Irish multiculturalism. While most of my participants did not talk about multiculturalism in the same language as that of the literature or in the manner of Irish academia, their discussions and descriptions to me about their perceptions and attitudes to their own cultures and that of others highlighted the degree to which they were interested and prepared to be engaged in the subject. Not one of my participants over the course of my interviews referred specifically to the concept of 'interculturalism' and I did not see any evidence that visitors were aware of the academic debates on the merits of interculturalism over multiculturalism. Yet, in spite of all this, it was many of those who took part in my research that are the forefront of the societal changes currently underway in Ireland and are in their own individual ways helping to create Irish multiculturalism. Irish museums could forge a role in assisting in this process and as my research highlights, are already been used by many sections of the Irish public to this end.

If as this chapter has argued that museums are seen and being used as resources by individuals from migrant backgrounds to assist their integration into Irish society, it must also be acknowledged that there is the prospect of a phenomenon that may pose challenges to such integration – that phenomenon in the Irish context is its postcolonial identity forged from a bitter colonial past. In the next chapter I go on to explore the wider influence of postcolonial theory on museology in general and its' particular

relevance to Irish museums. I do this by taking an in-depth look at the display practices of one of my case-study museums, Collins Barracks, National Museum of Ireland.

5 - The postcolonial Irish museum: Looking back, looking forward

> 'The distinctiveness of Ireland's history of colonial domination precludes any so direct an application of generalizing or 'transferable theories'. As at once one of the earliest colonies caught up in Europe's westward expansion and a society intimately bound to the cultural and, especially, the religious context of Western Europe, Ireland has always been both a template and an anomaly' (Lloyd 1993)

This chapter situates Irish museology within the larger field of postcolonial theory and explores how colonial legacies in the Irish context may affect the working practices (display, interpretation) of my case-study museums. I also outline how my research participants related to the display of diverse cultures and specific artefacts at these sites. It is my intention to set-out in this chapter and the next a central element of my research, namely how the effects of Irish postcolonialism as found within the nation's museums may have a role to play in re-envisioning concepts of a more diverse and inclusive multicultural Irish society. In considering the characteristics of Irish colonialism I draw on Ashcroft, Griffin and Tiffin's (1995) definitions of settler and non-settler nations. Ireland, as a non-settler colony did not see a large scale replacement of the indigenous population by an invading force[34] but rather control by an effective administrative and military presence operating out of the main towns and cities notably Dublin. Within this chapter, I discuss how museums of settler and non-settler countries compare and contrast and the implications of these distinctions for minority group representation internationally and specifically within Ireland. My analysis of these

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[34] The Elizabethan plantations of the sixteenth century largely failed and had limited success in Ulster.

characterisations of colonial location will be shown to be important to my study as the museological literature tends to concentrate on the experiences of settler nations – Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States – to portray the nature and complexities of (all) postcolonial museums (Simpson 2001; Boswell and Evans 1999). In these countries, discussion has centred on national museums and their efforts to incorporate minority indigenous peoples into the national narrative. I argue here that the experiences of other, less analysed postcolonial states, such as the non-settler nations of Ireland[35], disrupt the conventional debates around postcolonial theory and its application to museums, particularly national museums. Countries such as Ireland constitute postcolonial nations in which the indigenous population remained in the majority after independence and as such are rather different from the nations cited above. In particular, the Republic of Ireland's complex form of postcolonialism could be argued to be one that identifies with a history of resistance to British imperialism, but yet in some ways was accomplice to the imperial project itself. Overall there has been little, if any, analysis of minority group representation (or perceptions of such) within the museums of non-settler states such as Ireland. This is important for my research as it poses a direct challenge to the central research question of whether Irish museums can be public sites that contribute to social cohesion and intercultural understanding. Do for instance Irish postcolonial narratives limit the space within which minority groups might find their own unique voice and public presence? The first section of this chapter therefore outlines the connections between postcolonial theory and museums and then goes on to raise questions about some prevailing concepts of this theory, namely hybridism, and its specific application within the international museum context. I then go on to discuss narratives of postcolonialism at the National Museum of Ireland and its

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[35] India would also classify as an example of a non-settler colony.

impact on that museum's display practices and audiences in order to assess the degree to which it might be seen to affect notions of national inclusiveness.

Postcolonial theory and museums

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is often cited as the genesis of colonial and postcolonial studies (McLeod 2007; Carroll and King 2003). The discipline's initial critique of power relations and the construction of 'the Other' by the West continues to dominate the literature. However, postcolonial theory has become increasingly diffused into, and a mode of critical examination, for postmodernism more generally. As such, it now affects all areas of cultural studies. Its role in the analysis and understanding of museums is aided by John McLeod's (2007:8) attempt to relate the theory to the material world:

> Discontinuity, heterogeneity and diversity are perhaps the field's recurring markers. Yet postcolonial studies are not simply disparate and incoherent either; to be a field it must have some recurring elements or goals. One way of discerning the field's possible cohesion lies, I believe, in the configuration of that relationship between the material world and how we conceptualize it. Or, to put it differently, postcolonial studies requires us to recognize and explore the inseparable relationship between history and culture in the primary context of colonialism and its consequences.

The influence of postcolonial theory on the field of museum studies has been immense (Macdonald 2003; Hallam and Street 2000; Karp and Lavine 1991). In its earliest formulations, postcolonial theory highlighted the dominance of the colonized by the colonizer and the complex legacies of such contact following independence. One such legacy was the transformation of control of all aspects of political, economic and

cultural life of the nation from a previous occupying force to what Whelan (2003:94) describes as 'postcolonial paralysis' – the 'ossifying orthodoxy of the emergent nationalistic state which retains the institutional and ideological apparatus of the prior colonial state'. Such 'ossifying orthodoxy' was all too clear in former colonies where the settler white population became the ethnic majority. Several national museums in such countries have been notable in their attempts to incorporate minority voices into the new national narrative, for example, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Te Papa Tongarewa in New Zealand and the Australian National Museum (Simpson 2001; Casey 2001). However, the placement of what have been termed settler nations in the context of postcolonial studies is in itself contentious and the ability of postcolonial theory as developed in these examples to act as a guide for understanding relations in (all) postcolonial nations is increasingly being called into question. For instance, many First Nation peoples within Canada, for example, are adamant that not only is the country not postcolonial but that it is in fact neo-colonial, as it never truly altered national hierarchies of power after the colonial period (Moss 2003). Brydon (2003) has adopted the counterview, arguing for Canada's place in postcolonial debates (and therefore by default other settler nations) by emphasising the need of the country to disentangle itself from European history and influence, and by recognising distinctions between both settler and indigenous postcolonial positions. Ireland also poses legitimate challenges to current models of postcolonialism that often assume a simplistic binary racial conflict of white versus non-white, in that it was a majority 'white' ethnic indigenous colony (Carroll 2003: 3):

> Ireland was the first of England's colonies, the training ground for the
> colonists to North America, and the context of the first English discourse
> on why and how to conquer and colonize. The Irish were also subject to

representation as racially 'Other'. The resistance of the Irish to a violently imposed submission to English social, economic, and political structures made them inherently warlike and nomadic in the colonizers' characterizations of them as 'natural' slaves, which were in turn deployed to describe other colonized peoples.

Of course notions of the postcolonial condition are not uniform, even within former colonial states, where perspectives vary between different interest groups. How such variance has impacted on the development of national ethnic identities has been a key concern for many postcolonial theorists. Concepts of postcolonial hybridity and its theoretical application within the museum display practices of settler nations are important to consider in terms of their weight of influence within the literature. Homi Bhabha (1994; 1990) has had a significant influence on the representational practices of museums such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization and Te Papa Tongarewa. Bhabha is credited with extending Said's binary notion of colonizer-colonized to the more problematic 'hybridity' of cultures. For Bhabha (1994: 1-2), the process of colonization resulted in the creation of new forms of identity in postcolonial states: 'It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.' Bhabha's theory of national hybridity has been a persuasive framework for postcolonial states trying to accommodate ethnic differences within their borders in attempts to create a more homogeneous, unified citizenship. It has been particularly useful for majority settler nations who are conscious of large minority indigenous peoples historically kept to the margins of the national story. The notion of hybridity and the sharing of a particular experience, such as colonialism, has been utilised in attempts to destabilize past

animosities between settler and indigenous communities. A clear example of this is the case of Te Papa Tongarewa where the country's 'bicultural settlement' has been implemented at the museum to depict that 'Maori and Pakeha are joined together in the deep ahistorical space of land and nature' (Dyson 2005: 122). However, as Dyson goes on to highlight, in its attempts to project a national and international notion of unified identity, the museum continues to downplay past injustices. Canadian museums face similar problems in attempting to represent a unified idea of nation. Macdonald and Alsford (1995: 286) have stated that 'ethnic and aboriginal museums remain.....the main outlet for the interpretative perspectives of cultural minorities in Canada'. Increasingly, Bhabha's ideas concerning ethnic hybridity and shared legacies have come to be questioned with many critics seeing in them a dilution of the voice of marginalised groups. San Juan (1998: 30) has stated forcefully that:

> The claim of postcolonial theory (as exemplified by assorted Australian, Indian, and Canadian ventriloquists of 'speechless' subalterns) to be more radical than avant-garde modernism is problematic especially for people of colour seeking to affirm their autochthonous traditions of resistance. What is at stake is their survival, their authentic and incommensurable dignities.

San Juan views 'hybridism' within some versions of postcolonial theory as a model that fundamentally undermines the efforts of minorities to affirm rights and sentiments of difference. It is a view echoed in Bordewich's (1996) study of Native American struggles for cultural and sovereign independence. Similarly Benita Parry (2004) is critical of postcolonial theory that attempts to conflate the experiences of the coloniser and colonised into mutual cultural exchanges and interactions that denude the significance of power relations and historical struggle. For the purposes of this study, while accepting that Irish postcolonialism has indeed created a mandala of Irish and

British identities and cultures (forced or otherwise) it is also responsible for the creation of a particular ethnic nationalism following Irish independence in the early twentieth century that in itself may possibly exclude more than it includes. The question that arises for my research is whether the more nationalistic elements of Irish postcolonialism and its effects on civic and public life (including museums) actually pose similar challenges to the rights of minority ethnic differences as those described by San Juan? In a wider sense, could it be that postcolonial theory which is usually celebrated within the literature as offering the best insights or outlets for post-independence constructions of nation actually limit more than they allow for the widest possible articulation of Irish national identity? It is significant that following independence, the Irish assumed absolute control of their emerging national museums. Such events did not take place for the colonised peoples in settler nations. At the end of colonial rule (southern Ireland became the Irish Free State in 1921 and Republic of Ireland in 1948) the majority population was not one of 'invader-settlers' but the indigenous peoples. Unlike other postcolonial states, internal differences were predominantly constructed around religion and class rather than purely racial distinctions. However, in spite of such distinctions, the country still witnessed a coalescing of power in the hands of indigenous bourgeois elements that welded notions of national ethnic identity firmly to their specific concerns. In many ways the exclusionary politics of the new Irish middle classes was not that dissimilar from the departed colonial power. There is a historical pattern in this as Mbembe (2001: 40) describes similar developments in relation to many African postcolonial nations. Although Mbembe is talking about Africa specifically, the context could just as equally have applied to Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century:

Under colonial rule and beyond, a constellation of distinctively indigenous

interests gradually came into being. Sometimes in competition with the

evolues (the educated elite) and elements of the colonial bureaucracy,

sometimes in symbiosis with them, this constellation of interests strongly

influenced the shape of the independent states. This was also how – even

though the postcolonial state's aim was to overcome 'old hierarchies' –

relations of subjection were introduced and consolidated that broadly

perpetuated those the colonial state had initiated.

Ireland's experience of this process is described by Whelan (2003: 94) as:

The successor state sponsored a nationalist project, constructed around the

hegemonic bloc of the national bourgeoisie (agrarian and small business),

and intertwining the state with the Church, education and media.

The new 'indigenous interests' that emerged in postcolonial nations with ethnic

majorities such as Ireland, India and many African states, were the construction of a

small but significant elite within those countries. The new power brokers came to

realise that recently liberated national museums could be utilised to project not only

their ideas of the new nation but that as keepers of culture their hierarchical positions in

the new society could be upheld to the exclusion of others. Overall, postcolonial theory

has had little to say in addressing the representation or rights of ethnic minorities within

indigenous-majority independent nations such as Ireland. A clear example of this in the

Irish context is the absence of representation within the national museums of the

nation's largest ethnic minority group, the Travelling Community. The same situation

also applies to the Irish Jewish community which has a presence in Ireland for centuries.

In the next section I examine exhibitionary practices at one of my case-study museums,

the National Museum of Ireland at Collins Barracks to assess whether postcolonial narratives there affect visitor responses to the objects and cultures on display.

Postcolonialism and the National Museum of Ireland

The modern day National Museum of Ireland emerged under colonial rule as the Dublin Museum of Science and Arts in 1877. It was not officially designated a 'national' museum until 1908 (Wallace and O Floinn 2002). This is not surprising as neither its' British administrators nor the privileged class of Anglo-Irish interest groups involved in its formation, had intended that a truly nationalistic institution be inaugurated. Its purpose and function was first and foremost to further developments and appreciation in science and agriculture, which it was expected would translate into economic dividends from exploitation of the country's natural resources. A similar focus on natural history can be seen in the origins of what would become national museums in other non-settler nations such as South Africa (Goodnow 2006) and Kenya (Karanja Miara 2002). The transformation from colonial museum to National Museum was set in motion when Ireland's prehistoric gold and bronze antiquities replaced "field guns captured by Lord Gough from the Sikhs......and copies of classical statuary and ceremonial carriages" (Wallace and O'Floinn 2002: 11). The newly re-orientated National Museum of Ireland and its re-positioned Celtic artefacts became the foundations for a revitalised Irish ethnic identity following independence (Crooke 2000). The satirical British publication *Punch* had infamously depicted Irish ethnicity as sub-human and simian in feature; a means to overcome the inconvenience of a shared 'whiteness' amongst colonised and coloniser. It is not difficult to see why the post-colony sought to resurrect a romanticised and heroic Celtic ancestry that would not only support a desire for a distinct Irish identity but an identity based on an ancient and unassailable white European origin; 'to encounter the archaeological treasures of Ireland is to appreciate

national pride in a unique identity rooted over millennia in the achievements of an ancient European culture' (Wallace and O'Floinn 2002: 2). This tacitly acknowledges the legacy of Scandinavian and Anglo-Norman influence on Irish craftsmanship but states, 'while acknowledging these various influences, the distinctiveness and originality of the national treasures define the greatness and, in European terms, the uniqueness of ancient Ireland.' The National Museum of Ireland in the early decades of the twentieth century increasingly began to codify 'Irishness' as different and this difference was the means by which museums, as agencies of the Irish state, distinguished Irish identity against other ethnic identities, particularly Englishness. Closely bound up with the postcolonial construction of 'difference' or 'uniqueness' was the linking and in some cases valorisation of armed struggle as a means to preserve this sense of difference. The coalescing of these concepts and their impact on how Irish museums might act as intercultural spaces is something that I found to be very significant within my research in participant feedback at the National Museum of Ireland. As already mentioned the case-study of the National Museum within this research i.e. 'Decorative Arts and History' at Collins Barracks, is just one of four sites that now constitute the federation that is the National Museum of Ireland. Opened in 1997 with a remit to display decorative arts and modern Irish history from roughly 1500 to the present day, its current location is significant in that the museum is housed within what was historically the primary garrison of the British army in Ireland. This was to become an important factor in terms of public responses to the site and collection. The remaining three sections of the National Museum of Ireland are 'Archaeology' at Kildare Street, 'Natural History' at Merrion Square and 'Country Life' in County Mayo in the West of Ireland. This 'federated' sense of a national collection therefore creates an obvious physical break in the telling of Irish history between its prehistoric and

medieval past at one central Dublin site and where the story of modern Ireland takes up again at another, with both buildings being in different parts of the city. Some participants within my sample were aware of this compartmentalisation of Irish history at various national sites but the vast majority were not, the latter being especially the case for minority ethnic visitors. Collins Barracks raised particular issues for some visitors who were confused about the identity of the museum, the nature of some of its collections and what its role was within the larger world of Irish museums.

These questions begin metaphorically and physically at the front door as the museum simply calls itself; 'National Museum of Ireland, Decorative Arts and History'. The word 'barracks' is not evident, nor is it made explicitly clear that this complex of buildings, constructed between 1704-10, was purpose built as the home of the British army in Ireland. It is also not immediately obvious that the site's current name 'Collins Barracks' is taken from the Irish revolutionary leader Michael Collins, hence adding a further nationalistic overtone to the institution. This information only becomes available to the visitor as they make their way through a large exhibition titled 'Soldiers and Chiefs: The Irish at War at Home and Abroad From 1550'. Visitors who might assume that they were coming to see a national collection, in as broad a remit as that term might imply, are instead faced with what could arguably be described as a national military museum. Certainly there are galleries given over to other thematic displays such as 'Silver', 'Costume and Fashion', and 'Furniture', but the emphasis on Ireland's military past and present is dominant in terms of the exhibitions placement within the building and its sheer scale. There is evidence within my research to suggest that the telling of Ireland's colonial past at the National Museum can overtly colour visitors opinions of Irish history as predominantly a militaristic one to the detriment of a more nuanced

understanding of the social, economic and cultural lives actually lived. For instance, Adrian, a Filipino visitor interviewed at Collins Barracks remarked:

> Can I make an observation on what I expected here. Is it because of the war, the effects of the war, Irish people before were not able to express themselves through art. And art is very broad, you have singing, dancing, I mean more like that. They focus more on the military. It's the one way that I can think of what I have seen here. Although maybe that's the history of Ireland!

Numerous comments such as this referencing the militarisation of Irish history past and present raised questions for me as to whether a specific postcolonial discourse might be affecting Irish museum display practice and resulting public perceptions at not just the National Museum but Irish museums generally. In efforts to narrate the story of independence from British rule, the National Museum was perceived by some of my research participants to project the story of Ireland as first and foremost a militaristic one. It became clear in my conversations with Adrian that not only was his sense of wider Irish cultural history influenced by the military exhibition, but that he was unlikely to encounter the depth of historical information he was seeking on the nation's wider artistic forms, namely music and dance, something he had specifically expected to encounter at the National Museum in the capital city. He was unaware that the history of these art forms as interpreted by the country's primary museum are largely confined to the national museum site in the West of Ireland. In a similar fashion many majority Irish respondents were equally left with a strongly militarised and nationalistic version of Irish history at the National Museum. During the weekend that I conducted interviews at Collins Barracks I was struck by the large amounts of Irish male visitors arriving at the museum in groups, sometimes up to twenty or more. Discussions with

some of these visitors revealed that they were either serving or retired members of the Irish army, many of whom had actually been quartered at Collins Barracks before it became a site of the National Museum. They were all visiting to see the military exhibitions. Further discussions with the front of house staff at the museum about these groups confirmed that such visiting was a regular occurrence by those connected with the armed forces. The soldiers whom I managed to speak to in these visiting parties had widespread praise for the museum's displays dealing with the colonial past and felt that it was 'a natural thing to do' at the national museum. There was less certainty however amongst some of these respondents in relation to other exhibits at Collins Barracks. When I asked some of these individuals their opinions about some of the other displays at the museum such as the Asian collections, many had not in fact seen them or been aware of their existence. Some of those who had wandered into the Asian exhibits questioned why such collections were on display at the National Museum in the first place. It was felt that these exhibits did not relate to Irish culture and the overall nationalist narrative they at least felt was being projected, indeed fostered by the museum. However, it would be incorrect to assume that only those with a military background were predominantly drawn to the militaristic exhibitions at Collins Barracks as described. It was notable within my research sample for instance that most of the family groups interviewed at the National Museum had either come to see the exhibition 'Soldiers and Chiefs' or spent some time visiting it. I had initially assumed an obvious explanation may exist though for this. When family units are assessed across my three case-study museums the large presence of fathers visiting Collins Barracks is obvious as opposed to the number of male visitors at the Chester Beatty Library and Waterford Museum of Treasures. It was certainly the case that fathers took the lead in most of the interviews conducted with families at Collins Barracks. In some instances

fathers took the opportunity to view the military exhibits while their wives and children were involved in art activities run by the museum education team. However, following the end of such activities it was often explained to me that the children would then be taken 'up to see the guns and uniforms'. In one particular interactive exhibit children literally have the opportunity to pick up and hold a replica rifle from the late nineteenth century and follow instructions from a costumed solider projected on film as to how to aim and fire the weapon. There are also opportunities for children to dress-up in military costumes and live life as 'in the garrison'. My initial assumptions of the obvious lure of soldiers and guns for fathers and their sons however, was not borne out by interviews with the family groups as a whole. Repeatedly families made reference to the importance of educating their children about the nation's struggle for independence and what colonial life would have been like under Britain. In many instances, the school national curriculum played its part with families coming to learn about the War of Independence or more popularly the 1916 Rising. While the colonial and postcolonial histories presented at the National Museum are an obvious draw for visitors, it was also evident that some Irish individuals were not afraid to challenge the museum's interpretations of the national story. There are examples within my research which suggests that the postcolonial narrative of a unified Irish nationalism as presented by the museum was not taken at face value by all visitors who encountered it. Some majority Irish participants were slightly more critical of the unquestioning nationalistic commentary used by the museum in the telling of one of the most important episodes of modern Irish history, the Easter Rising of 1916. David, an accountant in his thirties visiting with his elderly parents noted:

> Well, some might argue that there's not enough about how prior to the
> 1916 Rising that most average citizens didn't actually agree with the

revolt. Like most people, when the GPO (General Post Office) was occupied, most people just though they were a shower of lunatics and it was only when they were mistreated that the public swung in their favour, the mob mentality, so that's probably not as represented as much, that there was a strong loyalty to the Queen in this country in the late 19th century. They were making a good living under the Queen.

David's perception, largely agreed upon by most historians, that there was stronger loyalty to the British crown in early twentieth century Ireland amongst a large percentage of the population than the National Museum might acknowledge is an interesting observation. It is interesting from the point of view in that it suggests some visitors to Irish museums will contest or question interpretations offered by the museum. David's critique of the National Museum's interpretation of the 1916 Rising also suggests that it would be incorrect to simply assume visiting audiences straight forwardly consume and reinforce nationalistic or postcolonialist perspectives contained within displays or exhibits. Caution therefore has to be exercised in assuming a direct transmission of ideas takes place between a preferred museum message and audience acceptance of said message. This 'vocal audience' as I have termed it within my research may have implications for my contention that museum messaging on positive intercultural interaction will be taken at face value and in a positive light by all visitors. I explore this area along with how my research participants' responded to museum messaging more fully in Chapter 7. Some of my research participants actually acknowledged that the National Museum might be projecting a distorted view of Irish history to visitors as explained by Fiachra, a civil servant visiting with his young son:

Probably if you were to take that (the military exhibition) in isolation, you would be giving them (tourists and non-Irish nationals) a slightly slanted

view of the country, there's a huge emphasis in there on the role of the

British, but in Kildare Street (another National Museum venue), in the old

exhibition it went all the way back to the Bronze Age and the Celtic

history as such. So I suppose it would give a distorted view as it's mostly

about the role of the British in Ireland.

This is an example of a participant who was aware of the telling of Irish history at other

national museum sites such as 'Archaeology' at Kildare Street and was therefore able to

interlink the stages of Irish history in a more sequenced way. It also reveals his sense

that Collins Barracks was the place that told the story of 'modern' Ireland, albeit a story

again dominated by warfare and battles. Fiachra in his discussions of the National

Museum sites displayed a mental mapping of Irish history across such institutions that

was extremely rare within my research sample as a whole and notably difficult for

minority ethnic participants in particular. The significant disjunctures in the narrative or

story-telling process across the federated National Museum of Ireland are important to

note as most of my research participants, be they from majority of minority

backgrounds were actively looking to 'follow a story' or increase their knowledge of

Irish history in a traditional linear fashion. They wanted to know 'what happened next'

and either lost their bearings or interest if subject matter strayed off-point. It is arguable

that the National Museum's proclaimed method of interpretating modern Irish history

through non-linear and non-chronological narrative schemes is at odds with the

preferred learning strategies of its visiting audiences. Other visitors commented that

they were unsure as to who the National Museum was actually addressing itself to.

Uncertainty as to whether it was talking to primarily an Irish or international audience

or indeed both led to confusion and non-comprehension in some instances. Robert, an

American student based in Dublin noted:

there were like places where the text says 'and the rest is history' and I didn't know the history. So it seemed that it was more geared towards people of an Irish background who knew all that.

It also appeared to be the case that the over-whelming scale of the colonial and military exhibition actually influenced participants' perceptions of other displays that were not connected to it at all. Jamie, a twenty eight year old telecommunications engineer had come to the conclusion that the displays in the 'Silver Galleries' were once the collections of the British elite who dominated Irish society for centuries rather than an exploration of the work of silversmiths across various centuries and countries. As he explained:

Like it's good to see the silver on display but it's not good in another way, because that silver was at the cost of the average citizen. Everything's intrinsically linked to the Rising, like you can see the wealth of the English prior to the Rising and then the basis of the people's revolt, you can see the contrasts between the two exhibitions.

Jamie's comments suggested to me that the postcolonial narrative woven through the National Museum's display and interpretation had actually created a scaffolding network of knowledge that had then influenced his reaction to other displays. While it is certainly true that the historical consumption of silver has a class basis, the display at Collins Barracks is not 'intrinsically linked' to the Easter Rising and Irish republicanism. It is a stand-alone exhibition. The wealth that was contained within the Silver Galleries was perceived by Jamie as a further appendage to the narrative of Irish colonial oppression he had just encountered in the 'Soldiers and Chiefs' exhibition. Once my interview with Jamie was over and I had turned off the recorder, I told him the

reality of the context in relation to the Silver Galleries to which he noted that he would now need to go back and re-assess. While the militarism narrative appeared to be affecting some participant attitudes to other display galleries at the National Museum it also seemed to take precedence over other significant events in Irish history, this being particularly the case with the unusual omission of the Irish Famine of 1845-49. Even in the early twenty first century, this catastrophic event could still be said to be seared into the Irish psyche through its regular appearance in literature, plays and film. It is certainly still on the Irish history curriculum at both primary and secondary level as a discussion at the National Museum between Marie, a home worker from Tipperary and her fifteen year old daughter Emer revealed:

Marie   She's (Emer) doing a project in school at the moment on the
             famine and we thought that maybe there might be a thing
             here (at National Museum) on the famine but there isn't –
             we accept that there's a military focus here, but we just
             thought we'd ask. A worker here mentioned the library was
             our best bet, the National Library.

Emer   At the Waxworks Museum they did have a room about the
             famine but it was things moving and sound, they didn't
             have anything to read. You got to see what it might have
             been like with people lying on a bed.

Marie spoke of how she felt it was unusual to have to find out information about a major event in the history of the nation from a commercial waxworks museum rather than the National Museum. The non inclusion of such a significant historical event did raise questions for me as to the degree to which a conflict narrative has affected a wider

and more nuanced analysis of the colonial and postcolonial period in Irish history. The Irish Famine as an important event was mentioned in conversation by several minority ethnic respondents, mostly of Indian origin who compared it to their own great famine of the late nineteenth century. One respondent, Noah, a recent immigrant from Mumbai who worked as a computer programmer in Dublin was keen to point out images to me of nineteenth century prints of the Irish Famine represented in an Indian guidebook he had on Irish history. The participant observations that I have outlined above are important as they ask searching questions of how Ireland's national museum interprets the country's colonial past and postcolonial present. Does the National Museum's emphasis on commemorating conflict overshadow other, equally valid perspectives, such as national artistic and cultural developments? Does it inhibit a deeper interrogation of Irish nationalism both past and present through its predominantly triumphant display methods? The presence or indeed absence of such interrogations may have implications not just for the manner in how Irish museums interpret the nation's past but how they as institutions can foster a climate of intercultural dialogue and debate to the benefit of wider Irish society generally.

Considering intangible and living heritage at the National Museum

In returning to Adrian, the Filipino research participant mentioned earlier in this chapter, my conversation with him demonstrates how his seeking out of diverse Irish art-forms such as singing, dancing and in his preferred case oral story-telling or intangible histories is over-shadowed by Ireland's colonial struggle and the museum's postcolonial response to this experience. Such broader categories of culture were spoken of quite regularly and usually in esteemed ways by minority ethnic respondents

both in relation to their own cultures and that of Irish culture[36]. However, as I have

outlined these art-forms are mainly to be found represented at the National Museum's

site in County Sligo, in the West of Ireland under the category of 'rural life'. There is an

implication here that such cultural practices are connected to a rural (and possibly

romantic past) rather than an urban and contemporary situation. The reality of course in

modern Ireland could not be further from the truth where such art-forms enjoy

widespread appeal and popularity and are constantly evolving through contact with

other influential sources[37]. There seems to be an irony that two of Ireland's most

dynamic living art-forms, music and dance, which have a long and rich history are not

included at the national site which deals with contemporary Ireland in the capital city.

These art-forms, either Irish or non-Irish, are also notably conspicuous by their absence

at my other two case study museums. My research would appear to suggest that these

living art-forms have the potential to act as successful bridges within museums for

increased intercultural interaction and understanding between diverse communities.

Within Irish museology however, the canon of art history and collecting as established

during the period of British occupation[38] has remained in place in the postcolonial

period, effectively relegating the 'performing arts' to a subordinate role. Museums and

the performing arts generally exist in largely separate spheres in Irish cultural life with

hierarchies of 'taste' in operation which on the whole do not see oral storytelling (Irish

seanachie or minority ethnic versions) on an equal platform with an exhibition of

artefacts or old master paintings. Irish museums might do well to re-consider such

assumptions, as a more holistic approach to cultural practices would not only create

fresh insights into the supposed 'value' of Irish art forms but also alter perceptions of

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[36] Storytelling or in Gaelic 'seanachie' has for centuries being viewed as one of the highest art-forms in
      Irish culture.
[37] The music of Sharon Shannon, one of Ireland's most renowned traditional musicians is a case in point.
[38] The South Kensington Museum (later Victoria and Albert Museum) was the model for the National
      Museum of Ireland and much of later Irish museology.

those from other cultures too. Eighteenth and nineteenth century European canons of 'good taste' may not necessarily be the defining notion of 'good art' for those from a non-Western background as Taylor (1992: 98) suggested:

> .....for a culture sufficiently different from our own, we may have only the foggiest idea ex ante of in what its valuable contribution might consist. Because, for a sufficiently different culture, the very understanding of what is to be of worth will be strange and unfamiliar to us.

A case could be made in the Irish context that there may possibly be more in common between majority and minority groups affections for storytelling, musical forms and dance than an appreciation of old master paintings or the more traditional methods of museum display which relegate such art-forms to a rung of lower cultural importance. How 'different cultures' are represented and perceived by visitors to the National Museum of Ireland will be discussed in the next section with particular attention given to the influence and effects of postcolonial theory on display and interpretation practices. I will compare and contrast respondent attitudes to the display of non Irish cultures across the case study museums and discuss whether the dominant sense of ethnic nationalism prevalent in Ireland and witnessed within its museums, pose barriers to such institutions effectively being sites of social cohesion and intercultural understanding.

Representing 'otherness' at the National Museum of Ireland

The manner in which the concept of 'the other' is treated and represented at the National Museum is in my opinion affected by Irish interpretations of the colonial past and contemporary Irish postcolonialist discourse which addresses this past. The National Museum in its display practices tries to avoid projecting a simplified and what

might be viewed an out-dated 'us' (subservient Irish) versus 'them' (dominating British) perspective and has attempted to draw out the complexities of such historical contact. The museum has therefore created what could be termed a 'two-way dialogue' perspective between Irish and British whereby the 'colonial interaction' describes how members of the British army interacted with Irish citizens, whom they daily came into contact with via trade, marriage and other allegiances. There is also elaboration on how thousands of Irishmen actually fought in British regiments across the Empire. However, the fundamental questions raised by this approach are not brought to their logical conclusions. For instance, the not insignificant role that Ireland and Irish soldiers played in helping to create the Empire itself and the human implications of this are never fully developed either through the displays or textual interpretation. The museums' approach to a dual conversation between Irish and British could in fact have been extended to interrogate Irish interactions with other peoples during the time of Empire. This however, is not what visitors witness at Collins Barracks. The museum creates an overarching narrative within its military exhibitions of what I would define as 'the fighting Irish spirit' whereby the Irish who served in the British army are cast as more courageous than the British themselves. At times within the displays and text panels it appeared to me as if the postcolonial drive to assert Irish difference usurps the traditional role of the colonised and coloniser. Specific examples of this are evident in the colourful descriptions of Irish soldiers' involvement in the quelling of what was termed the 'Indian Mutiny' of 1857. In this case the interpretative text accompanying various artefacts from this episode of history leaves the visitor with the impression that if it were not for the courage of those Irishmen within the British regiments of the Indian Army, Britain may have lost the war and potentially control of India. During a later interview with an Indian family, this particular display came up in conversation

whereby it was mentioned that what the West calls 'the Indian Mutiny' for most Indians was the beginning of their 'War of Independence'. Other examples of where this overt promotion of the bravery of Irish soldiers and their distinction within the British Army is notable is within displays around campaigns against the Sudanese in the 1880s and the narrative of the 'gallant' role of an Irish officer on the plains of North America and his 'heroic' death against the Sioux at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. In the latter case, no acknowledgement is made of the fact that Irish immigrants constituted some of the largest numbers within the North American armies that enacted the genocide of Native American peoples. Such postcolonial reinforcement of national strength even praise, of Irish 'enterprise' in the field of warfare did affect participant understandings and attitudes to the representation of different cultures at the National Museum. The effects were particularly noticeable whereby some visitors, having being immersed within the rhetoric of nationalist sentiment, were confused as to why other cultures would then feature at the National Museum. For instance, in a discussion between Tom, an electrician and his friend Paul, who is unemployed, the nationalistic and militaristic focus of the museum led to confusion as to the relevance of the Asian collection being there in the first place:

> Tom   I didn't like the Asian thing, I just didn't really see the
>   connection. It's like we need to fill the space with
>   something so we'll pick an Asian theme.

> Paul   Not at Collins Barracks, no. Like I mean I liked it, but I just
>   don't think it fits in here.

Apart from their feeling that the Asian collection did not 'fit in' at the National Museum they also wrongly assumed that there must be a military connection to the artefacts so as to give them legitimacy by being in the building:

Tom   But it was a private collection, it was given, like there is

          some military images on the tapestry but not much.

The tapestries in question are a series of 12, eighteenth century Tibetan-Buddhist Thangkas which depict the disciples of Buddha and are important elements in Buddhist prayer and reflection. They could not be further removed from notions of war and militarism. These precious Buddhist artefacts, along with other objects from China and Japan, are displayed within a series of rooms on the third floor of the museum in an exhibition titled 'A Dubliner's Collection of Asian Art: The Albert Bender Collection' which opened at Collins Barracks in 2008. Albert Bender (1866-1941) was born into the Jewish community in Dublin and later as an Irish-American citizen donated his collection to the National Museum over a period of years from 1931-6.[39] The location of the exhibition in both its geographical setting within the museum (making it quite hard to find) and in relation to the military exhibitions has a significant influence on visitor attitudes to it as is illustrated by Ruth, a young Irish mother visiting with her family:

I think if I've been in here five or six times, I've only been over there

(where the Asian collection is exhibited) once. Like there's a certain finish

on the military end and there doesn't seem to be an interlink with the Asian

stuff. And even though there's big banners out front, I don't think I was

even conscious of it.

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[39] An intriguing angle to this donation is that the then Director of the National Museum of Ireland, Dr Adolf Bahr was the leading figure of the Nazi party in Ireland. The museum does not explicitly make clear as to whether Albert Bender was aware of this fact while negotiating his bequest to the museum and the Irish state.

The current tone and layout of the Asian exhibition imply certain connotations and elicited varying responses from visitors. The title 'A Dubliner's Collection' immediately highlights that the role and taste of the collector is to the fore rather than any contextual analysis of the Asian cultural artefacts on display. This was a cause for concern amongst some participants within my sample. For instance, Joanne, a lecturer at a third level institution in Dublin had reservations at what she perceived to be an Irish museum's proto-colonial display of Asian cultures:

> There's no explanation of the artists who've made those objects, it's all typical museum speak, things taken out of context in display cases. Horrible! It's very colonial in a way, trying to be up to the British, do you know what I mean? Like, we Irish were collecting too.

The exhibition does dwell to a large extent through its written interpretation on Albert Bender, his career, his collecting activities and his connections to Irish literary figures such as William Butler Yeats. This interpretative approach follows traditional patterns seen at museums which usually highlights the role of the collector and his educated taste and limits the role of the actual objects and cultures on display to purely aesthetic concerns. While Bender's Jewish background is acknowledged in a text panel, this fact for me drew attention to the wider omission of the story of the Jewish community in Dublin and across Ireland as a whole at the museum. Up until the latter half of the twentieth century, the Jewish community in Ireland had been one of the largest minority ethnic groups in the country. Although assembled as a private collection, the Asian artefacts collected by Bender highlight Western canons of art history in dictating what was deemed worthy of purchase from non-European cultures with Japonisme and Chinoiserie dominating. The exhibition therefore largely consists of Japanese prints, Chinese sculpture from various dynasties with perhaps the Tibetan-Buddhist Thangkas

being the least 'typical' of European collectors taste. The European art historical tradition of 'aestheticising' non-Western cultural objects and removing them from a cultural specific context also led visitors to question their validity within the National Museum as illustrated in a discussion between an Irish husband and wife:

Thomas: Funny, I was thinking that it (the Asian exhibition) was more relevant to the National Gallery rather than the National Museum. I'd be more into the traditional museum, historical artefacts and history. I suspect that it's (the Asian exhibition) a big collection of sculptures and paintings basically.

Cynthia: I would have thought the same! I am surprised to find it here, I would have thought maybe the art gallery. Is there a reason why it's here?

For these visitors, the Asian artefacts had been stripped of a working cultural history or any sense of a personal story and were merely classified as 'art objects', now occupying the 'wrong' museum. Reactions from minority ethnic participants provided rich insights into how they felt the National Museum had dealt with representing either their own or other minority cultures. It was interesting that for some minority ethnic visitors, the Asian exhibits were also seen as out of place but for reasons other than their lack of connection to themes on either Irish militarism or purely aesthetic functions. For instance, a discussion amongst women of British-Pakistani heritage visiting the National Museum revealed the conflicting opinions within the group about what ethnicities might be expected to be seen at an institution such as a national museum.

Karen	I didn't expect it (the Asian exhibition), because you'd expect more Irish things.
Sophie	I didn't though!
Karen	Did you not?
Sophie	Well, because most museums, even like back in London you'll get an exhibition doing like, even for one month, arts from another culture, so for me it wasn't surprising.
Janet	I thought it would be more Irish based. The fact that they advertise it (the Asian exhibition) outside is good.

On analysing this groups discussion of the Asian exhibits at the National Museum it occurred to me that they were ultimately confused about the degree to which a museum, particularly a national museum should promote ethnic nationalism, civic nationalism or both to visitors. This was a common theme that I interpreted from debates amongst both majority and minority respondents within my sample across all three case-study museums. Even though some of the British-Pakistani women did not expect to see Asian cultures at the Irish National Museum, the group as a whole were unified in their belief that it was 'a good thing' because 'it shows them (Irish visitors) a different avenue'. In a similar vein, Clara an Irish mother visiting with her adopted Vietnamese son and daughter purely saw the Asian exhibition as something positive that represented diversity and could overlook the museum's foregrounding of the narrative around the Irish collector/donor:

I think it's important, never mind the fact that he (Albert Bender) was born in Dublin. I think it's important to be inclusive.

While a large percentage of minority ethnic participants within my sample were surprised to see non-Irish cultures represented at the National Museum (the same can also be said of the Chester Beatty Library) they all confirmed that such cultural exposure was a positive thing for wider Irish society. It is also clear from minority participant feedback that accurate representation of their ethnic difference and diversity is very important to them, particularly in a public space such as a museum for various reasons. Clarinda, a Japanese student for example who had enjoyed seeing the Japanese woodblock prints within the Bender exhibition explained her worries about Western perceptions of Asia:

> Because I know that people just see Asian countries as the same and that Asian countries have the same culture, I guess, but actually they're different. They have completely different languages of course and cultures.

This sentiment was forcefully elaborated upon time and again in interviews with minority ethnic participants at the National Museum. Imogen, a Korean student in her twenties unaware of the Western predilection for Japonisme and Chinosierie that informed both the colonial National Museum of Ireland's collecting habits and Albert Bender's choice of privately acquired objects, was angered by what she felt was the museum's tokenistic representation of Asian cultures:

> I'm very uncomfortable with it because there is only China and Japan. Of course China affects Korean and Korean affects, I mean Japanese is affected by Korean. There was nothing Korean there.

Similarly Filipino couple Adrian and Anne explained:

Anne	They display costumes from China and Japan, they don't really represent the majority of Asia. I don't see any Indian history there.
Adrian	What about the Middle East?
Anne	They're mostly about China and Japan. Us as Filipinos we feel so insignificant, there's nothing here to represent us.

For these Filipino visitors the regret at non-representation went beyond a superficial sense of representation for representations sake, it was actually connected to the betterment of their current situation in Dublin as Anne explained:

> there are a lot of Filipinos in Ireland now.....it's (representation) nice because at least they (Irish citizens) would know about us.

The regret experienced by these Korean and Filipino visitors who felt their culture had been excluded was intensified as most had not expected to see Asian culture on display in the National Museum of Ireland in the first place. This sentiment was summed up by a Japanese-American visitor who had been very impressed to see her culture displayed:

> I'm Asian, so I thought it was interesting to see the Asian collection. You know in Ireland to see an Asian collection! Asia is so far away from Ireland, to believe that the Irish people would be interested in the Asian artefacts and Asia part, it's nice to know.

Apart from the specific exhibition of Asian cultures represented within 'A Dubliner's Collection of Asian Art: The Albert Bender Collection' there is also a larger display of non-Western cultural artefacts displayed on a ground-floor wing of the museum simply titled 'What's in Store?' Within this space, row upon row of glass cabinets are filled

with the artefacts of various Middle Eastern and Asian countries, none of the items labelled and many not having adequate, if any, lighting. The National Museum website describes this display as:

> This storage facility makes publicly accessible some of the most important collections from the Art & Industry division of the National Museum of Ireland. It is the first time in the history of the institution that the idea of visible storage has been addressed. The entire reserve collections of glass, Asian applied arts, silver and metalwork are shown, including material from Ireland, Britain, Europe, the Middle East, India, Pakistan, Burma, China, Japan and Tibet.

The non-Western collection is impressive in its quality and range and is largely composed of artefacts assembled during the colonial period or contains items from the Bender collection that were not incorporated into that particular exhibition. The first catalogue of some of the Bender Collection was published in 2011 (Whitty) but the majority of the Middle Eastern and Asian collections has yet to be catalogued at the museum. I was struck by what appeared to be the peripheral placement of these collections not only in terms of their manner of display but also in the absence of their interpretation. In an increasingly pluralistic Ireland these collections have the ability to act as natural links to wider strategies of intercultural understanding and education. The museums self-professed acknowledgment of these artefacts as being 'some of the most important collections' is difficult to reconcile with how they are exhibited. The specific manner in how they are exhibited did affect some minority ethnic visitor attitudes to the collections. For instance Noel, an Indian father visiting the museum with his family had managed to come across the displays and voiced his concerns:

'I didn't expect to see them there – they were not well lit anyway which made it all uninteresting, I was disappointed with that'.

On further questioning it emerged that Noel's disappointment was not so much due to the fact that the poor display and lighting affected his enjoyment of the specific objects but rather that the museum in his opinion had not viewed the Indian collections as significant in their own right to have a more professional display. I noticed in my conversation with Noel a reluctance on his behalf to seem to criticise the museum for such displays and on several occasions he tried to qualify his criticism with phrases such as 'but it is a museum for the Irish' or 'it's this country's national museum'. In some instances participants were so taken aback to see objects from their cultures represented that they assumed such collections are merely replicas as Martha, an Indian visitor to the museum explained:

It's just that I think that it's been copied or something, yeah, the materials – the costumes, the jewellery.

On further questioning as to why Martha felt the objects might be replicas it emerged that she thought 'proper' or 'real' items would be more centrally placed within the museum where most visitors would see them. This assumption however did not take away from her opinion that intercultural education was still possible from these objects (authentic or not) as she went on to explain:

There should be a collection of other cultures as well, a mix of other cultures here so at least the Irish will be aware of the other countries. But not just for Indians, I think for all foreigners, all the nationalities I think they could get collections and display it and people would be aware of the other different countries.

Martha's discussions in relation to the real versus the replica and how museums might represent other cultures through genuine or simulated artefacts touches on a wider issue that emerged within participant feedback and which has resonance for all postcolonial museums wherever they may be. My research points to widespread uncertainty amongst museum visitors across all three case studies about the origins of non-Western collections and how they come to be within Irish museums in the first place. There is genuine puzzlement as to whether the objects on display from world cultures are in fact historical items and if they are, what is their provenance. Information on provenance was rarely supplied to the public at my case study sites. The non-Western collections at the National Museum for instance were often believed by those within my research sample to all consist of plunder from colonial times, which is not the case. The same situation occurred at the Chester Beatty Library where again, visitors on the whole were not conscious of the role of the privately formed collections there. A good example of this can be seen in a conversation between Jeremy, a retired bookshop owner and his wife Sonia at the Chester Beatty Library:

> Sonia   I have a theory which I probably shouldn't voice in here (Chester Beatty Library) but I don't think that a huge number of these things should be here at all. I think they should be given back to their countries. I just feel that if I went to China or India or Egypt or wherever and if I went into their big fabulous museums and I saw a huge number of our....like the torcs and objects of gold and things that were found in the bogs, you know, chalices or whatever they are, I don't think I'd be very happy. But then again maybe they have so much stuff that they can afford to allow us to have

it...but it was taken from them really wasn't it? Some places are asking for stuff back aren't they, like Greece. So I do have a bit of a problem with it.

Jeremy   Except though, sometimes with things like the Cultural Revolution, so many things are destroyed, but they are preserved here, not by love but by almost some kind of fate.

In summarising this chapter I have explored how postcolonialism can affect the display practices of museums in general and for the purposes of my thesis, the National Museum of Ireland in particular. I argue that Ireland, as a non-settler nation, differs in some respects from other postcolonial locations such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand. It differs predominantly from the point of view that the end of the colonial period saw an indigenous ethnic majority take control of its own destiny from a colonising force. This ethnic majority was not immediately conscious of diversity within its own ranks such as was the case of postcolonial America and New Zealand where the racial differences of Native Americans and Maori pricked the conscience of the nation. For the newly independent Irish, a strong conception of themselves as the long oppressed underdog emerged which allowed for little consideration of other forms of immediate minority Irish identities such as Traveller or Jew. The Irish colonial experience and postcolonial aftermath has produced and continues to produce emotionally charged narratives and debates in all aspects of Irish social and political life. It could be argued that the nation's museums are equally implicated within these debates. As I have outlined in this chapter, examples of this can be seen within the militarised displays and accounts of Irish history at the National Museum of Ireland. Such postcolonial perspectives potentially present challenges for wider inclusive strategies within the country's museums, as the nation has since independence, used

such institutions to create a largely essentialised understanding of itself and its citizenry. This contrasts with the 'shared' or 'bi-cultural' approaches seen in other parts of the world, or perhaps the attempts of increased inclusivity seen within the museums of old colonial powers. Yet while bearing all these concerns in mind I was equally intrigued by the degree to which minority ethnic participants within my research sample are enquiring about the consequences of what I have termed the 'postcolonial condition' in Ireland and the desire on behalf of these visitors in particular to know more about how Ireland's past is affecting its present. An equally significant development within my research is the finding that while minority ethnic visitors are on the one hand surprised to see themselves or other non-Irish cultures represented at Irish museums, they overwhelming feel that such representation is positive for both themselves and wider Irish society. As the research process developed I began to realise that much minority ethnic interest in Ireland's colonial experiences has more to do with a curious investigation into how a nation had constructed and defined an identity for itself i.e. 'Irishness', rather than any straight forward historical analysis of the Irish-British encounter per se as is being told by the museums. For many minority ethnic visitors within my sample it is Irish identity itself that is under the spotlight and how events within Irish history have contributed to creating such notions of identity. In the next chapter therefore I explore constructions and representations of Irish identity and analyse the roles that my case study museums have contributed to these narratives. I also argue that an interrogation of such identity construction and representation is important within the Irish museum context in light of Ireland's changing racial profile. I also suggest that my research has uncovered complex ways in which Irish museums are actively being used as places where new definitions of Irish identity are taking shape.

6 - Constructions of Irish identity and its representation at the nation's museums

This chapter assesses the degree to which Ireland's position as a former colony as previously discussed may have contemporary implications for concepts of identity and identity construction within the country's museums. Such an analysis is important to my study as an exploration of whether Irish museums are perceived by visiting audiences as sites where notions of Irish identity are interrogated and constructed may provide insights into how such public institutions might contribute to intercultural debate in the country's developing multicultural contexts. One notable marker of identity that I concentrate on within this chapter, ethnicity, has been described as an increasingly self-confident term (Melucci 1989; Hall 1992) and is re-defining itself and its place within modern societies. My research for instance points to multifaceted understandings of twenty first century Irish ethnic identity side-by-side with more traditional notions of this identity within the nation's museums. Museums are considered important locations for both identity maintenance and construction (Knell et al. 2010). For the purposes of this chapter I focus specifically on the research findings that uncovered complex understandings of twenty first century Irish ethnic identity in particular and the degree to which museums as public institutions are incorporated by various audiences as resources for identity construction. The qualitative feedback within my sample is the first in-depth analysis of both majority and minority ethnic responses[40] to identity representation at the nations' museums and attempts to gain insights into how participants discussed and conceived of their own personal and national identities in

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[40] In analysing majority and minority ethnicities, I draw on Eriksen (1993, p. 3-7) who states that 'In everyday language the word ethnicity still has a ring of 'minority issues' and 'race relations', but in social anthropology it refers to aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive. Although it is true that the discourse concerning ethnicity tends to concern itself with subnational units, or minorities of some kind or another, majorities and dominant peoples are no less 'ethnic' than minorities.

such institutions. As has been discussed in previous chapters, Irish society has experienced tumultuous transformation over the past two decades in relation to widespread demographic change through recent immigration and emigration. As with much of the rest of the world, the country has also been caught up in the larger context of globalisation with all the accompanying contestations this brings to questions of identity and nation. All these elements work to undermine any romanticised notions of what once might have been considered a 'fixed' version of Irish national identity and are processes of change evident within my research. However, as I intend to argue, Ireland's former experiences as a colony of the British Empire and its current postcolonial status has had important ramifications for ideas around Irish identity construction. I suggest that one noticeable result of the latter would appear to be a continuing reinforcement of what Gilroy (2000) has termed 'collective identity', most notably from a white Irish majority position. It should be pointed out that notions of 'collective identity' are problematic within most post-modernist perspectives on the theme of identity as May (2002: 131) makes clear 'it is now almost de rigeur in this postmodernist age to dismiss any articulation of group-based identity as essentialist – a totalising discourse that excludes and silences as much as it includes and empowers' (see, for example, Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Bhabha 1994; Gilroy 2000; Hall 1992). While bearing in mind Stuart Hall's (1992) premise that individual identities shift and can be re-negotiated, I am also conscious of his view that processes of globalisation can lead to reinforced interpretations of culture and ethnic identification, which I suggest have significance in the Irish context. I therefore explore in this chapter the degree to which a dominant Irish postcolonial identity appears to either manifest itself or is discussed at the case-study museums amongst research participants. In many instances specific museum objects or displays are the catalyst for such identity

discussion. To better analyse such perceptions of identity within the data, I draw on the postcolonial theorising of Benita Parry (1998) against that of Homi Bhabha (1994) and Gayatri Spivak (1990) in attempts to assess the implications of such identity constructs for Irish national identity. I also discus past and present conceptions of Irish identity and explore how the findings from this research either conform or diverge from such socially constructed phenomena (Fenton 2010).

Museums and Identity

Museums can be perceived to act as sites where society catches glimpses of itself, where it sees what is included and what is excluded, what is part of 'us' and what is 'other'. They can be integral locations of identity formation as has been suggested by Crooke (2007, p. 14) '.....collections are an expression of our identity. As we build collections they become an extension of ourselves; they reflect what we are interested in, our values and our judgements'. These values bestow on museums a very important social responsibility to consider carefully and negotiate the messages they project to the public about images and notions of identity, nation and belonging. Ethnicity as a characteristic of identity and as a term and field of study is a recent development (Goldberg and Solomos 2002), appearing for the first time in the English language in the 1950s (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 6) and defined as: 'a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity among at least some of its members'. Considering all these elements of the term and their interlinked nature, it is often ethnicity that is perceived to hold a central position when it comes to debates within the literature around diversity. As Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge (2007: 30) point out:

'ethnicity is of cardinal importance as a basis of social conflict. Ethnicity

may coincide with the other dimensions to social differentiation although,

more often, human diversity is reflected in ethnic identities, which cut

across other differentiating criteria. Where this occurs, it is commonplace,

although not invariably so, for ethnicity to take precedence over class or

gender in the individual's sense of identification'.

Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge (2007: 30) go on to cite Sillitoe and White (1992) in

defining an ethnic group as 'a socially distinct community of people who share a

common history and culture, and often language and religion as well'. While

acknowledging these various definitions, I feel it is critical to recognise that

membership of such groups is fluid and shifting. Therefore, rather than seeing diversity

as a purely ethnic consideration, for the purposes of my research, diversity is instead

viewed as a heterogeneous concept, recognised as having multiple component elements.

Perceiving diversity in this way proves more helpful in analysing how Irish museums

can effectively contribute to framing or re-framing identity narratives (Sandell 2007).

Also, by envisioning such a wide parameter for identity narratives to be discussed by

those within my study, I as the researcher have the opportunity to see how participants

themselves relate to and describe their own notions of identity. Such an approach is

particularly useful in the consideration of those under-represented within socially

distinct communities as a whole, such as women, sexual minorities, young people and

minority faith groups. It is argued that human recourse to constructed notions of ethnic

identity and nation is on the wane, with Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*

(1983) repeatedly cited as a bulwark against what many postmodernist thinkers would

consider regressive thinking. However, the continual ethnic strife and warfare that has

erupted in various locations around the globe in the latter decades of the twentieth

century and continuing into the twenty-first century would seem to contradict the assumed end of ethnic and ethno-national loyalties. Participants within my research from both majority and minority backgrounds more often than not formed opinions on objects or their display methods that were influenced by aspects of their ethnicity and customs connected to their cultural backgrounds. Within the museological literature the continued importance of the subject is evidenced by numerous publications that deal with issues of identity, community and race (Watson 2007; Crooke 2007; Littler and Naidoo 2005). Postcolonial museums have been, perhaps more than others, involved with the complexities of ethnic construction and representation since independence. First Nations have increasingly asserted their ethnic and cultural rights and national museums, so important to national recognition and legitimisation, have been seen my many as key objectives. Ethnicity as a concept can divide opinion: in one sense identity defining and in another discriminating, possibly even racist. Stuart Hall (1992: 162) however has been vocal in his support for the principle of difference and has sought to alter the parameters of the debate around ethnicity:

> The fact that this grounding of ethnicity in difference was deployed, in the discourse of racism, as a means of disavowing the realities of racism and repression does not mean that we can permit the term to be permanently colonized. That appropriation will have to be contested, the term disarticulated from its position in the discourse of 'multiculturalism' and transcoded, just as we previously had to recuperate the term 'black', from its place in a system of negative equivalence. The new politics of representation therefore also sets in motion an ideological contestation around the term 'ethnicity'.

Such changing theories around identity raise challenges for national museums that confront increasing calls from self-identified ethnic groups for formal recognition within these national institutions. Can the experiences of postcolonial museums offer some ways forward? If, as outlined in the previous chapter attempts at 'hybridity' and 'biculturalism' have been notable projects within the national museums of settler nations in accommodating ethnic difference, what have been the experiences of non-settler countries such as Ireland and how do they differ? To date, no empirical information has been gathered within the Irish museum context to assess whether or how these specific cultural institutions have responded to the objectives of the National Action Plan Against Racism[41], which in many ways would offer up information on how these institutions are negotiating issues of ethnic diversity and race in a national context. My research goes some way in offering insights into the degree to which Irish audiences view the roles played by museums as sites that contribute to identity confirmation and construction in multicultural Ireland. My research also asks questions around how current narratives of Irish identity may exclude more than they include and whether the nation's museums are complicit in propagating such a situation. In order to explore these areas further however, it is necessary in the next section to analyse past and present conceptions of Irish identity.

Concepts of Irish Identity

For much of the latter half of the twentieth century, the field of Irish Studies tended to view and discuss Irish identity as primarily constituting two communities or cultural traditions, one being nationalist and Catholic the other unionist and Protestant (Finlay 2007). This debate was set against the intense political situation and conflict of what

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[41] Irish museums are not subject to the policies of an over-arching strategic organisation such as is the case for museums in the UK under the umbrella of Arts Council England. Both publicly and privately funded Irish museums are on the whole autonomous institutions.

was termed the 'Troubles' of the 1980s and 1990s. Political and social theorists however increasingly sought to dissolve these essentialist binary identities and attempted to bring about more expansive understandings of what Irish identity might mean or look like in the hope that such thinking would offer some common ground between both communities. Finlay (2004) has termed such attempts at identity re-negotiation 'cultural pluralism' but stresses that for much of the latter half of the twentieth century the process always remained predominantly bicultural in focus. The promotion of cultural pluralism was a concerted effort in the first instance by Irish revisionist historians to challenge and critique traditional Irish nationalist discourses which they felt were responsible for constructing and maintaining a monolithic and monocultural Irish identity following independence from British rule in 1921. This identity was and still is regularly defined as white, Catholic and more often than not patriarchal in nature (O'Connor 2008, MacÉinrí 2007). Its origins are often linked with the harnessing of Irish cultural nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century in a struggle against the British Empire. As Irish nationalism developed it increasingly began to conjure ideas and images of an 'ancient' ethnic identity prior to the colonial period that was effectively carried over into the identity of the postcolonial independent state. Such a search for an 'ancient' identity or heritage led to the birth of the Celtic Revival[42] at the end of the nineteenth century and a sense of being a 'unique' people. It is always important however to be conscious of the constructed nature of such ideas of 'uniqueness'. For instance, Smith (1998) cites Connor (1994, p. 202) in highlighting how such claims to 'unique descent' are always purely social constructions:

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[42] The Celtic or Irish Revival consisted of a loose federation of several cultural organisations including the Gaelic League (estb. 1892) and the National Literary Society (estb. 1892) that aimed to revive an ethno-cultural sense of Irish identity between the 1880s and 1920s through language, literature and the arts.

> The sense of unique descent, of course, need not, and in nearly all cases will not, accord with factual history. Nearly all nations are the variegated offspring's of numerous ethnic strains. It is not chronological or factual history that is the key to the nation, *but sentient of felt history* (emphasis added). All that is irreducibly required for the existence of a nation is that the members share an intuitive conviction of the group's separate origin and evolution.

Of course, this 'sentient of felt history' had an ironic outcome within Irish postcolonialism in that the legacy of the strident nationalism that overcame British rule and the accompanying notions of 'separate origin and evolution' of the movement, tended to exclude many of those who played prominent roles (both politically and culturally) in the fight for Irish independence, such as members of the Protestant Anglo-Irish communities. Groups such as the Anglo-Irish muddied the waters of a belief in a 'unique descent' as did the existence of other minority communities such as Irish Travellers and Jews. The reality of such diverse ethnic Irish groups has always seriously undermined the supposed homogeneous 'white Celticised' racial image projected by the Irish state since independence. The revisionist agenda of the 1960s onwards to promote cultural pluralism however was to largely fail as it encountered a backlash from an Irish population who felt revisionist historians were attempting to re-write the struggles of the colonial and postcolonial period (now an important marker of Irish identity) in attempts to win over the Protestant population of Northern Ireland. More successful in their attempts at re-formulating concepts of Irish pluralism and identity were postcolonial theorists such as Declan Kiberd (1995, 2001) and Luke Gibbons (1996). Irish postcolonial theory of the 1980s and 1990s, unlike revisionism, did not seek to overthrow the sacred cow of Irish nationalism in the quest of opening up debate on

identity. Instead it advocated a more nuanced position that on the one hand heavily

critiqued the restrictive and exclusionary nature of national identity that emerged in

postcolonial Ireland, and on the other argued for a re-visioning of this national identity

in ways that might be truly representative of all citizens. This re-visioning of identity

calls for an openness as to what could be incorporated into notions of 'Irishness' rather

than closing down such options. At the same time however Irish postcolonial thought

did not make recourse to theories of hybridity or 'interstitial space' as advanced by

Homi Bhabha (1994) or Gayatri Spivak (1990). Rather Irish postcolonial thinking has

tended to follow Parry's (2004, p. 65) conviction that 'if it is conceded that the structure

of colonial power was ordered on difference as a legitimating strategy in the exercise of

domination, then it could be argued that the construct of binary oppositions retains its

power as a political category'. Parry's arguments against hybridity theories in

postcolonial contexts are to a large extent connected to her scepticism of Bhabha's use

of post-structuralism and literary criticism in these debates, which for Parry denude the

historical voice and role of resistance offered by the colonised/oppressed. Within the

Irish postcolonial situation there is an additional historical element which has tended to

undermine classical adaptations of hybridity theory as a useful means of exploring Irish

'shared identities'. This is the fact that Ireland was a non-settler colony (Ashcroft,

Griffin and Tiffin 1995) administered by a small but militarily effective colonial

presence from Dublin. In many ways, Irish identity has for centuries used 'Englishness'

to define what it was not. While specific postcolonial calls to revitalise an Irish identity

albeit distorted by colonial experience has had its critics (in particular Howe 2000) it

could be argued that it has at least provided a theoretical frame to re-assess concepts of

Irish identity within an increasingly multicultural nation. Within my research

'postcolonial Ireland' is certainly a recurring theme within participant feedback at the

case-study museums and acts as a scaffolding device against which many individuals

articulate their understandings of Irish and non-Irish identity and cultural difference. I

explore this situation more fully in the next section with regards to the case-study

museums and assess the degree to which the postcolonial condition affects

contemporary ideas of Irish identity.

Locating 'Irishness' at the nation's museums

As outlined in previous paragraphs there has always been a close relationship between

conceptions of Irish national identity, rooted in a difficult colonial past, and the

country's present postcolonial positioning of itself. It could even be argued that in some

respects such experiences have been internalised by successive generations since

independence as being symbolic of national character. That the nation's museums are

entangled within these concerns has already been noted by Reid (2005, p. 213-18) who

claims that 'much of the displays at both Kildare Street and Collins Barracks (sites of

the National Museum of Ireland) continue to support nationalist interpretations of

history. The cultural identity and heritage constructed to underpin Irish sovereignty

retains its iconographic power, despite an increasing irrelevance to contemporary

society'. Reid (2005, p. 207) goes on to cite O'Mahoney and Delanty (1998) who argue

from a similar perspective that 'the continuing legitimacy of an exclusive cultural model

that sprang from the nationalist politics of the nineteenth century inhibits the creation of

a post-national identity relevant to the needs of both the Republic and Northern Ireland'.

In neither case do the writers define however what they envisage a 'post-national

identity' might look like or what elements would give it substance or indeed how it

should be displayed at the national museum. My study analyses the ways in which

research participants discussed national identity at the National Museum of Ireland and

the other case study museums and therefore offers insights into whether the public view

such institutions as limiting or opening up space for explorations of identity discourse in the minds of ethnic majority and minority visitors. This section therefore highlights some of the diverse participant feedback around perceptions of Irish identity that emerged at the case-study museums. While the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks has a wide array of exhibition galleries covering themes as diverse as Irish costume, period furniture, silver and the work of important Irish designers such as Eileen Gray (1878-1976), it is the exhibition 'Soldiers and Chiefs: The Irish at War at Home and Abroad 1550-2001' that was referred to by most participants within my sample when discussing perceptions of Irish identity. This is perhaps unsurprising as the exhibition dominates a full wing of the barracks complex and is one of the first exhibition spaces that visitors encounter on entering the museum. Observation of visitor interaction with front-of-house staff at the museum reception also revealed that the 'Soldiers and Chiefs' exhibition was regularly suggested by museum staff as the first (and in some instances) 'the best' exhibition to see while visiting the museum. Opened in 2006 as a permanent exhibition, visitors get to discover not only the role of the British army in Ireland but also the experiences of those Irish who fought in the service of the Empire. The exhibition covers a chronological time-span beginning with the Elizabethan Wars to Ireland's current peace-keeping missions with the United Nations. It should be noted that the militaristic context of Collins Barracks as a historic colonial site was a subject that the National Museum wanted to acknowledge and incorporate into its displays and interpretation from the outset of it becoming a museum (Dunlevy et al.). For some visitors, direct links were drawn between these exhibits and their perceptions of Irish identity. This could be seen in a discussion between Matt, a thirty-four year old accountant visiting with his friend Ben, an administrator also in his early thirties who both self-identified as white Irish:

Matt	Well, every country has some kind of identity and I think that their museum, their national museum reflects their identity.
Ben	They (museums) tell you where you came from.
Interviewer	What kind of identity or sense of 'Irishness' do you think people take away from here?
Matt	That it's a very militant kind of a background, that there was a lot of trouble, especially against the English.

For these visitors notions of what it might mean to be Irish was integrally connected to the country's colonial struggle against Britain. Both spoke passionately about their sense of awe in coming face-to-face with items connected to Irish nationalist heroes such as revolutionary leader Michael Collins. They were not alone however in creating these links between Irish identity and conflict as historical imagery was also conjured up by other participants in relation to more contemporary political 'struggles' in Ireland. For instance, the country's initial rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 was celebrated by Irish Euro-sceptic parties, such as Libertas, as a defence of Irish freedom and national identity against an oppressive, homogenising EU project. Connections to these debates were made by white Irish couple Mike, a fifty-two year old social worker and his wife Marie, a retired nurse visiting the museum with their two children. As they noted:

Noel	It's (military history) hugely important in Irish politics at the moment, most of the main government parties trace some of their credibility to the 1916 Rising.

Marie   And Libertas, in the recent referendum, they had images of

the assassinated leaders of the 1916 Rising and there was

things like 'they died for your freedom, don't throw it

away', things like that. It is still very vivid, very strong.

For many white Irish participants within the research sample there appeared to be a strong connection between concepts of Irish identity and an independent nation, feelings that were heightened through interactions with museum objects and displays about the colonial past. Amongst some minority ethnic visitors resident in Ireland however, the colonial narratives at the National Museum were just one of many perspectives being sought on understandings of Irish identity. For instance Adrian and Anne, a married Filipino couple in their twenties who are both nurses in a Dublin hospital and residents in Ireland for over a year were visiting the National Museum in order to learn more about Irish life and culture. It was the colonial exhibition that left a lasting impression on them in relation to reflections on 'Irishness' as Adrian explained:

Adrian   We were thinking about how this museum reflects the Irish

but it's more on the military history, the buildings that were

destroyed during the war. So we were trying to compare it

in an Asian way and with musical culture or dancing or

dressing and something that would speak about native Irish.

We were trying to look for it but it was more about British

people coming over here, train people here and how people

here cared for their armies and how they fought for other

colonies. What's coming in mind, it's more on that.

Although, maybe that's the history of Ireland?

This couple had not been aware that the National Museum of Ireland is a federation of different sites. Their interest in discovering Irish cultural identity through music, dance and folk life may well have been served better through a visit to the National Museum site in Co. Mayo in the West of Ireland. However, it is arguable that most citizens and foreign visitors, unaware of the organisational structure of the museum, will perceive the National Museum, Collins Barracks as the definitive location which tells and defines the national story. It does after all hold the remit to interpret Irish modern history. Connections between colonial struggle and Irish identity were also evident within respondent feedback at the Waterford Museum of Treasures. However, in this instance museum display practices and use of interpretative text focused more on the colonial story from a local or regional perspective rather than the over-arching national picture. Yet, in a similar fashion to the National Museum in Dublin some respondents were attempting to uncover wider definitions and understandings of symbols often (and at times stereotypically) connected to Irish identity. For instance, Helen a refugee from Malawi living in Waterford for five years had attempted to find out at the museum the origins and meanings behind the use of the harp, commonly seen as a symbol associated with Irish identity:

Helen   ....then one of the artefacts I saw there, the thing that they put on most of the Irish stuff, whether it's a passport, what do you call that? ......the harp!

Interviewer   Did they explain why the harp is used?

Helen   No, this guy I asked him when he was showing us around. He didn't tell me the foundation of that. Because I just see it

on a lot of things like. When you see Ireland, you see the

harp somewhere.

Helen's particular interest in finding out about the significance of the harp as a symbol connected to images of Irish identity had been triggered by her personal experiences as a refugee to the country. It was prominent on all legal documentation she had had to deal with and of course is the primary image on the Irish passport. Within the group interview that Helen participated in, it was interesting that none of the white Irish participants were able to offer her an answer as to the origins or significance of the harp symbolism. This is perhaps unsurprising as symbols such as the harp, shamrock or celtic cross hold no significance for most majority Irish who are aware, indeed cynical of the superficial and commodified nature of such images. This however was not the case for many minority ethnic participants within my sample who perceived such symbols as holding true value for the nation – afterall would something of no value be the face of the Irish passport? Of all the images that are often associated with Irish identity the harp is a leading candidate and has international recognition. Discussion of it occurred frequently across the case study museums with some visitors hoping that answers would be found to its significance within the museums such as in the case of Anita, a South Korean student visiting the National Museum of Ireland who was surprised to not find more information about it at that museum but various incarnations of the motif on sale in the museum shop:

Why is the harp a symbol to Irish people? Because when I walk through

the streets I see lots of harps.

Some of the minority ethnic participants appeared to take certain symbols of 'Irishness' that they encountered from the mass media and expected to find a depth to these

otherwise commercialised slogans within the nation's museums. Museums, both national and local, may well have to be clearer about where tourist advertising stops and historical and contemporary cultural evaluation begin. The success of such commercialised motifs of Irish 'identity' can be directly credited to the marketing campaigns of the Irish tourist board Failte Ireland (translated as Welcome Ireland) and the indirect use of the image by corporations such as Guinness. The relationship and impact of the Irish tourist industry to the country's museums is worth bearing in mind when discussing issues around Irish identity. For instance, the mission statement of the Irish government department[43] with responsibility for Ireland's cultural institutions, including its museums states that its role is 'to enrich Irish society by supporting the growth of a competitive and sustainable tourism industry and increasing access to, and participation in sport, the arts and culture'. While references to increasing access are certainly welcome, what is interesting to note about the government position is the primary importance it places on the tourist industry. Throughout the department's policy documents, the idea of public cultural inclusion and the benefits of such participation to social capital and cohesion could be argued to be almost secondary to the economic value placed on culture and the arts. This economic use of culture in Ireland has already been discussed by McManus (2005: 236) who states:

> There is a conflict between the commodification of heritage for tourism or other economic purposes and its role in helping to determine cultural identity. Successive Irish governments used tourism as a vehicle for economic development. The industry is now the largest, Irish-owned internationally-traded sector of the Irish economy.

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[43] Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

While there is nothing new in seeing museums as part of a nation's wider tourist offer, the underlying economic imperative of culture as income generator may create conditions in Ireland where efforts to present a more heterogeneous image of Irish cultural identity and society is a potential threat to the 'image' that generates tourist revenue. As McManus comments 'the idea that there is no such thing as a single Irish identity or heritage is unwelcome to the tourist industry'. Considering the current economic difficulties that Ireland faces, it may well be the case that museums may not only raise or introduce admission fees, therefore limiting social participation, but potentially shy away from representing Ireland as a truly multicultural country, hence towing the tourist industry line on what 'sells'. From the outset of my research I had been aware of the powerful cultural image of Ireland created by Failte Ireland. In all media forms, Ireland is projected as an ethnically white, largely non-urban (except when citing Joyce's city of Dublin) land of ancient ruins and folklore. Hugely successful marketed images such as the harp, shamrock and Guinness are not only effectively utilised by Failte Ireland to further its economic objectives but actually have become international if questionable symbols of Irish identity. Within my research many majority respondents considered such imagery superficial and shallow representations of what 'Irishness' might mean. A family group at the Waterford Museum of Treasures had problems in reconciling the commercial aspect of tourism which they saw as diluting the cultural experience, with the layout and function of the museum itself:

Daughter   I don't like the idea of having such a big gift-shop. It would
             be nice if it was maybe to the side. It would be nice to have
             some exhibitor's pieces or something, or optionally walk

through the gift-shop if you want to. All that real tacky kind
of 'Oirish' stuff, shamrock stuff.

Father
But then again you have the transition from the tourist
office. It's quite a different transition from what you'd
associate with the museum. That's a problem.

Mother
I think the actual building is very well done, with the view
boxes on the floors but the immediate impact being more of
sales is not the right impact. I would prefer if they were
subsidiary. The museum and the exhibits should have the
immediate impact. When you walk in here, it's an office
and a shop and a tourist office and then culture. There
should be something there that enforces the central theme of
the building.

It had also occurred to me that the powerfully constructed image of Ireland and
Irishness by the tourist industry as sometimes made manifest in Irish museums could be
a barrier to cultural participation by non-white Irish citizens, irrespective of socio-
economic background. Although I did not ask specific questions about the Irish tourist
industry in my interviews, the fact that it came up in discussions at all case-study
museums raised questions for me around the extent to which the public link the tourist
business to Ireland's museums and wider cultural domain. Expecting to find perhaps
uneasiness from minority ethnic respondents about their lack of presence within this
industry and the role that museums play to sustain the tourist business, the feedback was
more complex than I had anticipated.

Minority ethnic respondents from a variety of social backgrounds were confident in situating themselves outside of and distinct from the 'heritage image' created by Failte Ireland and the case study museums and actively interrogated the symbolism that went with the Irish heritage industry. It was one of the many instances within my research where respondent's sense of their ethnicity came into play to discuss that which differentiated them from the country's majority ethnicity without this difference necessarily being a 'contested' area. What is important to bear in mind about these notions of difference, which at the current time may be specific to the Irish context, is that Ireland's minority ethnic population is predominantly a first generational one as opposed to second or third as seen in other EU countries. None of the minority ethnic sample in my research for instance had been resident in Ireland for more than fifteen years. The question remains open therefore as to how second and third generation Irish minority ethnic citizens will react if they do not see themselves reflected in a future Ireland.

Attempts at locating or defining 'Irishness' in a more wider cultural context outside specific narratives of colonialism or 'collective identities' did emerge in discussions at the Chester Beatty Library. In some respects, the non-Irish nature of the collections at the Chester Beatty Library could be said to have focused participant attention even further on what Irish identity might be or mean. Some Irish social commentators however, suggest that future ideals of more open interpretations of Irish identity may be under threat following the passing into law of the Citizenship Referendum and Immigration Act 2004. By a majority of almost four to one, the Irish electorate voted to amend the country's Constitution, removing the right to citizenship from future

generations of Irish-born children who could not demonstrate generations of belonging to the State (Mullally 2007, p. 28):

> The Twenty-seventh Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2004 proposed that a new section be added to Article 9 of the Constitution to read as follows:

> 9.2.1. Notwithstanding any other provision of this Constitution, a person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and its seas, who does not have, at the time of his or her birth, at least one parent who is an Irish citizen or entitled to be an Irish citizen is not entitled to Irish citizenship or nationality, unless otherwise provided for by law.

> (Mullally, p. 34)

Lentin and McVeigh (2006, p. 4) have argued that for the first time in Irish history, notions of Irish nationality, citizenship and identity are now tied specifically to ethnicity:

> The state was changed utterly by the June 2004 Citizenship Referendum, in which almost 80 per cent of the Republic's electorate voted to link citizenship and blood by constitutionally differentiating, for the first time in Ireland's history, between citizen and non-citizen.

Notable within participant feedback in Waterford was the degree to which many minority ethnic and refugee respondents had utilised the museum to both assist their integration into the local area[44] and consider the local museum an information resource

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[44] Participants spoke of following tours at the museum to improve their English language skills, using the museum education facilitates to support their children's education in local schools, particularly in the area of history.

that could give them an insight into the 'identity' of Waterford itself. As a regional museum, the Waterford Museum of Treasures also appears to open up the fractures of majority white Irish identity amongst research participants more so than was the case at the National Museum in Dublin. For instance, visiting Irish majority individuals from other parts of the country variously described the identity of Waterford people as 'different', 'self-contained', even 'aloof'. Amongst Waterford residents themselves, notions of identity were split with some participants from more rural areas of the county feeling that the museum was not necessarily representative of them and that it perhaps 'identified more with the lives of Waterford city people'. While it is still uncertain as to what future impacts constitutional change will have on Irish identities as a whole, there was evidence within my research sample of complex and diverse twenty-first century constructions of Irish identity underway. Significantly museums and their collections were actively been used by some participants as resources for such identity work as will be described in the next section.

Museums and the construction of diverse Irish identities

Within the museological literature significant international work has already being carried out in relation to museums both representing and constructing identities in national contexts (Knell et al. 2010; Watson 2007; Macdonald 2003; Hallam and Street 2000; Karp, Kreamer and Lavine 1992, Karp and Lavine 1991). The word identity in itself is of course an extremely complex term and covers not only ethnic diversity but also gender, class, age, religion, and sexual orientation. Museums are often key sites of interrogation for such concepts with audiences bringing their own personal stories and backgrounds to such institutions. I encountered such interrogations taking place at all case study museums and by minority ethnic visitors in particular. Unlike many of the Irish majority visitors who describe Irish diversity by utilising historic examples in a

third person perspective[45], migrant participants were actually living current change and hence talked about identity issues from a first person scenario. This was particularly noticeable in minority ethnic discussions around the possibilities for their future generations' integration in Ireland and how their plural identities would be conceived. For instance, Sarah an account in her late twenties from Malaysia but now living Dublin noted at the Chester Beatty Library:

> We are culturally Chinese, you identify with your culture, with your practices at home, but you call yourself Malaysian. I assume that my children will probably say the same – they are Irish, national, and will be proud to be Irish, but as well as that they will be proud to be Chinese because that is my heritage and I hope, I think it would be nice for the new generation of us, it will be nice for them to see not just the Irish culture but also have access to this library to see their parents culture.

Museums as places that store cultural and national identities are viewed as resources that could enrich and nourish the constitute elements of a 'new' Irish identity. Such processes were highlighted by Jessica, an engineer originally from Hong Kong visiting the Chester Beatty Library:

> I have two Irish friends, they are a couple and they adopted a Chinese girl and the Chester Beatty Library is actually a very popular place for the parents who have adopted Chinese kids, because the last time I came here to see a show, we saw a lot of them with their adopted kids. The parents

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[45] For some majority Irish participants, notions of Irish diversity and ethnic identity was sometimes alluded to with reference to historical invasion and colonial occupation i.e. Scandinavian (Viking), Norman or British legacies. This in a sense illustrates how indigenous Irish identities such as Travelling Communities, Jewish, and Anglo-Irish tend to be excluded from a larger conception of Irish national identity. Such processes of exclusion begin at school and are also evident within museums.

like to bring them here, so they can see Chinese culture. Adoption is

becoming very popular in Ireland now and a lot of them are from China so

the parents bring them here to get them to know their own culture. Also,

my two friends Tom and Rachel, they actually started to learn Mandarin

because they want to teach the kids Chinese.

At the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks, Adrian and Anne a Filipino

husband and wife mentioned how it was their belief that their children should somehow

be able to access and be proud of their Filipino-Irish identity at the National Museum.

They were uncertain however as to whether and how an Irish national museum could

achieve this:

I think it's important that they know about Asian things, because a child

with an Irish & Filipino, they would know of a homeland culture. This is

how they lived, this is how they show respect to their parents and the

elderly, that's important. I don't know if this museum can do that.....they

would make that child feel that they are from the Philippines?

This couple's uncertainty was based on solid grounds. Could, indeed would Irish

museums so steeped in a postcolonial mindset be able to incorporate other identities

within a larger national frame? Surprisingly, my research appears to suggest that Irish

colonial and postcolonial experiences may offer a bridge of understanding between

increasingly plural Irish identities. As has been outlined within this chapter, Irish

majority participants within my sample strongly self-identified with a particular ethnic

and cultural background that can be seen to have origins in the colonial history of the

nation. This identity often emerged over the course of interviews at the case-study

museums in relation to specific objects, displays or even on the basis of the architectural

style or geographic location of the museums. At the Chester Beatty Library the specifically non-Irish nature of the collections seemed to even further accentuate Irish racial and cultural identity in the minds of visitors from both majority and minority backgrounds. As my research progressed and it increasingly became apparent from the data that a strong sense of a 'collective identity' was emerging amongst majority Irish respondents, it raised questions as to how Irish minority ethnic residents related to this majority identity and whether as citizens they potentially felt that they and their identities were being excluded from the national story? Could Irish identity even be a threatening force to minority groups? This does not appear to be the case from feedback at the case study museums. The data suggests that many minority ethnic respondents had beliefs in their own 'collective identities' that were just as strong as majority respondents. Significantly many minority ethnic respondents themselves were originally from postcolonial states other than Ireland. In a similar fashion to the Irish majority respondents, minority participants demonstrated in their conversations that they were acutely aware of the former colonial history and postcolonial present of their 'home' countries. In many cases minority ethnic respondents showed a desire to make connections between the colonial experiences of the Irish and their own backgrounds. An example of this occurred at the Chester Beatty Library in a discussion between two male Indian software engineers in their late twenties who had recently moved to Ireland to take up employment. They had been surprised to find the Asian and Middle Eastern artefacts on display at the Chester Beatty Library and had initially come to Dublin Castle, where the museum is now situated, to explore Irish history. As one explained:

> I came to see some Irish history and didn't see it. We both have been
> colonies and I wanted to see what happened because of British dominance,
> to see how the culture of Ireland changed. Like I mean we speak their

> English, our education system is based on the British culture, so I just
> wanted to see how it has impacted on here.

At the National Museum, Collins Barracks minority visitors readily made connections to the colonial exhibitions and displays and explained how this element of Irish history reminded them of how such struggles equally forged national identities in their origin countries including South Korea, India, and the Philippines amongst others. An example of this is seen in a comment from Sasha, a Korean student living in Dublin visiting the National Museum of Ireland:

> I liked the soldier museum part, it was quite interesting, I never knew the
> Irish history, that they had a civil war and they were participating in World
> War One. I like history and I saw that Ireland and England fought each
> other and I wanted to know the details. I was interested in the IRA and the
> army side and that they fought for government and freedom. It's quite
> similar in Korean history.

Therefore the strong 'collective identities' that emerged from within my data was in many cases partly due to such identities forcefully constructing themselves at various points in time to overcome a colonising force. Irish postcolonial national identity, which might initially seem exclusive from racial, ethnic and religious perspectives, appears in the context of the case-study museums to actually open up links of communication, mutual interest and shared experiences between extremely differing identity groupings. This makes for unusual findings when consideration is given to the various reports mentioned in Chapter 1 around racist incidents in Ireland. It would appear that Ireland's colonial past and the postcolonial identity that it has created could provide the nation's museums with a rich source of material with which to explore future concepts of Irish

identity and intercultural understanding. Ireland's postcolonial position offers possible foundations on which to apply Smith's (1998: 205) notion of a 'reshaped nation', one that can be truly inclusive of minority peoples. The multiple identities that constitute this diverse Irish nation however should not be viewed as merely 'symbolic', rather, they are deeply held concepts. To talk of such characterisations of identity, be they ethnic, cultural, religious or other as being merely symbolic within a wider Irish national context runs the risk of demeaning the importance attached to them by the many minority participants within my sample. These myriad identities are increasingly important contributing components of what it might mean to be an Irish citizen. The strength of such self-identity also challenges classical postcolonial hybridity theory and finds support in the theorising of Werber and Modood (2007) and Friedman (1997: 81) who states that:

> 'hybrids, and hybridization theorists, are products of a group that self-identifies and/or identifies the world in such terms, not as a result of ethnographic understanding, but as an act of self-definition – indeed, of self-essentialising – which becomes definitions for others via the forces of socialisation inherent in the structures of power that such groups occupy: intellectuals close to the media; the media intelligentsia itself; in a sense, all those (and, one might add, only those) who can afford a cosmopolitan identity'.

The shared experiences of postcolonialism may offer a platform in which such identities are recognised as contributing to new and dynamic formulations of Irish identity rather than be side-lined or relegated to tired debates around assimilation.

In this chapter I have argued that Ireland's colonial and postcolonial experiences continue to significantly influence contemporary constructions and perceptions of Irish identity. Museums, as places that purport to tell the story of the nation are important locations in which Irish identity can be said to be represented, projected and created. My research with visitors to the three case study museums finds that majority white Irish participants overwhelmingly identify with, and spoke of, having a strong ethnic and cultural 'collective identity'. Such perceptions of identity were often reinforced through the case study museums, their collections or even the buildings they occupied. The colonial past was regularly cited by participants as being an element critical to their ideas around their own and wider Irish identity. However it also became apparent within my findings that minority ethnic visitors within my sample are involved in a process of interrogating definitions of Irish identity - past, present and future. Their questioning of Irish identity as represented by the case study museums is in many ways connected to minority participants assessing how they, but also, their future generations could be part of an Irish nation. Significantly, my research suggests that institutions such as museums are actively being utilised by the country's minority ethnic citizens as resources in the creation of new forms of Irish identity. The postcolonial context that gave rise to what might be seen as a narrow Irish nationalism following independence is now, over ninety years later, opening up the possibilities of a diverse, intercultural contemporary Ireland. This is largely because elements of Ireland's colonial story as told within its museums and still present in the fabric of Irish society would appear to have the ability to act as a bridge around intercultural debate and understanding amongst the country's diverse ethnic groupings. The implications for the nation's museums are numerous, exciting and challenging. An acknowledgement by Irish museums that the country's colonial experience is not unique would be an important first step. It is after all the shared

experiences of colonialism and empire by peoples worldwide that suggests Irish identity is not seen as an exclusionary force by many minority participants within my research. Many of these individuals themselves identified as originating from former colonial nations in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. It may be the case therefore that the blind acceptance of traditional postcolonial hybridity theory and a relinquishing of collective identities need not necessarily be the only route to creating a successful intercultural nation. Such post-modernist calls are difficult propositions for former colonial nations such as Ireland and many of its minority groups, themselves originating from other postcolonial states. Although Ireland still struggles to define its approach to multiculturalism and is unsure of how interculturalism will work in practice, my research suggests that there are encouraging signs that such debates are already taking place within the nation's cultural institutions where new forms of Irish identity have the potential to be celebrated.

7 - Museums, the media, and multicultural Ireland

> The media occupy a key site and perform a crucial role in the public
> representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultural power. It
> is in and through representations, for example, that members of the media
> audience are variously invited to construct a sense of who *we* are in
> relation to who *we* are not, whether *us* and *them*, *insider* and *outsider,*
> *coloniser* and *colonised*, *citizen* and *foreigner*, *normal* and *deviant*, *friend*
> and *foe*, the *west* and the *rest.* By such means, the social interests mobilised
> across society are marked out from each other, differentiated and often
> rendered vulnerable to discrimination. At the same time, however, the
> media can also serve to affirm social and cultural diversity and, moreover,
> provide crucial spaces in and through which imposed identities or the
> interests of others can be resisted, challenged and changed.

(Cottle 2000:2)

Simon Cottle's statement is referenced in an important Irish study that investigates the intersection of media broadcasting (radio and television) and the representation of cultural diversity in Ireland (Titley; Kerr and King O'Riain 2010). *Broadcasting in the New Ireland: Mapping and Envisioning Cultural Diversity* (ibid) is a significant new piece of research into how Irish minority ethnic communities consume and interact with media platforms in Ireland. The findings of this research, I intend to argue, have relevance to my own study on the possibilities of Irish museums as sites of intercultural negotiations, whereby museums in general and Irish museums in particular might be viewed as constituting part of a wider world of mass media and communications

(Hooper-Greenhill 1994). Such an envisioning can then prompt questions around the role of the audience and the complex ways in which they engage or indeed disengage with the media message being offered. Within this chapter therefore, I aim to explore the role of audiences and their relationship with media messaging and attempt to assess what such outcomes might mean for my research agenda around the representation of the 'other' at Irish museums. Questions that I consider within this chapter include - how do those within my research sample 'read' what the case study museums appear to be telling them about collections that represent non-Irish cultures? Is there a sense that my participants consume museum interpretation in an undiluted form or do they construct their own 'readings' from the displays and textual information provided? Is there evidence within my research that participants resisted the preferred interpretations[46] of the museums and took oppositional stances to what might have been 'officially' offered to them? In considering these questions, I draw upon the literature of cultural and audience studies which provide framing devices against which to understand my participant feedback. Throughout the chapter, I point out where this analysis intersects with the overall theoretical framework of my research within multicultural theories advanced by writers such as Bhikhu Parekh and Will Kymlicka and the possibility that Irish museums might act as agents of intercultural dialogue. I also discuss how museums are now being viewed as part of a larger mediascape (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998) and what the implications of such a position are for both museums and audiences. It is notable for instance, that one of Titley, Kerr and O'Rian's (ibid) main conclusions is that minority ethnic groups perceive media representations of their ethnic, racial and cultural identities as having consequential effects on their lives in Ireland. Such a finding poses the question as to whether there is evidence within my

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[46]   Apart from discussions with museum staff, I also analysed museum text panels, labels and guidebooks to get a sense of what the case-study museums' preferred interpretations might be.

sample of a similar concern in relation to how museums, as public institutions, represent notions of cultural difference? If museums are to be now seen as part of wider media resources, what similarities do they share, if at all, with the more traditional media formats such as print and television and with more recent social media? Finally, I consider whether audiences discriminate about which media sources they view as more reliable in gathering information from, and if so, what are the implications of these assumptions for museums. In concluding the chapter I discuss how wider debates within Irish media sometimes emerged within the interviews with research participants. The most notable example of this is the on-going critical situation around the placement of migrant children within the Irish state school system. I aim to demonstrate how museums, as institutions, and the educational services they provide acted as a case of comparison against schools for some interviewees within the sample on issues of intercultural education. In the next section I go on to discuss how cultural studies has re-envisioned the formerly straight forward role of audiences as simple receivers of mediated information that 'affected' their lives to more nuanced, complex understandings that puts individual experience centre stage.

What's in the message - perspectives on how audiences 'read' media discourse

Research around audience studies and the media has tended to increasingly analyse the history of the interaction between these two sociological domains and the effects that such interactions have had on each other (Silverstone 1994, Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, Ruddock 2001). To date, three broad stages or notions of development have generally been identified within this literature. The first stage, termed the 'effects' phase has tended to see an unbroken link between the media source, for instance a television transmission or newspaper article, and the reception of such information unquestioningly by the public. In such a conception of media – audience relationship,

'the essential model here is of the media as a narcotic where messages are injected into the mass audience as if from a hypodermic syringe. The audience in turn responds to this stimulus in a fairly direct manner' (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 5). It quickly became clear to most cultural studies theorists that such a model did not take into account the complex, inter-networked relationships of audiences. The capacity of such same audiences to respond differently to media messages was a consideration that had equally not been adequately reflected upon. In light of such reasoning, a second phase of media-audience relationship was developed which was termed 'uses and gratifications'. Within this model, the audience for the first time was given prominence in terms of how they were actively perceived to interpret media messages and were seen to be 'active'. The uses to which individuals put media sources for their own gratification, rather than merely been viewed as 'pawns' within the larger media world, came to be seen as an important step forward in theorising about audiences. While the 'uses and gratifications' model was perceived to be an advancement in thinking on the 'effects' understanding of media-audience relations, both have been criticised for their overly behaviourist underpinning and their perceived simplistic and individualistic understanding of the sociologically diverse composition of audiences (Abercrombie and Longhurst, ibid). Stuart Hall's (1990) now famous 'encoding/decoding' framework was to provide the third phase in media-audience understanding and significantly alter thinking around such interactions. It also had the effect of shifting the underlying basis of theorising about audience interaction with media outlets from a behaviourist to a more critical approach. Hall's model of interrogating media and audience relations was rooted in a Marxist perspective, which not only argued that media messaging needed to be viewed as a distribution of power and world views from ruling elites but that such message distribution was 'encoded' in a language of semiotics (favourable of course to

the elites in society and their world view) which was then later 'decoded' by mass audiences. It was Hall's theorising as to how audiences might 'decode' the 'encoded' media message that still casts a significant influence over cultural and audience studies today. As Procter (2004: 70) explains:

> Hall's three hypothetical positions from which decodings might be made:
> 1) The dominant-hegemonic position: where the viewer decodes the message in terms of the codes legitimated by the encoding process and the dominant cultural order.
> 2) The negotiated position: a contradictory position where the viewer has the potential to adopt and oppose the dominant televisual codes. For example, the British Muslim viewer who responds to news of '9/11' by condemning the 'terrorist attack' on America, while protesting against the construction of Islam as 'uncivilised'.
> 3) The oppositional position: One of the most significant political moments for Hall, where the viewer recognises the dominant televisual codes and opposes them.

In relating such theorising back to my central research question on the potential of Irish museums to foster better understandings of cultural diversity and national pluralism, two important and intertwined issues become immediately obvious. This first is the importance that now needs to be placed on understanding the role(s) of the audience member in constructing his or her own reaction or relationship to media discourse, in this case, museum interpretation and representational practices. Secondly, as the above summary of media-audience theory shows, the increasing realisation that audiences are themselves 'active' in their appropriation of what pubic media sources (including

museums) might tell them, implies that any proactive endorsements of a multicultural Ireland that might be proposed by Irish museums may in fact be subject to negotiated if not outright oppositional readings by Irish audiences. As Richard Sandell (2007: 11) notes in relations to museums challenging various forms of prejudice:

> This 'turn to the audience' clearly presents interesting opportunities as well as challenges to museums understood to be countering prejudice through the dissemination of purposively constructed social messages.

Bearing in mind this 'turn to the audience' I examine in the next section how media and audience studies have impacted on the museological sector and what such cross-fertilisation of ideas might mean for Irish museums and their audiences. I then go on to explore the extent to which participants within my sample at the case study museums accepted *preferred* readings, took *negotiated* positions or constructed *oppositional* stances to the interpretation offered to them. At all stages, I bear in mind how such readings might have implications for Irish museums as sites of intercultural negotiation and dialogue.

Museums of communication as well as conservation

The importance of viewing museums as elements within a wider mediascape has been extensively discussed by MacDonald (2002), Hooper-Greenhill (1994, 1995) and Lumley (1988). Such analysis is important as it allows for the considered study of visiting audiences and their perceptions of what is displayed to them at museum and gallery sites rather than simply viewing 'the museum' as a place that is only of importance for the curation and conservation of objects. Hooper-Greenhill (1994) for instance, has utilised the methodologies of audience studies to suggest that up until recently, most communicative approaches at museums have been representative of the

'effects' or simple model, in that exhibitions and displays 'fed' a preordained message to the visiting public. As she explains (ibid: 41):

> The simple model can be applied to a museum exhibition. It is possible to describe the exhibition team as the source, the exhibition as the transmitter, with objects, texts and events as the channel of communication, the visitors' heads as the receivers, with the visitors' understanding as the final destination.

While it could be argued that such models of communication are still prevalent for many museums, it is the case that increasing numbers of museum professionals are aware of the limitations of such approaches and are actively attempting to analyse and incorporate audience feedback into their public interpretation and communication strategies. Such moves highlight the growing realisation within the museum sector that the audience are indeed 'active' rather than 'passive' in their interpretation of what they see presented to them. It is therefore, becoming increasingly questionable for museums to claim that supposed audience 'mis-readings' of preferred 'encoded' messages within exhibitions and displays are purely a result of poor communication strategies on the part of the museum. While certain communication strategies such as overly complex usage of museological or art historical vocabulary and non-engaging display methods may well play a part in confused messaging, the active role of the viewer in constructing his or her own response to an exhibit seems to be increasingly something that has to be taken into account. In considering the engaged or 'active' nature of audiences within the sphere of museum studies, it is instructive to look at findings in cultural studies more generally in order to be aware of possible similarities or differences. For instance, of the

three possible methods suggested by Hall (1990) as to how audiences might 'decode' what media outlets might be telling them, it is the 'oppositional position' that has received the most attention in recent years by theorists (Silverstone 1994). This is perhaps understandable on the part of researchers as there is something exciting, even heroic, in seeing audiences as gaining their own voice and actively rejecting the promoted media message. However, it would seem that caution is advised in overly viewing audience 'oppositional readings' as defiantly resistive in nature as Silverstone (ibid:149) explains, 'critical distance (of an aesthetic, a ludic or even a moral kind) does not necessarily involve challenging the basic referentiality of the text or its ideological force. Viewers can be critical but still accept the basic, dominant or structural meanings offered by the text'. This viewpoint has relevance for my findings as there is evidence of such 'critical distance' by some participants within my research sample around the representation of non-Western cultures in particular at the case study museums by minority audiences. In a similar fashion to the theorising of Silverstone (ibid) such questioning amongst some minority ethnic participants does not always act to nullify the 'preferred message' being offered by the museum. Other factors came into play to create the 'critical distance', for example the migrant experiences of some within my sample, appeared to influence and even mediate visitor's critical responses to exhibitions and the narratives they purported to tell. An important development in relation to this is the increasing role that constructivism has come to hold in the museum world over the past twenty years or so (Hein 1998). Constructivist learning theories as utilised within museums and advocated by George Hein place great emphasis on the personal life experiences of individuals and therefore the need to be as open-ended as possible in the provision of information to accommodate such diversity of thinking. In a practical way within some museums this has taken the form of multiple view-points

being offered within exhibitions and a move away from the more traditional singular message or opinion. The constructivist approach to museum interpretation and exhibitionary practice raises some interesting issues for Irish museums attempting to negotiate, even promote, multiculturalism and interculturalism. On the one hand it opens up a space for the inclusion of many voices and opinions, where the notion of personal experience is not only acknowledged but actively welcomed. Yet, the opening up of such a space, equally has to consider that voices and opinions critical and perhaps openly hostile to notions of multiculturalism and interculturalism can also enter. In such a situation, it would seem that Parkeh's (2006) conception of 'cultural interrogations' or debates that take place within public spaces, might offer a possible way forward, where inherent assumptions around multiculturalism and interculturalism and the reasons behind such assumptions have to publicly prove themselves. However, the successful facilitation of such negotiations would be dependent on the ability of museums themselves to be critically aware of the engaged role that the individual brings to such discussions and a realisation that they as institutions are part of a wider media dialogue. Visitors to museums are certainly bringing such interconnected media dialogues within them over the threshold of the museum and do not leave such debates at the door on entry. The next section therefore examines the degree to which my research participants could be said to have perceived Irish museums within the wider context of media sources. I also assess visitor reactions to the messages and interpretations put forward by the three case study museums, particularly around non-Western cultures and whether they took dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, or oppositional positions to the information provided. I go on to consider what such analysis might mean for future intercultural interrogations at such sites.

Irish museums as participants in a wider mediascape?

A clear message to emerge from the research that Titley, Kerr and King O'Riain (2010:175) conducted with Polish, Nigerian and Chinese citizens in Ireland was the exceptionally diverse nature of media sources that their minority ethnic respondents drew upon.

> Media users rarely if ever exist in *media ghettoes*, exclusively seeking out home services and programmes. Instead, this research details the complex everyday media worlds constructed by research participants, where channels, sources and programmes across different media, and from different contexts, are integrated in practice. Irish, diasporic and transnational media are engaged, critically assessed and often watched and used relationally.

Feedback from the minority ethnic participants within my sample do in some instances draw parallels with these findings whereby references to other media sources are often interspersed when discussing museums or uses of museums. However, my research would also seem to go further and suggest that museums themselves are sometimes seen as important media sources in their own right, particularly by minority groups who 'pick-up' information on local and national narratives and in some cases use them as barometers against which Irish attitudes to migration and multicultural issues are measured, even contested. An example within my research that illustrates these points well is Helen, a migrant from Malawi who has lived in Waterford for five years and who is candid in describing her multiple media usage which incorporates her general interest in history and museum visiting:

I've watched loads of documentaries about ancient Egypt and they show

lots of interesting things, so that maybe one day you want to go back on

the internet and search more for the stories.

Helen has a self-expressed interest in history. Her comment is insightful as not only does it outline the diverse media sources, for example, television, internet and museums that she uses to follow up her interest but the manner in how she does this. While she might watch documentaries on television, this activity is often followed up by further research on the internet with additional exploration of topics at museums themselves. Helen was a frequent user of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter and had actually browsed the website of the Waterford Museum of Treasures but found the content disappointing. Her descriptions of how she remembered some features of her museum visiting experiences and forgetting others was spoken of in a manner very similar to how she described her internet browsing – taking on board some information, leaving other information out. However, it also became obvious in conversation with Helen that she had occasionally utilised the local Waterford Museum of Treasures in a manner similar to any other media outlet in attempting, as a relative new-comer, to find out things about Waterford city. As she explained:

you should be able to tell a story about the place (Waterford). Like say you

are there for the first time, you should be able to have the ideas of what the

place is all about. So I think such things make the museum interesting.

Although she is interested in history, it became obvious through the course of discussions with her that what actually made the museum *interesting* for Helen is her use of it and its collections and narratives as an information source that gave her some perspective or insight into the local population, city and its history. Helen's use of the

phrase 'to tell a story' almost conjurs up media associations. While without doubt she

utilised other social services and media outlets to orientate herself, the museum is

viewed as an additional source of useful information. What also seems to be of

particular importance however for Helen is the potential of the museum to project a

public image, an advertisement even, of how she might like her own culture and African

culture in general to be represented back to others, particularly the local Irish

population. For instance, in a heated debate within the focus group of which Helen

participated, questions arose around the validity of representing non-Irish cultures at the

Waterford Museum of Treasures and what would be the relevance of such

representation. Helen attempted to elaborate to the mostly white Irish group on how the

museum could offer windows onto Malawian and African cultures more generally, and

how this could assist wider understanding and tolerance in Waterford. I quote Helen at

length as it is important to get a sense of how she tried to elaborate her point to the other

women in the room:

> The way I saw some artefacts and items in the museum, some of the
>
> lifestyle was here (in Ireland) in the 1950s and in my country it is now. I
>
> can say, ok we are different by a generation, our thinking can't be in the
>
> same way, because we (Malawi) are a little bit behind, because we are still
>
> using to go to the wells to draw water, to go and gather firewood and from
>
> where I'm coming from, the people before, they made clothes from the
>
> bark of the trees, you scrape the whole tree, the first and second layer, you
>
> actually scrape it to make clothes. And while that was happening in my
>
> country you developed the industrial revolution here and then people
>
> started to learn how to wear clothes because some materials were coming
>
> here through the catholic priests that came to Africa. So you can actually

tell between the periods, ok when there was the industrial revolution here, they were still wearing the barks of the trees. We can trace it from there and now there's industry, so that we can make our own cotton and take it into the power-looms and make clothes out of it. That's the way I look at it.

Helen was attempting to explain to her colleagues in the focus group that while African countries such as Malawi may be lagging behind Ireland in a developmental capacity, this was something that Ireland had also experienced in its history, in the 1950s and 1960s. On the whole, Irish news stories about Africa tend to focus on developmental issues connected to the continent and its categorisation as a third world entity. As Waterford city now has a substantial African population, especially from Nigeria and Malawi, Helen felt it was within the possibility and remit of the city's museum to explain to its citizenry such similarities of development but at different periods in time. Helen's suggested mode of representing this difference was through photographs, as it was her viewing of black and white photographs of Waterford city, its inhabitants and the quayside at the museum that brought such ideas to her mind in the first place. It appeared to me that Helen's descriptions of how Africa and Africans might be represented within her local museum (of which they are currently not) was something that was informed by both her own personal experiences but also wider social concerns, namely the situation of Malawians in Waterford and public perceptions of them as a new community in the city via various sources. She had been pleased for instance when, in discussing how the local museum represented the colonial period and eventual Irish independence, a local paper published a piece on celebrations by the Malawian community to celebrate Malawi's independence day. Overall, Helen's awareness of how various media platforms, including museums, reflected on her community

appeared similar to how Titley, Kerr and King O'Rian (2010) described Nigerian interrogations of wide-scale media sources in relation to how they felt they and African issues more generally were depicted in Ireland:

> Irish media do not exist in isolation, and discussion of Irish media are nearly always relational. Irish produced news – and media in general – can be seen as significant points of reference in the densely networked, transnational media environments of many Nigerians in Ireland. An implication of this is that Irish media are not only contrasted and evaluated in relation to each other, but to channels, services and approaches available in this extended mediascape.

In a similar fashion to the above observation, it could be argued that Helen's discussions of her uses and feelings towards the Waterford Museum of Treasures appears to place it within the category of a 'channel' or 'service' that had bearing on her life as a migrant in Waterford city.

Challenging the museum message

Other minority ethnic participants also showed an awareness of the overlap that can exist between representation at museums and the wider media which may have implications for intercultural awareness. Some visitors spoke of seeing parallels between Western television and film representations of non-Western cultures and their display at Irish museums. Katia, a Japanese national teaching at an Irish secondary school and who arrived in Ireland in 1999, had come to know of the Chester Beatty Library through her Japanese guide book and then later by hearing about it on Irish radio. This prompted her to visit and to eventually make contact with the Education Department at the museum where she now occasionally carries out workshops around

Japanese arts and culture for the museum. Katia's responses to some of the interpretative strategies around the Japanese collections at the Chester Beatty as well as Japanese collections she had seen at other European museums is instructive in terms of perception of media cross-over:

> you know the images of the samurai and feudal Japan are really seen as
> kitsch by us Japanese..... but that's how they are in cartoon books and tv
> here, it's what people expect.

Katia's response to the representation of elements of Japanese culture could almost be described as a classic example of a 'negotiated position' as described by Hall (1990). While she is proud to see her culture represented and appreciated within Western museums she is also quietly dubious of the 'kitsch' nature of this representation, influenced as she sees it via other mass media forms such as television and cartoon magazines. When questioned further as to whether and how she might like to see Japanese culture and its artefacts represented differently or in a more nuanced way, her response revealed a more pragmatic concern around general tenets of intercultural awareness rather than 'getting it right':

> This museum is very unique, it's a mixture of different cultures and
> religions, it's rare to see. It makes people's mind broaden, to open eyes to
> the other worlds. It's so precious, especially the Oriental collection.

Although Katia shows awareness that current museum representations of her culture can be potentially simplistic and echo stereotyped images seen within wider popular media, this was not of undue concern to her. The bigger and more inter-culturally important goal in her final analysis is that the Chester Beatty Library offer Irish visitors an introduction into Japanese culture. Some of Katia's fellow countrymen however, are

more critical of Irish and western representations of Japan and Japanese culture and see a danger in generic representations whether that be at museums or in the wider media. Tony, a Japanese sociology student in Dublin, while enjoying the Chester Beatty Library generally, felt that it had created a 'stage-set' image of what it wanted Japanese culture to be rather than what it actually was or is. His conversation is peppered with a questioning of the word 'authentic' as is summed up in his statement about his understanding of the historical multicultural nature of Japanese life:

> The set-up, the displays, I don't know...they're trying to show the
> 'authentic' Japanese. But actually Japanese culture has always had
> elements from Korea and China, they don't talk about this.

It appeared to me that as a student of sociology, Tony was confident in his ability to make connections between his knowledge of history, media studies and the Chester Beatty Library's mode of collection representation during the interview. This was clear in his discussions around curation tactics, western imperialism and film:

> managers arranged how things are here (at the Chester Beatty Library), of
> course there is Orientalism here, this museum is a part of imperialism. In
> western movies about Japan, this is what you see!

Tony, unlike Katia, focused more on what he perceived to be the potentially negative aspects of the messages that the Chester Beatty Library might be transmitting about Japan and its cultures. While his 'decoding' of the Chester Beatty exhibits could still be described as negotiated, for instance he conceded that at least Irish visitors got an insight (even if simplified), his was a more critical stance. Unlike Katia's pride in the fact that cultural objects from her homeland were on display in Dublin and therefore allowing access to Irish audiences to her culture, Tony had reservations about the actual

understandings that would come from these encounters. These reservations seemed to consist of visitors taking away ideas that Japanese culture is homogeneous and inherently warlike (through over-representation of the samurai or Japan's role in World War Two) but yet able to display extreme pacifism through activities such as the art of tea-making and as skilled calligraphers. In a personal capacity, Tony had experienced some verbal racial abuse on his arrival in Dublin with comments that he 'go back to China'. Like many other Asian participants within my sample, Tony expressed concerns that Irish citizens tended to view all Asians as the same, drawing no distinctions between countries and cultures. His experiences may well have contributed to his reaction to the Japanese displays at the Chester Beatty Library, in particular his wish for a more diverse, complex angle to Japanese, and by extension, wider Asian cultures. He described museums as 'distinguished' places that could portray difference in a positive manner. His descriptions of the racist incidents he encountered in Ireland are echoed within the numerous 'letters to the editor' sections of many Irish broadsheets over the course of this research. The following is just such an example, from another Japanese national which was published in The Irish Times[47]:

> As a Japanese student living in Dublin, I read with great interest your
> article on immigration. Since coming to Dublin, I have been attacked by
> several Irish teenagers on a number of occasions. There are many
> elephants in the room of Irish society but this particular creature has the
> capacity to hurt both international and Irish people in the near future.
> M Akahori, Ireland

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[47]   A 'colony of Nigeria' or a 'culturally diverse' society, *The Irish Times*, Wednesday June 27, 2007

If Katia and Tony's attitudes to the displays and interpretation of the Japanese collections at the Chester Beatty Library could be described as broadly 'negotiated' in outlook there is also evidence of more direct 'oppositional' stances at the same museum. Two Chinese students directly challenged the museums representation of Tibetan culture as being distinct from Chinese and felt that the museum had a direct role to play in explaining such political and cultural contexts to Irish audiences:

> Yeah. They (Irish citizens) don't know much about China, but for example they do know about Tibet! Like, they want Tibet to be free, but they do not know about Chinese history. Like for this museum ok, they should at least bring some Tibetan things, to do the history of Tibet and the history between Tibet and China. Let Irish people know that Tibet is part of China. I know that most Irish people would say that Tibet should be free but they are wrong. For us, Tibet is part of China. The Communist party changed Tibetans lives from bad to good, from poor to healthy.

For these Chinese visitors, and possibly others that visit the Chester Beatty Library, the 1950 invasion of Tibet by China as understood by the West, is considered in completely different circumstances. It is viewed more of a long awaited historical re-connection between two regions of a singular country albeit with differing ethnic groups. During the interview with these students, who freely stated that they had no affinity with communism or the communist party, they spoke at length about the various 'Free Tibet' campaigns that they saw in the Western media. What appeared to trouble them in particular was the way they perceived that the narrative seemed to ever only be broadcast in a one dimensional way with the 'good' Tibetans pitted against the 'bad' Chinese. They were both of the opinion that the Chester Beatty Library could and

should host an exhibition on the topic that would lead to more constructive debate. Both respondents recognised the difficulties involved for the museum should it ever try to tackle this sensitive subject:

Interviewer   Do you think a show like that would be controversial?

Student   I think it would be a challenge....but if Western people read more books and saw things like in here (at the museum) about the Tibetans and the Chinese I think they would understand better.

Although the participants within my sample cannot be taken to be representative of the Chinese community in Ireland, their comments do raise an interesting issue in that one of the largest minority ethnic communities within Ireland may feel a disconnect from wider Irish society with regards to how they feel they are characterised as a nation and people. In my discussions with these Chinese visitors there was a distinct sense that the media was something that they felt could not be trusted. This unease was partly due to their perception of Western portrayals of the China-Tibet issue but may also perhaps have been connected to their own cultural backgrounds where the press is firmly under the control of the communist regime. A sense of negative portrayal of China and the Chinese in Irish media outlets was very much in evidence within Titley, Kerr and King O'Rian's (ibid) Chinese focus groups. It is interesting to see that these two Chinese participants should view museums as public institutions that they would expect, and to some degree trust, in attempting to narrate the protracted issues of the China-Tibet situation. This seeming preference of the museum over other traditional media outlets appeared to be connected to the central position of the artefacts within the collection. It is the cultural object that allows the museum to hold a trusted position over other

communication sources. These visitors certainly believe that Irish public opinion is positioned negatively against the Chinese because of the politics around the Tibet issue and were defensive in expressing their opinions. While as the researcher I maintained a neutral position with regards to their comments, it was obvious that the participants were anxious as to how I, as an Irish national, might perceive their opinions and ultimately them. They at no point, however, elaborated on whom they thought should tell this story in terms of how it would be achieved at a museum and how a consensus should be arrived at upon which stories to tell. There was rather just generic statements and notions that museums 'could do' or 'should do' these things without a considered idea of how this would work in practice. The reactions and conversations of the above minority participants within my sample around some of the displays at the case study museums have echoes in Macdonald's (2002: 239) conclusions that visitors sometimes 'constructively appropriate the exhibition into their own cultural lists, and discuss it in relation to their own lives and interests'. The range of examples outlined above illustrate the variety of minority visitor reactions to displays from 'negotiated critique' to outright 'oppositional' in nature. In the next section I move on to assess how majority audiences decoded displays and representations of non-Irish cultures.

Belief in the 'authoritative' museum message

Minority ethnic cultures and their representation within museum displays are also discussed by some majority Irish participants within my sample. On the whole in these situations majority 'decodings' of the exhibits take the form of 'dominant-hegemonic' positions where the perspective put forward by the museum is rarely, if ever, challenged or queried. This in itself is probably not surprising as to critique such displays would require some degree of knowledge about either the artefacts or cultures displayed. Such a situation raises important questions on the nature of how Irish museums could be

perceived by majority audiences to 'speak' with authority about the country's minority

ethnic cultures and their representation. As I have already outlined in the previous

section, there is a large degree of questioning from minority visitors about how they and

other non-Irish cultures are presented within Irish museums. For instance many of the

actual displays themselves are predominantly concerned with formal aesthetic concerns

of the objects or artefacts and less so with their socio-cultural connections, areas that

many minority visitors tend to talk more about in relation to such exhibits. Adjectives

such as 'nice', 'beautiful', 'pretty' are common amongst Irish majority participants

when giving their reactions to museum displays on other cultures. Where minority

visitors might elaborate on how a particular object relates to a religious or social custom

that is important within their culture there is a sense that Irish majority visitors are not

accessing this level of insight. Their depth of cultural engagement beyond the surface

aesthetic could be argued to be questionable. From the museums perspective however,

such public responses might be deemed a success as their primary intention at the outset

of such exhibitions is to mostly highlight the artistic excellence of the artefacts rather

than work within a sociological frame. There is a preponderance of Irish majority

'confirmatory' responses to the museums central aims of highlighting the artistic beauty

of non Western cultural art and artefacts within the research data. However, there is also

evidence of some instances of 'oppositional' reactions to the actual inclusion of

minority cultures at Irish museums. These responses however, do not seem necessarily

connected to racist or exclusionary sentiment but rather a genuine questioning of why

non Irish cultures should be displayed within the nation's museums at all. An example

of such a response is seen within comments from Maureen, a participant at one of the

Waterford focus groups who did not share her fellow participants' sentiments about the

need for non-Irish artefacts at the Waterford Museum of Treasures:

I think if it's (cultural artefacts) tied into the history of the country that you could see a connection, then it's relevant to be there, but just to have a display for the sake of having a Japanese display that doesn't tie in culturally to what the museum is trying to tell you, it's a waste of time.

For Maureen the point of a museum is to tell the story of Irish history and represent Irish culture, past and present. In particular the Waterford Museum of Treasures, of which she was talking about, is there to serve the purpose of telling the story of Waterford. Japan is simply another country, another culture. The reality that there are Japanese-Irish citizens living in Waterford does not enter the equation. Even for those within the focus group who challenged Maureen on the importance of having cultural diversity at Irish museums, a 'them and us' binary is still in evidence, where 'Irishness' is perceived as a homogeneous entity. This can be seen in a comment by a participant named Anne who disagreed with Maureen's conception of what and who should be displayed at Irish museums:

I think that it's good as well to have stuff from other cultures, you know what I mean. Because otherwise, if you're not from Ireland, then when you go to a museum, it is to see Irish stuff. But for Irish people, like I'm probably never going to go to Japan so I'd quite like to see Japanese stuff. And I think for kids it's good because they're learning about other countries and their history in school and it's good for them to see exhibitions on other countries.

Even though these two participants have differing views about the representation of cultural difference at Irish museums they both had not considered the diversity of Irish identity that now means something other than might be traditionally displayed within

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the nation's museums. In common with some minority ethnic participants, Irish majority visitors at the case-study museums at times referred to external media sources such as television or film when discussing exhibits of non-Western provenance. In some instances such media influences had life-long impacts on how individuals came to appreciate non-Western cultures. An example of this is David, a retired bookshop owner visiting the Chester Beatty Library with his wife. He explained how a television programme had inspired him to learn more about Chinese and Japanese cultures which he then supplemented with visits to museums:

Interviewer   What made you so interested in Chinese or Japanese culture?

David   I suppose it's both. I could tell you a story, I ended up in hospital in the middle of the 1970s and I saw this series on television called the Kung Fu Series and there was the pilot film on and that really caught my imagination. I suppose I'd always been fascinated by Chinese things even as a kid so I thought I'm going to do something about that, so ever since I've been doing martial arts, did art, went to college, come to museums like this and I write haiku as well, which is a kind of conventional poetry, modern poetry.

David's interest in China and Japan from a young age meant that he had what could be described as perhaps a wider and deeper exposure to these cultures than many other Irish visitors within my sample at the Chester Beatty Library. Yet, even with his lifelong interest, David was honest about the limitations of what he truly knew and

understood about Asian cultures while visiting a Chinese art exhibition that happened to be taking place at the museum while this research was being carried out:

> I loved the devils and mortals and all that, what was your man's name, Chaing Lu or something? There's so much I don't know, I must say. Some of them are very dynamic and strange things going on and they caught my imagination today, I didn't know anything about this particular artist and some of the more Zen like paintings as well?

David, like many other participants within my sample (both majority and minority) appears to be utilising museums as he would other media sources to feed his personal interests. He had numerous DVD documentaries on Japanese and Chinese history but as he explained himself there was 'nothing like seeing the real thing'. In seeing 'the real thing' he still deferred to the narratives put forward by the museum and was therefore 'confirmatory' in his responses to the exhibits, as most white Irish participants are. His general knowledge and interaction with Chinese and Japanese cultures through museums such as the Chester Beatty Library highlights what he terms a 'superficial' but yet broad sweep respect for these cultures. From the original 1970s television programme Kung Fu which sparked his early interest to his current day museum visiting, David seems to epitomise in practice the hopes of Japanese participant Katia, discussed earlier, with her allusions to 'light touch' but respectful introductions to cultural diversity occurring at Irish museums for Irish audiences. It is the issue of how Irish museums manage to facilitate such 'light touch' inter-cultural introductions that is open to question.

Assessing the media from within the museum

In this section I consider how reporting within the Irish media on issues around multiculturalism and interculturalism at times made its way into discussions with some of my research participants at the case study museums. I include these debates as they relate to my research agenda around museum engagement with Irish multiculturalism and interculturalism and illustrate how visitors occasionally made connections to what they read in newspapers or heard on television in connection with their museum usage or experiences. I argue here that Irish museums and their collections are not seen as disconnected from wider debates around multiculturalism within the media world, especially by some within my research sample. This is particularly noticeable with media reporting of developments within the Irish educational system that directly affected minority ethnic children while this research was being carried out. In the space of a few short years between 2008 – 2011 the formerly intense Irish media coverage given over to migration and multicultural issues shifted to economic concerns. This is of course understandable considering the economic difficulties that the country now finds itself in. However, there is a sense that Irish media coverage of the nation's on-going multiculturalism has rarely developed beyond the initial reporting of what might be termed hard facts[48] to more in-depth coverage of processes of integration and what post-migration now means for those who arrived in the 1990s and 2000s. It could also be argued that media reporting on diversity issues within Ireland has at times given out mixed messages with editorials that appear on the same day and even same page that range from positive titles such as 'Ireland must be cleansed of racism' appearing beside

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[48] The early and mid-2000s saw Irish media make frequent use of government statistical analysis to comment on migration numbers to Ireland, numbers of migrants in employment and those who had gained citizenship.

the more provocative 'Immigration in state of chaos'.[49] One particular subject that comes up within participant feedback at museums in relation to future social cohesion and multiculturalism is the role of education, perhaps not surprising within a museum context. Participants from both majority and minority backgrounds regularly spoke of the important link between school education and museums. Minority participants in particular are acutely conscious of the role that school visits to museums could play in educating majority white Irish children about the diversity of communities that is now part of Irish life. This topic was prevalent within media reports over the period in which this research was being carried out and was at that time particularly centred on the issue of faith schools and education. It needs to be pointed out that faith schools and multicultural progress are often inextricably linked within social and political debate in Ireland due to the fact that 98 per cent of primary schools in the State are under the control of the Catholic Church (Boland 2007). Prior to the onset of the economic crisis of October 2008, a persistent feature within Irish media reporting was a concern over the supposed developing 'enclave' educational status of minority ethnic children across the State but particularly in Dublin. Due to schools normally only taking those children from catholic backgrounds, and with the multi-denominational group Educate Together[50] at maximum capacity a crisis point had been reached where the children of minority parents from non-catholic backgrounds had nowhere to go to school. The crisis led to the then Minister for Education having to open emergency schools in 2008 and 2009 in what became the first community schools at primary level in the history of the Irish state. These first community schools were and continue to be made up of predominantly minority ethnic children. The situation led to some commentators, including a former Taoiseach (Prime Minister) suggesting that dangerous racially

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[49] Irish Daily Mirror, Friday, July 27, 2007
[50] Educate Together was established in 1978 and has 60 primary schools across Ireland.

segregated education is being introduced in Ireland (Fitzgerald 2007). The Irish government had already been criticised by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination as it refuses to alter educational legislation that gives preferential treatment to Catholic children within the state system (Boland ibid). This situation and its reporting in the national media came up in conversation with some family groups within my sample who had brought their children to participate in educational events at the museums. For instance, Gillian a mother who regularly brings her daughters to the Saturday Art Club at the National Museum had been following developments in the press with regards to the new schools. While seeing the museums weekend activities as primarily a source of cultural education for her children, it also appeared that she was conscious that it provided them with the opportunity to meet children outside of their regular school environment, including children from other cultural backgrounds:

> .....here (at the art club) Orla and Caroline get to do stuff they don't do in school...and they meet other children outside our usual circles, like there are some Indian children, they don't come often but we see them now and again.

Gillian was obviously conscious of the fact that her daughters had the opportunity to meet children from different backgrounds at the Saturday Art Club, something that may not have been possible at their school due to the selective ethos of Irish schools generally. In the course of discussions as to why she might have seen her daughters ability to interact with children from other cultures as being important she explained her reservations about what she was reading in the media:

> Interviewer: And what do you think about children from different
>   cultures getting the chance to meet each other?

Gillian   It's good for them, they'll just stay with their own

                 otherwise, won't they! That can't be a good thing in the

                 end. Like at those new schools, we live near one of those,

                 like, how will they (minority ethnic children) mix with Irish

                 kids?

Gillian's questioning of how children from different cultural backgrounds would get

opportunities to 'mix' and interact with each other goes to the heart of the intercultural

debate in Ireland. As suggested previously in this thesis, multiculturalism is happening

in Ireland but in a process in which diverse groups have little opportunities to interact

and learn about each other. While Gillian's daughters get to meet Indian children at

activities run by the National Museum, it could be argued that the possibilities of

intercultural connections between various ethnic groups are stronger for some than

others, even within the school environment. Research for instance by Kropiwiec and

King-O'Riain (2006) would seem to suggest that Polish communities overall are seen as

having been accepted and better integrated into Irish society over other ethnic groups.

Their broadly white, European and Catholic ethnic and cultural make-up is often

alluded to as significant factors in contributing to this ease of integration. According to

Titley, Kerr and King O'Rian (2010) Polish communities themselves largely consider

that the Irish population have on the whole welcomed them as hardworking, dependable

and eager to contribute to Irish society generally. In contrast the same report notes that

African and Asian respondents are less optimistic of majority Irish perceptions of the

positive role played by their communities within society.

Outside of Dublin, the media coverage of intercultural mixing (or not) within the

education system was also infiltrating participants discussions in Waterford both at the

museum and at the external focus groups. What was particularly interesting to see in

Waterford was how outside of the capital, Catholic schools had had to open up places to children of non-Catholic background due to the sheer crisis of lack of school places for these children. Such a situation had developed for an Iraqi Muslim mother called Susan who took part in a Waterford focus group. While discussing museums from the point of view of education in general she explained that her children are enrolled in the nearest Catholic school to them in Waterford city. The lack of choice means that they have no other options. As with the Dublin participants, Susan was also aware of the media coverage of the issues involved for minority ethnic children in Irish schools but openly disagreed with some of the headlines and reporting and was a lot more positive about the situation than might have been expected considering media portrayals. While journalists and various commentators highlighted what they perceived to be the challenges for children of non-catholic faith and no faith being exposed to Catholic/Christian dogma, for Susan the primary concern was that her children got a good education irrespective of the ethos of the school. In Susan's case she explained that she follows up school based learning for her children with visits to the Waterford Museum of Treasures. She is not alone in this as some of the other Muslim respondents spoken to in Waterford had also visited the city's museum, mostly for educational reasons with their families. These trips are usually purposeful and rarely for leisure. They are undertaken to assist with homework exercises on subjects such as the Vikings, Normans or history of Waterford itself. The purposeful nature of such museum visiting is an important point as the museum has an entry charge, something that all the migrant participants commented upon and which as low earners (some of them being refugees) is something they are conscious of. However, in the urge for their children to succeed and keep up with their Irish peers they are prepared to pay the museum admission fee to access such resources. For these participants, the educational needs of their children are

a priority irrespective of the faith ethos of the local school and over and above the issues being debated within the national media on the subject. It appears to be the case in Waterford that local resources such as museums and libraries are not only used by minority ethnic families as an extension of the school classroom but that such sites were all considered part of a wider network of extended resources that could be drawn upon for educational and integrational assistance. In a related manner, two Irish secondary school teachers interviewed for this research, at different case study museums, also made reference to the media storm about the dramatic changes taking place within the Irish education system and the challenges it posed for developing interculturalism. Rachel, a history teacher undertaking preparatory work at the Waterford Museum of Treasures had brought some of her classes to visit the museum in the past. Yet, she had never considered the museum as a place to teach interculturalism and was reluctant to do this herself:

> We were looking at Irish history when we came here.... I know what you
> mean about other cultures, but honestly I wouldn't.....I wouldn't know
> where to begin.

Rachel did not feel confident enough to enter into discussions with her students about intercultural issues. This is interesting as she describes her school as being multicultural in nature:

> Rachel We are a multicultural school, we have children from a lot
> of different backgrounds.
>
> Interviewer But you are run by a Catholic order, are there issues around
> that?

Rachel   Not really, I see where you're coming from, but those kids

(from non-Catholic backgrounds) don't have to take part in

religion class. They used to have separate study-time but

with the cuts we can't supervise that now, so they just sit at

the back but don't take part.

Moira, a secondary school teacher of art and design visiting the National Museum in Dublin also made reference to the media reporting on multicultural education and linked it to her visiting of the museum. For instance, she liked the museums display of Asian art and had previously brought class trips to see the Japanese prints. While she could see the potential of the non-Western collections as teaching aids and had used them as such for art and design, she was more reticent about the use of collections as sources of intercultural education. As she explained:

Children just want to be children. I have a few immigrant children in my

class and I want them to be seen the same way as everyone else.

Moira's overriding concern was that the minority ethnic children in her class may feel 'singled out' in targeted discussions around interculturalism in front of museum collections. She did not want their cultural difference to be highlighted or made to stand out in any way from their white Irish peers. Both Rachel and Moira's comments illustrate two distinct elements that are important considerations for museums that may attempt to see themselves and their collections as sources of intercultural education and understanding with regards to teachers and schools. As in the case of Rachel, some teachers may simply not see museums as sources that can assist interculturalism and even if they do, they may not know how to go about utilising them in this area. For those teachers such as Moria who are aware of the significance of such collections for

intercultural debate and knowledge, there is the sensitive issue of not isolating minority ethnic students as 'other' or 'different' amongst their peers. Such a situation is particularly the case at secondary school when young people are keen to be seen to blend in or be accepted as being part of the larger group.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed how some participants within my research sample responded or 'decoded' representations of non-Irish cultures at the case-study museums. I have also attempted to highlight how such discussions are often inter-connected with participant awareness of media representation and reporting on issues around Irish multiculturalism in sources and contexts outside of a specific museum environment. The notion of the 'active' citizen or participant in media discourse implies that museum narratives do not and cannot exist within a vacuum. This could be said to be particularly the case when confronted with individuals who are exposed to and affected by media exposure and for whom there are very personal implications, namely migrant communities. My research would seem to suggest that viewpoints put forward by Irish museums are being openly questioned by members of minority communities in relation to portrayals of diversity. Such questioning ranges on a scale from being politely 'negotiated' in position to strongly 'oppositional' in nature. However, irrespective of the forms that such questioning takes, the bigger role or indeed goal in the minds of minority participants is the degree to which museums might contribute to a developing national intercultural frame of thinking. In this respect, they are considered valued and trusted elements within the wider Irish mediascape.

8 –Findings, recommendations and future research

Within this concluding chapter I discuss how the findings from my research offer some possible answers to my core research question on the potential of Irish museums to assist in the construction of a diverse and inclusive society. Three distinct words emerge as significant from within the research question itself, namely 'construction', 'diverse' and 'inclusive' and the outcomes from my research in many ways intersect with these terms. Over the preceding chapters I have drawn out their meanings in the Irish context and illustrate where my case-study museums interact with them through the comments and feedback of my research participants. For the purposes of this concluding chapter therefore, I utilise these three terms as frames of reference for the final discussion.

From the outset of this research there was limited material to draw upon for minority ethnic experiences of museum visiting in the Irish context. There was certainly no comprehensive Irish research that I could refer to in attempts to assess how new communities might be utilising such sites and what motivational factors may exist as to why visits may be taking place. I have therefore drawn upon international research around minority visiting to museums to contextualise my findings in the larger arena. My own assumptions and indeed presumptions about the nature of the research question have changed considerably over the duration of the research process. For instance, I was critical in the beginning and early stages of the process as to the degree to which Irish museums could be said to be involved in processes of intercultural work that are almost taken for granted in other national contexts. This criticism was partly based on my experiences of having worked within the Irish museum sector in the late 1990s and which I forward here as an explanation for my scepticism around Irish museums and their engagement on these issues. In the period in question, I worked with the Education Department at the National Gallery of Ireland and conducted freelance learning work

with other museums and heritage sites. My personal experiences within the Irish museum context at that time was that learning and education as overarching concepts are involved in on-going negotiations and contestations about the significance of their role within such cultural institutions. While accepted as having a place at the table, these public facing services, it could be argued are not given the same levels of support or funding as scholarship and care of collections. Diversity awareness and intercultural initiatives were on the whole, during this period, even smaller elements of the Irish museum learning offer if actually offered at all. While accepting that museums by virtue of their displays of diverse collections can be said in theory to offer varying degrees of intercultural connections for the public, my research for this thesis with actual visitors is an attempt to find out whether such interactions are taking place in practice with the Irish public and what effects such interactions have. My concerns over the degree to which Irish museums might not be active or participating within processes of intercultural understanding were also heightened by the findings of research that I carried out in Ireland for a report on cultural education for the Attingham Trust (Waterfield 2004)[51]. Questionnaire and interview research for this survey revealed the extremely limited amount of intercultural projects undertaken at Irish museum and heritage sites. However, it should be noted that this research was conducted with museum personnel (curators, education and learning staff etc) and not visiting audiences. Therefore, while the Attingham Report is in a position to make an assessment on the extent to which planned and programmed intercultural projects and initiatives were being carried out at Irish cultural sites, it cannot make claims about the degree to which informal intercultural understanding and learning was taking place

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[51] The Attingham Trust report focused specifically on learning within the historic built environment sector of the UK and Ireland. However, I conducted widespread interviews with museum and gallery professionals in Ireland in conjunction with those that worked within a historic built environment domain.

amongst visitors to such venues. Essentially, visiting Irish audiences do not have a voice within the Attingham research. As I began the process of research for this thesis I had speculated that the limited number of programmed intercultural initiatives at Irish museums might have an adverse effect on both the working of such sites as places of intercultural interaction and inhibit public engagement on the subject. Analysis of my research findings, however, provides insights that I was not expecting around the actual wide-ranging and complex ways in which visitors are confronting issues of multiculturalism and interculturalism within my case-study museums and how museums and their collections are playing important roles in such processes. Significantly, however, it is audiences themselves and not necessarily museums that are taking the lead in viewing museums as socially responsible spaces for debates on contemporary Irish multicultural society. There is a concern that museums are merely playing 'catch-up' with wider public recognition and discussions on the topic rather than being institutions that are in the vanguard on such issues. This realisation is important for several reasons. As this thesis has pointed out, Irish society is rapidly evolving into a vibrant and diverse entity, perhaps the most diverse it has historically been. The increasing multiculturalism of Irish society has been echoed by a rise in racist sentiment towards new communities, so much so that EU reports regularly draw attention of this fact to the Irish state, as outlined in earlier chapters. The wider issue of racism in Irish society is equally not assisted by government policies which appear to make the process of gaining Irish citizenship more of a challenge than a right. Also, as I discuss in chapter 7, the nation runs the risk of institutionalising separateness and by extension racist thinking by virtue of a school education system that privileges children from Catholic backgrounds at the expense of a more inclusive and non-denominational education. I would argue that it is against such a backdrop that Irish museums have a role to play in

harnessing their resources to become centres of 'interactionist multiculturalism' as theorised by Bhikhu Parekh. In placing such social responsibility at their core operations, Irish museums become active agents in fostering debates not only about contemporary Irish diversity but about the historically diverse reality of the nation. Recent Europe wide research (EuNaMus 2012) on the role of national museums highlights how museums that do not incorporate narratives of diversity are seen by minority groups to be essentially denying them a sense of citizenship. It should be noted that Ireland was included in this study. Such findings strengthen the assertions of this thesis particularly in light of the following sections which outline the extent to which minority visitors to Irish museums are both questioning the meaning of Irish identity and looking to locate themselves within an inclusive Irish nation.

Construction: new identities, new nation

A significant finding to emerge from the research is the degree to which minority ethnic participants in particular are utilising the case-study museums to interrogate notions or constructions of Irishness. Their explorations of museum collections ask questions in the nature of what does it mean to be Irish, what are the signifiers of Irishness and what narratives (historical and sociological) create contemporary notions of Irish ethnic and cultural identity? Such searching by minority participants is not simply a leisurely pursuit while visiting a museum, the purpose is much more focused in intent. As discussed in Chapter 3, my research represents the views of predominantly recently arrived migrants to Ireland who anticipate setting up new lives in the country. Museums are considered important resources for such migrant peoples in attempts at understanding the national and local psyche and character and how they might respond to this. While certainly other sources of information such as those supplied by government, the media and social networks are also utilised to integrate into a new life

in Ireland, museums are another important link for migrants in this wider network of resources as I outline in Chapter 7. The presence of real historical artefacts give the museum sector an added aura of trust amongst my research participants where they feel they are being objectively told the story of Ireland in a professional manner. Such levels of trust resulted in many minority participants to suggest that museums could and should create exhibitions or presentations that would better inform wider Irish society about the various ethnic, cultural and religious elements that now constitute Irish society. However, it is also apparent within the participant feedback that museum narratives are not always taken at face value by such same audiences. There is clear evidence within my sample of minority ethnic visitors disagreeing with representations of their own (or other) cultures at the case-study museums and many majority Irish responses which query the representation of non-Irish cultures within the nation's museums at all. Such active, questioning audiences imply that initiatives inaugurated by museums to debate issues of interculturalism and multicultural Ireland in general will encounter a public that is not afraid to make its voice or opinions known whether they support such initiatives or not. It would seem that pragmatism might be a guiding principle in these matters and a recognition that there is no such thing as objective reality in a museum setting. My research also suggests that museums are not only being used to understand how past constructions of the nation and national identity came to be but are active agents in the formation of new twenty first century Irish identities. There are numerous examples within my research sample of collections and objects being used by visitors of diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds who are in the process of moulding dynamic new Irish identities. This is particularly the case amongst young migrant families who want to ensure their children are aware of origin country heritages or mixed Irish families who are keen that their children are proud of their dual (or

multiple) heritages. Notable also within the research data is the tendency of majority white Irish parents who have adopted children outside of the EU to make use of the case-study museums to both inform themselves and their adopted children about origin country cultures and traditions. The immensely diverse processes of identity construction that I witnessed at the case-study museums in all these examples did not imply a radical diversion from Smith's (1991:91) definition of national identity:

> .....'national' identity involves some sort of political community, however tenuous. A political community in turn implies at least some common institutions and a single code of rights and duties for all the members of the community. It also suggests a definite social space, a fairly well demarcated and bounded territory, with which the members identify and to which they feel they belong.

Irish museums I suggest constitute some of these 'common institutions' and are being used by diverse Irish audiences to provide the narratives and reasons, the 'glue' as to why they feel they belong. While my case-study museums are involved in processes of human identity construction it is also important to recognise that they are also interlinked in the minds of many visitors with the construction of the identity of place. In many respects, both forms of identity are difficult to separate, particularly for majority Irish visitors whose personal identities are often intimately tied to a local environment through family, work and social histories. The regional Waterford Museum of Treasures is a good example of this as due to its remit to tell the story of Waterford it has not only created a past identity for Waterford but it has the power to continue to create future localised identities. This intersection of museums constructing a narrative of place or locality emerged as significant within my study as it brought into

clear focus the issue of how new minority communities might (or might not) get a say in the museum's on-going development of the story of Waterford. It is easy to see how such construction of self and place as witnessed in Waterford is relevant to the regional museums of Ireland's thirty-two counties and their immediate minority ethnic communities.

Diverse: multifaceted Irishness

My research suggests that the case-study museums are being visited by a diverse ethnic and cultural range of first generation migrants to Ireland. This is a significant finding in relation to such sites as places that can facilitate dialogue around future notions of an inclusive Irish multicultural society. Not only is there a diverse ethnic and cultural mix amongst the backgrounds of these visitors but they also represent a wide spectrum across social and class divisions as I outline in Chapter 3. As I suggest in this study, the strong motivations for such visiting are connected to the need to accumulate information on the best ways to integrate into Irish life. Such motivations therefore have the power to override possible feelings that museums are exclusive places only accessible to certain sections of the population. The extremely varied class backgrounds of many of the minority participants within my sample is suggestive of such a situation. Questions do remain, however, as to the degree to which such an interest amongst diverse audiences is sustained once initial motivational factors (such as integration) have been satisfied. I am specifically speaking here about how such diverse audiences move from a present need in utilising Irish museums to understand the history and narratives that have created the contemporary nation state to seeing themselves (and their future generations) represented at these museums as part of the future story of the state? It is noticeable, for instance, that none of the minority ethnic participants within my sample represent second or third generation Irish migrants. What are the experiences

of these audiences and what motivational factors would bring them inside an Irish museum? Are there reasons as to why they might not visit? This is perhaps an area of further study. There are clear examples and lessons from which Irish museums can contemplate and draw upon in considering who is missing or deliberately omitted from the national story and how such omissions could be avoided in future. For instance, three of the historically largest minority ethnic groups in the country have no current representation at any Irish national museum, namely The Traveller community, the Jewish community and Anglo-Irish communities. Members of the Traveller community spoken to during the course of this research are adamant that for many within their society Irish museums simply do not represent them or they believe want to represent them. They feel they have never been invited into dialogue to be included and generally see museums as just another institutional element that upholds the rights and privileges of the settled Irish community over other, alternative modes of life. The task of representing Travellers therefore usually falls to sole interested and dedicated individuals at smaller local authority museums such as the example of the Cork City Museum cited in Chapter 4. The exclusion of the above communities at Irish museums has several important consequences. Their omission firstly obscures a fuller picture of the historically diverse nature of Irish ethnic and cultural identity. This in turn encourages the promotion of a continuing and inaccurate sense of a homogeneous Irish 'people' both at home and abroad. The media, education system and museums all play their part in propagating this conception of Irishness. Importantly for my study, the limited representation of a historically diverse Ireland at the nation's museums asks serious questions as to whether and how Ireland's newest citizens will find representation at such institutions. If Irish museums have found it challenging to enter into negotiations and accurately portray the histories of its own long-term ethnically

diverse indigenous people such as the Traveller community, how will they fare with multifaceted twenty-first century identities who self-identify as Chinese-Irish, Indian-Irish amongst others? Visitor feedback from this research has suggested some possible answers to these scenarios as I discuss in the next section.

Inclusive: shared experiences and shared stories

Another significant finding to emerge from the research data is the role that Ireland's colonial past may play in contributing to the framing of the country's multicultural future within Irish museums. This is an important thread running throughout my thesis and one that evolved in a fashion that I had not considered. For instance, I expected Ireland's colonial story to make its presence felt as a strong theme at the case-study museums but had considered that it might do so in a manner with possible negative implications for my research question. I anticipated minority ethnic research participants in particular expressing views of how Irish postcolonial identity might exclude rather than include them due to a codified and overly nationalistic sense of Irish identity developed since independence. This ethnic and cultural identity I imagined might almost be seen as a threatening force to Irish minority citizens who due to skin colour, cultural or religious background would find themselves excluded from the national story. This however, is not what transpired within minority ethnic feedback. Overwhelming Ireland's colonial story is viewed by visitors to the case-study museums as something that assists their understanding of how modern Ireland came to be. These historical events and Irish reactions to them are seen by many within my sample as processes that create national character. Postcolonial national construction is therefore something that has the ability to bring people together in a shared sense of identity through communal struggle. It has to pointed out however, that while minority visitors to Irish museums may find Ireland's colonial and postcolonial story useful in gaining

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insights into Irish society and by extension forging connections with this society in a wider sense, caution has to be urged as to how majority Irish audiences interpret postcolonial readings at the nation's museums. Debates around Irish postcolonialism for instance must always be watchful for any hint of essentialism or exceptionalism in relation to national identity. Narratives of postcolonialism should always expose rather than conceal or deny racist sentiment. A large proportion of my research participants identified with narratives of colonialism as they themselves originate in postcolonial countries which have forged national and cultural identities in a fashion similar to Ireland. This shared sense of a colonial past appears to work in breaking down what otherwise might be appear to be unbridgeable gulfs between very differing ethnic and cultural groupings. The manner in which colonialism and postcolonialism emerge as critical intercultural reference points at the case-study museums prompted me to analyse how such processes are negotiated within some of the postcolonial nations in which many of my research participants come from, namely Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. It was also useful that I was able to visit the national museums of these three respective countries towards the end of my thesis and assess how the colonial and postcolonial experience is incorporated into the national story within these nations and compare and contrast against that of Ireland. It appeared to me that Asian countries have and are still in the process of internalising the colonial period to create a greater sense of national solidarity amongst their diverse ethnic and cultural populations. The National Museum in Singapore for instance is a stand out example of how it illustrates the manner in which its Chinese, Indian and Malay citizens coped under colonialism and how all these communities in their own way struggled to bring the new nation into being and yet all continue to share a common interest in a successful multicultural Singapore. Similar themes of 'strength in diversity' are echoed at the national museums

of Malaysia and Thailand. Irish postcolonial museums can learn much from their Asian counterparts in foregrounding a more diversified sense of Irish ethnic and cultural traditions that celebrates the differences within and opens up avenues of inclusion for newcomers.
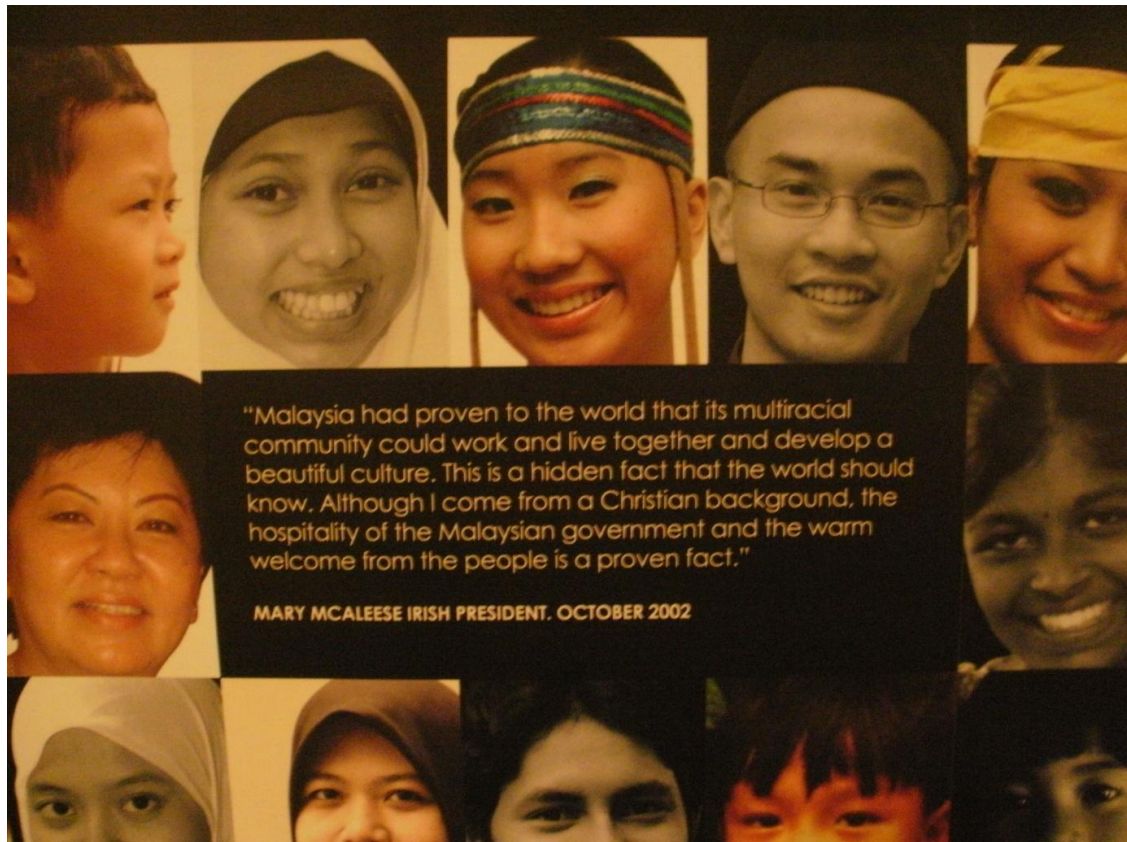

Figure 4   Display panel, National Museum of Malaysia   Photo: author

My research suggests that it is a process that is already underway amongst some visitors to Irish museums. It is the museums themselves that must now act to better assist such curiosity and develop further such processes of knowledge exploration.

The will and ability of Irish museums to engage with the cultural past and present of minority communities in their locale, especially newly arrived communities, is at the heart of museums participation in the multicultural agenda. Participant feedback within my research suggests that this engagement will have to in some degree facilitate not

only the display and interpretation of cultural artefacts from minority cultures but also an accompanying effort to engage in debate with such communities and present a sense of their lived experience in contemporary Ireland. Some minority participants within my sample expected this as a given and they desired to see their cultures on display. Others felt that Irish museums should review the manner in how they represent some artefacts from non-Western cultures based on a European canon of art history that overly fetishes aesthetic importance and therefore omits significant cultural social rituals, rites of passage or religious purposes connected to such objects. For some minority participants the concept of being 'seen' or represented at museums at least meant that they and their culture are not forgotten or omitted. This is significant and challenges those Irish social theorists adverse to the symbolic representation of multiculturalism as seen in the writings of Fanning (2002: 184) who references Fiona Williams (1989) critique of 'the "steel bands, saris and samosas" approach to multiculturalism. Williams phrase is probably the most hackneyed that I encountered within Irish literature dealing with the topic of multiculturalism. Irish museums need to carefully consider how they intend to work with minority ethnic audiences in order to better meet their needs both today and perhaps more importantly for future generations. The hosting of large expensive exhibitions on for instance 'Asian Art' in the hope that it encourages Asian visitors to come to a museum may not necessarily connect with such audiences who do not recognise the European notion of 'art' and rather consider the objects on display as elements within a wider cultural narrative (Ang 2005). It is also arguable that exhibitions that privilege purely art historical or aestheticised approaches to non-Western artefacts and cultures is not fostering a deeper sense of intercultural understanding amongst majority Irish audiences. There is clear evidence of this within my research sample whereby some participants queried the relevance of Asian artefacts

at the National Museum believing that they should be classified as 'art' objects and hence stripping them of sociological importance. All the above raises important questions for Irish museums but in particular those outside Dublin who may simply not have what they perceive to be adequate collections to undertake such cultural 'representations'. While my research shows that visitors come to Irish museums for a variety of reasons, it does also suggest that some minority ethnic participants in particular are very conscious of their representation or not within such institutions. Such findings are similar to those of Desai and Thomas's (1998) research with minority visiting to UK museums and galleries. In addition, both minority and majority Irish audiences expressed a desire that museums represent cultures as living entities and not merely always restrict displays and interpretations to conventional historic and aesthetic concerns. For instance, several participants at the case-study museums suggested holding workshops that demonstrate the contemporary nature of communities' cultural lives in conjunction with the usual historic exhibitions. Ideally such workshops or interventions within the museums would be led and managed by members of Ireland's minority ethnic populations. There may well be opportunities for Irish museums, both urban and rural, to engage with minority communities in their vicinity on issues such as representation, collections policy and dialogues of interculturalism at both local and national level. The concerns of communities in Waterford for instance will have both similarities and yet notable differences from those in Dublin. The generally positive attitudes that minority visitors within my sample have towards museums implies that there is scope for Irish museums to reach out to them and involve them in planning processes at multiple levels. This is a significant issue for regional and rural Irish museums with ever increasing pluralised communities evolving around them. Equally, the question of museums and representation of minority cultures in regions where such

communities have low demographic presence or none at all has already been considered by Shaikh (2001) in the UK context. As she states (ibid:100):

> The idea that we can choose not to address issues of cultural diversity because the region we live in is not representative of the national population is reprehensible. If a museum collection has ethnic minorities in its locale, but no 'relevant' collections and no resources to collect this material, does this mean they cannot attract these audiences, simply because the collections do not 'match'? More significantly, what if there are no ethnic minority communities living locally? Can museums in these areas side-step the issue of promoting cultural diversity on the basis that ethnic minorities simply do not figure in their local demographics?

Shaikh's analysis has direct bearing on the Irish context where although between 17 per cent of the Irish population are now from minority ethnic backgrounds (Census 2011) most of these communities are based in the larger Irish cities. Going even further than Shaikh's commentary, my research would suggest that minority visibility even within regional cities such as Waterford should not be taken to mean that interaction and understanding between minority and majority citizens in such locations are necessarily more advanced than non urbanised areas of Ireland. Encouragingly my data reveals that minority groups in Ireland are utilising museums, even in regional areas where cultural artefacts from their specific pasts or present are rarely if ever on display. While the reasons behind such visiting are multiple, as I demonstrate in this thesis, the idea of self-representation is on the whole not purely desired for the sake of seeing one's own culture displayed at Irish museums. The purpose of representation serves a larger, and for the immediate term in Ireland, a much more important agenda in the minds of minority visitors, namely - facilitating cultural access for Irish majority audiences

unfamiliar with the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of minorities. This aspect of self-representation at museums by minority participants is seen by them to directly serve their better integration into a multicultural Ireland, both urban and rural.

Other factors to consider around the inclusion of Ireland's minority groups within its museums is the importance of language, something that has already been found to be important in other countries (Desai and Thomas 1998). As these authors note (ibid: 2) 'the main additional factor for ethnic minority groups was that those who spoke little or no English were consistently less likely to visit museums and galleries than those who were fluent in English'. While this is an important consideration, my research has found that Irish museums are actively been used by recently arrived migrants in efforts to improve their English. It is also significant that the Irish state supports an official policy of bilingualism. This has been viewed by some Irish research (Immigrant Council of Ireland 2008:24) as a possible area of strength for future Irish multiculturalism in that migrants and more recent communities 'value the ability to communicate in a variety of languages'. There is a perception within such research that the acknowledgment of two state languages, English and Irish, opens up more avenues for the acceptance of other languages to be 'part of' Irish life and that such a situation provides cultural similarities between majority and minority groups. As in other public arenas in Ireland today, Irish and English labels now regularly appear beside each other in museum displays. Yet, there are limitations to such possibilities as the Immigrant Council of Ireland (2008) makes clear that 'there is no evidence that adult migrants are being encouraged to see the Irish language as a means of communication and integration in Ireland, despite the fact that many of their children are learning it in school'.

Recommendations and future research

In order to move towards positioning Irish museums as spaces that can truly become sites of intercultural dialogue and inclusion my research would suggest several recommendations and some further research. Both minority and majority participants within my research sample want increased cross-referencing of the contemporary world with the historic in relation to collections within museums. Such an approach is deemed to not only create a conceptual arc of understanding from the past to the present but also allows for the opinions and feedback of diverse audiences to be heard through the contemporary interventions. This is very important for many minority groups who feel that once an artefact of their culture is exhibited within a museum context, they as the originating culture of that artefact no longer have a say about an objects significance or meaning. To facilitate such interventions or open dialogue and access to collections and museums in general, it is imperative that Irish museums actively invite and employ individuals from the country's diverse communities to contribute to the curation, programming, education and marketing of such institutions. The excellent work of the Chester Beatty Library, particularly in its employment of artists, musicians and other creative individuals from Ireland's minority communities to work with the public is a study of good practice that could be replicated at museums across the country. By also employing artists (across various media) from minority communities to work with collections at their sites, museums not only revitalise the historic nature of an object but give it contemporary relevance. For example, an exploration of the extensive Middle Eastern collections at the National Museum of Ireland (Collins Barracks) by artists from that region of the world or perhaps more importantly, by first and second generation Arabic communities in Ireland, would bring a whole new dimension to the importance of those collections for the museum itself and multicultural Ireland generally. At any

time, but certainly in times of recession such as Ireland is currently experiencing with budget cuts and limited financial support, the ability of museums to evidence that they are contributing to wider societal debates such as the successful integration of the nation's diverse communities allows the public and governments to see their potential as institutions with wider social responsibility agendas. By undertaking such work they also build trust with minority communities who in turn view museums as places that genuinely are interested in them and want to engage them. The value of such trust might be pivotal when a museum faces difficulties and can call on the support of its local diverse communities. The case for the socially responsible museum therefore also makes good business sense. In order to better engage and understand the demographics and needs of local minority communities in their hinterland, museum staff will need to liaise with local government (city and county councils) officers who work with such communities on a daily basis. The ability and willingness of museums to make use of local resources, such as local government, to better inform themselves of minority communities may well determine their success in reaching such audiences. In order to progress towards the goal of Irish museums as effective intercultural platforms, extensive training and advice will need to be considered for staff across all aspects of the museum profession. At present in Irish museums it would appear that intercultural work is seen as the domain of education and outreach staff. This is arguably only a fraction of the work that needs to be undertaken to create a rounded, holistic intercultural museum as it largely does not alter the parameters of collection acquisition, display and interpretation. The Irish Museums Association (IMA) should take a lead on highlighting the significant role its' members can play by situating intercultural debate at the centre of their institutions activities. This could be done through advocacy in the Irish Museums Journal and by dedicating one of the Association's annual conferences

to the topic. Training around intercultural work could also be built into the IMA's practitioner forums and study days. Ireland's Council of National Cultural Institutions (CNCI), a statutory body that makes recommendations to the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht should prioritise the role of the intercultural museum within its mission statement and policy documents. It should actively promote the intercultural agenda amongst its constituent organisations. The CNCI should also play a lead role in explaining to government departments and key individuals the significant part that museums and other cultural institutions play in fostering intercultural debate and understanding in Ireland. Further research is required to assess the opinions and perceptions of second and third generation migrant communities to Irish museums and their collections. Do they visit such sites and if so what are the motivational reasons? If they do not, what are the perceived barriers to visiting? It would also be instructive to get a sense of how differently, or not, second and third generation visiting audiences view and utilise museums in light of the experiences of newly arrived migrants within this study. An area of importance that is referenced within this thesis but ultimately falls outside the scope of research is the intersection of school visits to museums and aspects of intercultural education around collections. The significance of museums as sites that have the ability to open windows onto other cultures and belief systems for children in a country where state education is still controlled by the Catholic Church is not to be underestimated. To what extent are schools and teachers using museums to build intercultural understanding and awareness between pupils? Are teachers confident enough to utilise museum collections in such a manner or are they dependent on the museum providing such provision? While I touch on these topics in Chapter 7 more in-depth analysis is required. It has to be acknowledged that a truly intercultural Irish museum will have to negotiate sensitive questions around group and human rights. For

instance, in terms of dialogue with local and national minority communities which 'voices' should museums privilege over others? Can supposed 'community leaders' or 'religious elders' really be expected to speak on behalf of everyone within such loosely defined national groupings? What criteria determine who asks such questions and who gets to give the answers? Will there be a right of reply for all? Delicate questions around individual, group and universal human rights are increasingly having to be dealt with and promoted by museums in national and international contexts. The same will be true for Irish museums. Where differing cultural perceptions of rights clash, is there a non-negotiable standard that applies to all? As this thesis has attempted to illustrate, the shifting nature of contemporary multiculturalism is a relatively new social development for Irish society. Museums, just like other social and civic spaces can and are sites that have to negotiate their way through such questions. The extent of transparency of these negotiations and public involvement in such debates will more than likely help define what a working Irish multiculturalism should look like.

Appendix 1: Information for pilot study research participants

Information Sheet for Pilot Study Participants at Chester Beatty Library

Project Title: Irish Museums in the Construction of a Diverse and Inclusive Society

Contact Address: 120 Washington Road, Worcester Park, Surrey, KT4 8JJ

Date:

Dear participant,

I am very grateful that you are willing to take the time to participate in my research project.

I would like to take this opportunity to tell you more about the nature of the project, who I am and why I am undertaking this research, and how you were selected for the project. I would also like to inform you about how the data you supply to me will be used and the protections of your privacy and confidentiality that are in place.

What is the project/survey for?

The research, which is the basis for a PhD at the Univeristy of Leicester is examining peoples' attitudes to museums in Ireland. I am hoping to discover why people visit museums, what their expectations are of such places and the degree to which expectations are met.

How you were selected?

You were selected as someone who could assist in this research as you have attended events at the Chester Beatty Library and are therefore familiar with visiting this museum and possibly others. The Education Officer at the Chester Beatty Library was involved in identifying people who might like to contribute as participants.

Your role in completing the project/survey

I will have a discussion with you lasting no more than 30 minutes at the Chester Beatty Library where I will ask you some questions about your experiences of visiting this museum.

Obtaining Informed consent. Your participation in the project is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the project at any point. If you are uncertain or uncomfortable about any aspect of your participation please contact me at the details listed at the top of this letter to discuss your concerns or request clarification on any aspect of the study.

Protecting your confidentiality.

Any information you supply will be treated confidentially. In the case of your comments being used in any written assignments or publications, it will be given anonymously.

If you have any questions about the ethical conduct of the survey please contact the Department Ethics Officer, Dr Lisanne Gibson, on lg80@le.ac.uk.

Thank you very much for participating,

With best wishes, Signature

Appendix 2: Survey questionnaire

Visitor Interview Questions at the three case study museums

Motivations & Visiting

1) How did you first hear of the Chester Beatty Library? (Word of mouth, press, direct marketing).

2) What influenced you to visit the museum on the first occassion? (Positive experiences of others, children having been there on school trip, collections of world cultures).

3) Was there anything memorable that stood out for you after your first visit here?

4) What motivates your visits now? (Permanent/Temporary Exhibitions, specific events, family workshops)

5) How often do you visit the Chester Beatty Library in a year?

6) Who accompanies you on visits to the museum? (Family, friends, individually)

7) Are there other museums that you also visit – which are they?

8) Would you say these other museums differ from the Chester Beatty Library in any way? (nationalism of other museums versus universalism of CBL).

Affect of museum visiting in personal terms

9) Do you have a favourite object/display in the museum and if so what is it?

10) What makes this object/display appeal to you? (Personal identification, aesthetic)

11) Are there objects on display here that say something, or relate to, some aspect of your everyday life? (Cultural, religious, political – making connections to the present)

12) Can you think of an example of how a display or event here gave you an insight into something you had not encountered before? (practices of different culture(s))

13) If you were to recommend a visit to the Chester Beatty Library to a friend, what would you tell them that they would gain from a visit? (exposure to ideas on other religions/cultures)

Purpose of Museums

14) Are museums useful to society, and if so, in what ways?

15) Do you think there is anything unique in what they offer to the public?

Personal Information

16) Would you mind telling me your age?

17) What is your occupation?

18) How would you define your ethnicity?

19) Do you follow any religion?

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